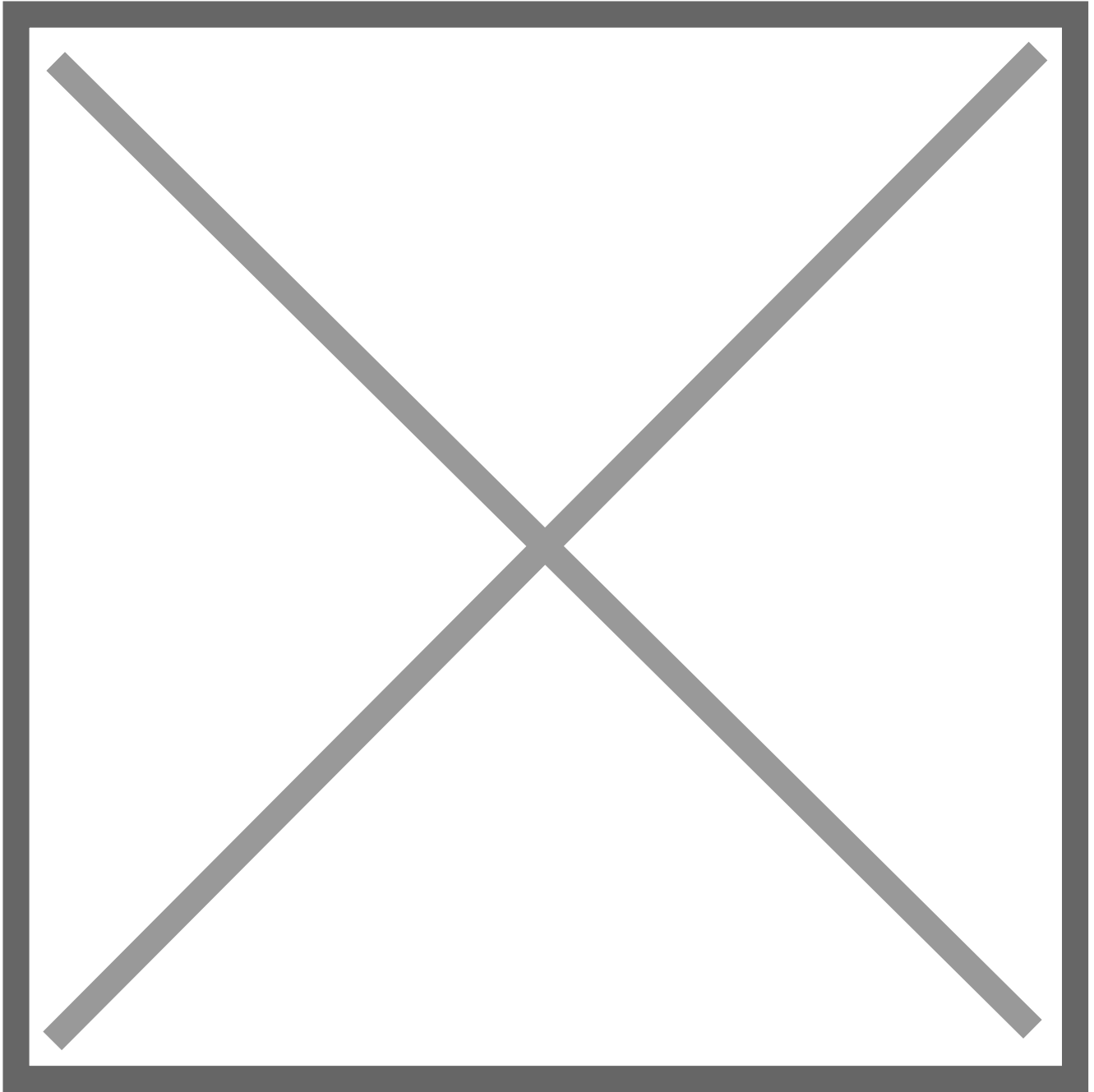


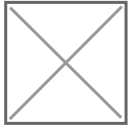
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Christians attend the funeral of Mary Hafez Michel Najjar and her mother, Maysa Khader Ibrahim Abu Daoud, at St. Porphyrios Greek Orthodox Church in Gaza City Oct. 3, 2026. The Christian mother and daughter, along with three others, were killed in the early morning hours Oct. 3 in an Israeli airstrike on the residential building where they lived. (OSV/Courtesy of X, @PGabRomanelli)

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Gaza Strip — October 5, 2026

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The pastor of Gaza's only Catholic parish revealed that Pope Leo XIV sent a personal condolence message following an Israeli missile strike that killed five people, including a Christian mother and daughter.

In his daily video update posted to YouTube Oct. 4, Fr. Gabriel Romanelli, pastor of Holy Family Parish, read the pope's "beautiful message" he received earlier, just one day after the missile strike that killed Maysa Khader Ibrahim Abu Daoud and her daughter, Mary Hafez Michel Najjar.

"Good morning, Fr. Gabriele. Ever since hearing the painful news about Maysa and Mary, I've been praying for them, their families, and everyone in Gaza. 'How long, Lord?'" Leo wrote, echoing a lament from Psalm 13.

"Thank you for standing by the parish and so many people who only want to live in peace. God bless, with a warm embrace," he wrote to Romanelli.

According to Turkey's state-run news agency Anadolu Agency, the two women were among five people killed in the early hours Oct. 3 in an Israeli airstrike on a residential building in Gaza City.

The deaths were confirmed hours later in a statement by the Higher Presidential Committee for Church Affairs in Palestine, which mourned the lives lost, including the two Christian women.

"Maysa and her daughter Mary had devoted their time to serving parishioners and displaced people sheltering at the Holy Family Church in Gaza, providing support and assistance amid the devastating humanitarian conditions facing the Gaza Strip," Ramzi Khouri, head of the committee, said.

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He added that the deaths of two women were "a painful loss for their families, the Church, and the parish community, and add to the growing number of martyrs among the Palestinian people in Gaza, who continue to endure death, destruction, and suffering on a daily basis."

The mother and daughter were laid to rest hours after their deaths, following a funeral at St. Porphyrios Greek Orthodox Church in Gaza.

In an Oct. 3 statement, the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem prayed for their eternal rest, as well as "an end to the war and bombardment and for the protection of civilians.

"May a just peace prevail, so that the people of Gaza may live without fear for their children and loved ones. May their memory be eternal," the statement read.

The Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem also issued a statement on behalf of Cardinal Pierbattista Pizzaballa, who expressed condolences to the families of those who died and to the Christian community in Gaza.

"His Beatitude offers his prayers to the Lord, asking Him to receive the two deceased in His abundant mercy, grant them eternal rest in His Kingdom, and bestow upon their families and loved ones the grace of consolation, strength, and hope," the patriarchate said.

In his video update, Romanelli said he was grateful for Leo's message and said the airstrike confirmed local fears "that there is not a single safe place in Gaza," neither in their homes, in streets and their churches.

"We have had 62 deaths: 62 Catholic and Orthodox Christians who have died in this war," the parish priest said. "Of those 62 people, 25 have died violent deaths from bombardments or military snipers, and the majority died where they had taken refuge here, at Holy Family Church."

Romanelli said that although the attack has affected the Christian community, similar airstrikes and attacks are "the reality for every resident of the Gaza Strip."

"The people are exhausted; the people are asking for peace, for this war to truly end," he said.

"Let us pray intensely for the Church, let us pray intensely for Pope Leo XIV, and let us pray intensely for peace between Palestine and Israel," Romanelli said. "May these innocent victims from this part of the Holy Land, like Maysa and Mary and so many others, serve — united to the redeeming sacrifice of Christ — to grant us peace of soul, peace among families, peace in society, and peace throughout the world."