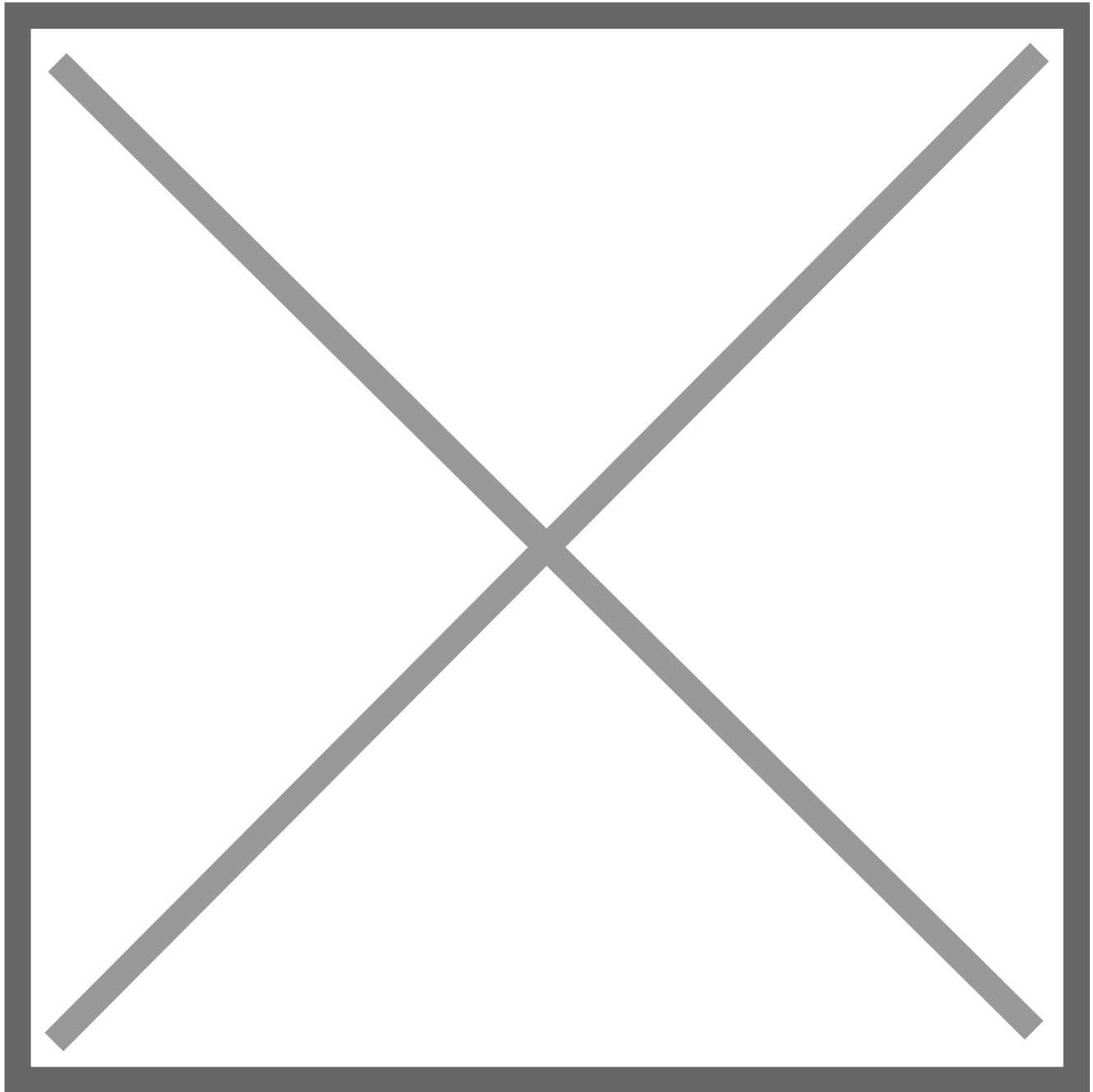




Pope Leo XIV leads the Angelus prayer in Piazza della Liberta in Castel Gandolfo, near Rome, July 26, 2026. He appealed for dialogue, diplomacy and prayers for a just peace in the Holy Land and the Middle East. (OSV News/Reuters/Remo Casilli)

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Castel Gandolfo — July 27, 2026

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Pope Leo XIV offered prayers as firefighters continue to battle massive wildfires in Spain and France that have forced hundreds of thousands to evacuate from their homes.

"As devastating wildfires affect the various regions of France and Spain, I express my closeness to all those who have been affected and invite everyone to pray for them and for the emergency personnel engaged in relief efforts," Leo told pilgrims July 26 gathered outside the papal residence at Castel Gandolfo.

The Reuters news agency reported that the deadly fire that began mid-July in southern France is spreading rapidly and advancing toward the city of Bordeaux, threatening one of the French economy's most important wine-producing centers.

While no civilian casualties have been reported, two firefighters died while battling fires near Bordeaux-Mérignac airport, according to a July 21 report by BBC News.

In a July 26 statement, the French bishops' conference assured their prayers for those affected by the wildfires, especially those "who lost their possessions or the fruits of their labor, as well as injured firefighters "and the families of those who gave their lives."

"We invite Catholics to generously participate in the growing solidarity efforts. We encourage parishes to keep their churches open whenever possible: many offer a welcome respite from the summer heat," the statement read. "Parish halls can also serve as shelters for displaced people, providing them with the rest, comfort, and practical assistance they need."

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"Since the beginning of summer, the wildfires raging across France have already burned nearly 100,000 hectares, displaced approximately 170,000 people, and destroyed countless homes and forests," the bishops' said.

As the extreme summer temperatures continued to rage across Europe, the bishops called on Catholics "not to forget the sick, the elderly, or those who are isolated, but to pay them extra attention and to organize themselves, within their parishes, to show them a fraternal and faithful presence."

"Faithfulness to the Gospel compels us to take action," the bishops said. "Sometimes it takes the form of simple gestures, like offering a glass of water. In these trying times, let us remain attentive to one another and strive to bear witness to Christ's love for all."

In Spain, deadly wildfires have burnt over 190,000 acres of land across the Madrid, Toledo and Avila provinces and nearly 100,000 residents have been forced to evacuate, according to Reuters.

After visiting areas affected by the wildfires July 22, Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez called on the country's polarized politicians to set aside divisions and to unite in confronting "the climate emergency."

"And that means not only putting out fires, but also implementing prevention and awareness-raising policies, allocating sustainable financial resources throughout the year, and also committing to policies that mitigate the climate emergency and help us adapt to it," he said.

The Archdiocese of Madrid issued a statement July 25 saying it was joining in prayer for those affected by the wildfires in Spain.

"In these particularly difficult times, the diocese offers its prayers for all those suffering the consequences of the fires and for all those working to combat this situation," the archdiocese said, adding that Cardinal José Cobo asked parishes to include a special intention during Sunday Masses "to ask the Lord for an end to the fires and for comfort and strength for all those affected."

Cobo also visited a sports center June 25 in the municipality of Alcobendas where residents of a nearby wildfire were sheltering. According to the archdiocese, residents, especially the elderly, told the Spanish cardinal that they were alerted of the evacuation by the sound of church bells ringing in the area.

"It showed that, in many Spanish villages, bell towers remain much more than just a feature of the landscape: they continue to be a communication tool capable of mobilizing an entire community in a matter of minutes," the Madrid archdiocese said.