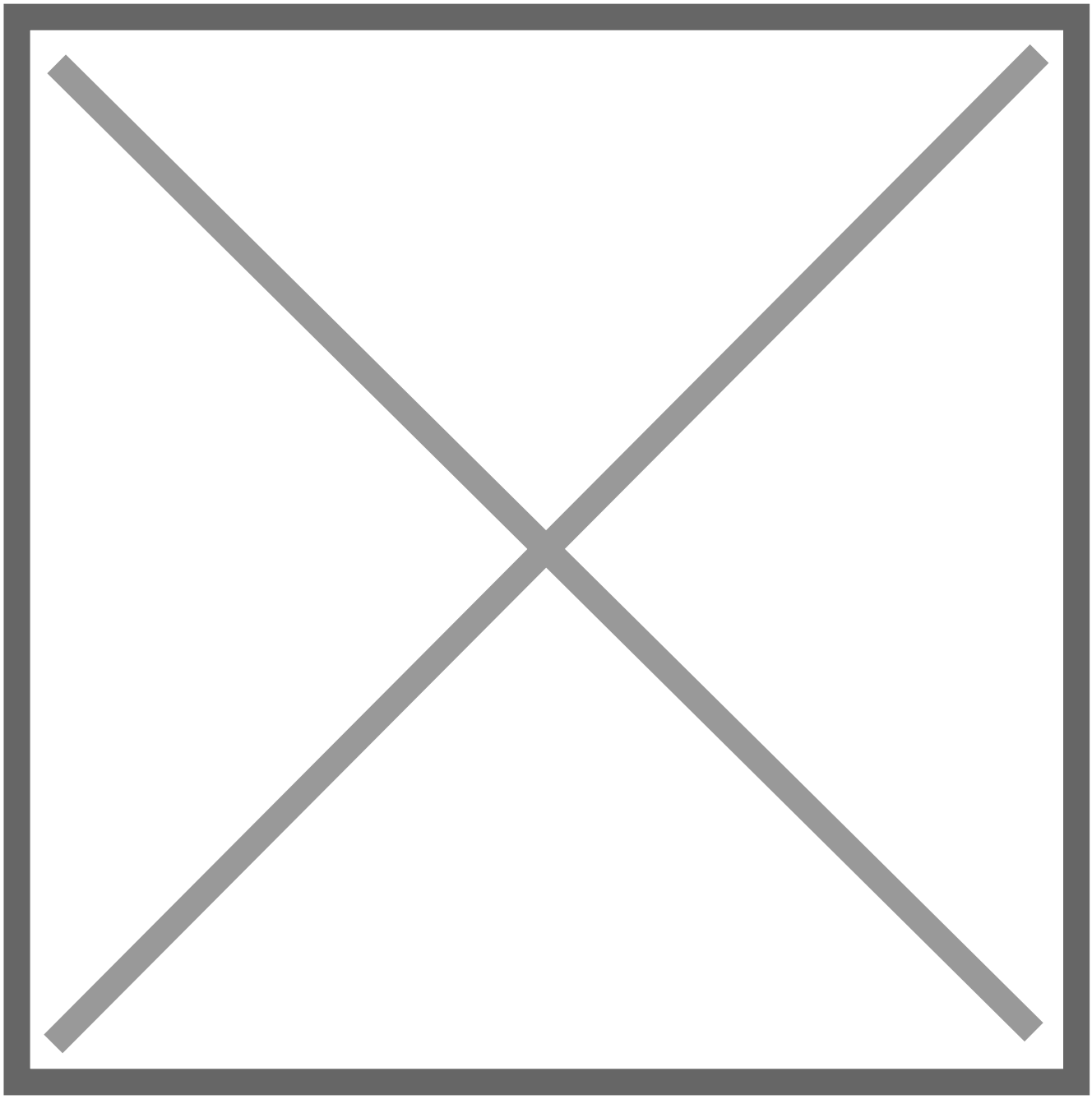
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Pope Leo XIV receives a present from an inmate at Barcelona’s Brians 1 prison, during his apostolic journey, in Barcelona, Spain, June 10, 2026. (OSV News/Vatican Media/Simone Risoluti)

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Amid the loneliness and despair of life behind bars, God continues to love and encourage the imprisoned to not let the sorrows of their past deter them from the hope of a better future, Pope Leo XIV told prisoners in Barcelona.

Speaking to inmates and prison ministry volunteers at the Brians 1 Penitentiary June 10, the pope reminded them that when faced with the temptation "to feel inferior and think it is not worth going on," prisoners should lift up their eyes to God, who, "through the presence of so many people, never ceases to show you his love and closeness.

"Even if anxiety and sadness mark certain moments of your journey, remember that life’s mistakes do not define a person’s identity," he said.

Accompanied by Bishop Xabier Gómez of Sant Feliu de Llobregat, the pope was welcomed with applause and song and greeted several people as he made his way to the main stage.

In a June 8 interview with Vatican News, Fr. Jesús Bel, the prison chaplain, said the Brians 1 penitentiary houses 1,100 men and 150 women, and serves as a pretrial detention center.

"This results in a prison with greater uncertainty and anxiety, as those detained do not yet know if they will be convicted, or if so, what their sentence will be. This

creates a state of profound anticipation and considerable suffering," Bel told Vatican News.

A second facility under the chaplain's care, Brians 2, houses only male inmates, he noted.

Welcoming Leo to the prison, Bel spoke about the religious care offered to inmates at the Brians 1 and 2 facilities, including weekly Mass, preparation for receiving the Sacraments and Bible study.

Leo's visit to the prison, he said, "comforts and encourages us."

"Thank you for looking at us with eyes of mercy and for telling the world that we exist, that we suffer, that we want to lift ourselves up and move forward," Bel said. "We want to unite ourselves strongly to the Lord and fill ourselves with His presence because we know that He is the only path to true freedom."

The pope also heard the testimonies from two female inmates, Montse and Josefina.

Addressing the pontiff, Montse spoke about her struggles believing in God, especially after the death of her loved ones, especially her son.

"I could never accept the death of my son; I did not understand why God had to take him away," she said. "I fought a lot with Him, and it took me a lifetime to understand that God is not to blame. Today I ask God for forgiveness for everything. I asked for the grace of faith, and I experienced how the resentment had gone away."

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Expressing her joy at being there with Leo, Josefina recounted how the Church had been a constant presence since childhood. However, she noted that she too, like Montse, questioned God in her life.

"I questioned (God) about everything at times, but never as much as when my son had an accident," Josefina explained. "I suffered a lot seeing him suffer, and it even made my faith waver. I did not understand why that misfortune happened."

Despite her doubts, Josefina credited God for her son's survival, which she saw as a "miracle."

"Here in prison, I am not alone," the inmate said. "Jesus gives me strength, He gives me life. I notice it within me; otherwise, I don't know how I would have endured this."

Thanking Bel and the inmates for their testimony, Leo said he was "deeply moved" and that "every human being is worthy by the mere fact of having been willed, created and loved by God."

"It is a consoling truth that accompanies us at all times and reminds us how his merciful love always outweighs whatever good or evil we may have done," the pope said.

Recalling St. Augustine's spiritual biography, "Confessions," the pope told the inmates that by trusting in God's divine grace and allowing "ourselves to be guided and transformed by it," they can discover that "the past does not condemn the future."

"Let us make room for the Lord in our hearts and seek his face," he said. "Let us allow his love to guide us. Let us cling to him, who continually invites us to hope and shows us a wonderful horizon that no physical barrier can prevent us from reaching."

God, he added, "continues to speak to us in the depths of our consciences, helping us discover that he dwells among us. He is only waiting for us to give him a chance."

Leo concluded his address by encouraging the inmates to "keep dreaming God's dream" and that while God loves them as they are, "he dreams of you being even better."

"The Lord allows us all to start anew, for being human and being Christian does not mean never making mistakes, but rather growing in the ability to convert, repent, make amends and, above all, to reconcile and forgive," the pope said.

This story appears in the **Pope Leo in Spain** feature series. View the full series.