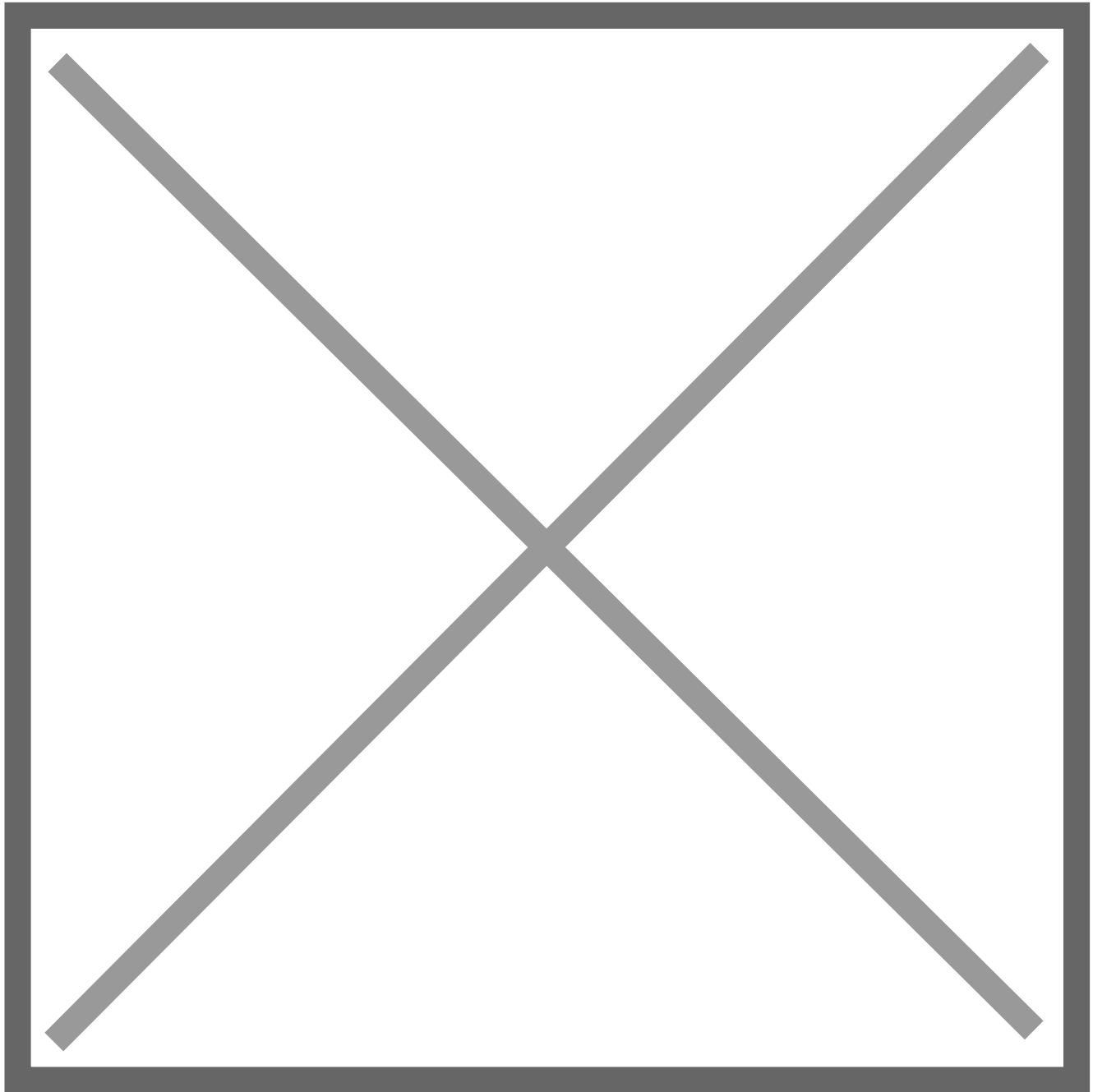




Pope Leo XIV looks at a horse as he greets an employee of the papal gardens in Castel Gandolfo, Italy, Sept. 5, 2025. The Vatican released Pope Leo's message for the World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation which will be celebrated Sept. 1. (CNS/Lola Gomez)

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Vatican City — August 20, 2026

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The social and ecological devastation wrought by war represents not just a political failure, but a moral crisis rooted in a divided heart in need of conversion, Pope Leo XIV said.

Violence, injustice and environmental damage are not just "the result of flawed systems or structures; it is 'a symptom of the deeper dichotomy that is rooted in humanity itself,'" the pope said in his message for the 2026 World Day of Prayer for Creation, which will be celebrated Sept. 1.

"The wounds of war and the degradation of the earth, then, are profoundly linked to the condition of the human heart," Leo wrote. "The conflicts that torment humanity are in many ways the outward expression of interior discord and division. When the heart is distorted, relationships suffer, and the structures we build begin to reflect that disorder."

The World Day of Prayer for Creation marks the start of the ecumenical "Season of Creation," which concludes Oct. 4, the feast day of St. Francis of Assisi, patron saint of ecology.

The theme for 2026 is "They shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks," based on the verse from the book of Isaiah. The Vatican said

June 2 that the celebration's theme "highlights the connection between armed conflict and environmental degradation."

"The title — a passage in which Isaiah prophesies the transformation of weapons into agricultural tools — is an explicit invitation to prioritize development and sustainability over violence and destruction," the Vatican said.

In his message, Leo said the world is "witnessing many crises and much human suffering" as well as the accelerating "disruption to the harmonious balance of creation."

"These phenomena are not unrelated; they are a single plea for healing and peace arising from a wounded world," he said.

Reflecting on the day's theme, the pope said that although Isaiah spoke of a time when nations transform "what destroys life into what sustains it," in today's world, "we too often witness the very opposite, as efforts continue to be directed toward violence and war."

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"War leaves wounds that extend far beyond the battlefield. It claims lives, tears families apart and forces millions to flee their homes, thereby deepening fear, injustice and division," he wrote. "War also leaves behind social and ecological destruction that endures for generations."

Armed conflicts, coupled with environmental degradation, he added, create a "vicious cycle" that "destroys ecosystems, contaminates essential resources, such as air and water, and undermines food security," thus creating further conflicts.

The pope noted that war not only creates wounds that damage individual people and communities, but also the bonds of the human family, revealing "a deeper failure to live in God's image and likeness, to respect life and to care for the earth entrusted to us."

"This is not only a political failure, but also a moral and spiritual one," Leo wrote. "Rooted in distorted desires and the misuse of human freedom and power, war stands as a counter-witness to the Gospel of peace."

The building of a peaceful society, he continued, requires not just a reform of structures but also a renewal of hearts that are facing "an ethical and cultural crisis," evidenced by the desire "for domination, the pursuit of immediate profit, and the inability to recognize the God-given dignity of each human person."

Isaiah's prophetic call to "beat swords into plowshares" is a call for both individuals and nations to "transform harm into life," not just through external changes, but through a return to God "who will reorder our desires, heal our wounds and help us grow in virtue," he wrote.

Leo warned that without an "inner transformation, peace will remain fragile and short-lived."

"But where hearts are renewed, new possibilities begin to open. What has been used for destruction can be redirected toward life, toward the care of the poor, the nourishment of the hungry, and the safeguarding of creation," he wrote.

"The true tools for building peace are not weapons of destruction; instead, they are truth, dialogue, patience, goodness, justice, mercy, understanding, care and love. These flow from hearts shaped by the Gospel and sustained by God's grace. Only these qualities possess the power to transform individuals, renew communities and heal the wounds of our world," the pope wrote.