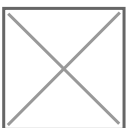




Pope Leo XIV gives his homily during a prayer vigil as part of the Jubilee of Consolation in St. Peter's Basilica at the Vatican, Sept. 15, the feast of Our Lady of Sorrows. (CNS/Lola Gomez)

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Pain must never give rise to violence, and every Catholic needs to learn to safeguard with tenderness those who are vulnerable, Pope Leo XIV said during a prayer vigil dedicated to people experiencing pain and affliction due to illness, bereavement, violence or abuse.

Recognizing that some members of the church "have unfortunately hurt you," the pope said, the church "kneels with you today before our Mother (Mary). May we all learn from her to protect the most vulnerable with tenderness!"

"May we learn to listen to your wounds and walk together," he said in his homily Sept. 15, the feast of Our Lady of Sorrows. "May we receive from Our Lady of Sorrows the strength to recognize that life is not defined only by the evil we suffer, but by the love of God, who never abandons us and guides the whole church."

The pope led the prayer vigil in St. Peter's Basilica Sept. 15 as part of the Jubilee of Consolation, which is "dedicated to all those who are experiencing or have experienced moments of particular difficulty, grief, suffering or hardship in their lives," according to the section of the Dicastery for Evangelization in charge of organizing the Holy Year.

During the vigil, two women offered their reflections and experience of losing a loved one to senseless violence and finding consolation, reconciliation and new life through their faith.

Lucia Di Mauro, spoke about forgiving and supporting the young man who was an accomplice in the 2009 murder of her husband, Gaetano Montanino, in Naples, Italy, and Diane Foley spoke about her son, James Foley, a U.S. journalist who worked in conflict zones and was kidnapped, once in Libya, then in Syria, where he was ultimately beheaded by members of ISIS in 2014.

Telling the story of his Catholic faith and passion for "giving voice to the voiceless," Foley also spoke of the pain and anguish of finding out "my innocent, good-hearted

son was taken at gunpoint, sold and held captive for the 'crime' of being a journalist — just as our beloved innocent Jesus was condemned to death for our sins," she said, her voice catching with emotion.

"Anger surged within me — anger at ISIS, at our U.S. government, at those who refused to help. Bitterness threatened to consume me," she said. She found comfort in the Stations of the Cross, and "Jesus and Mary became my constant companions, along with countless earthly angels whose compassion lifted me up."

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The unexpected happened, Foley said, when Alexandra Kotey, one of the jihadists who had kidnapped and tortured her son, offered to meet with the family after he pleaded guilty to all eight counts of kidnapping, torture and murder.

"The three days of meeting with Alexandra became moments of grace," she said, as "God gave me the grace to see him as a fellow sinner in need of mercy, like me," and she turned evil into good by establishing the James W. Foley Legacy Foundation, which advocates for the safe return of Americans taken hostage and educates student journalists about safety practices in places of danger.

In his homily, Leo said, "the testimonies we have heard speak of a truth: that pain must not give rise to violence, and that violence never has the final say, for it is conquered by a love that knows how to forgive."

"The violence suffered cannot be erased, but forgiveness granted to those who offend us is a foretaste of the kingdom of God on earth," he said.

"Where there is evil, we must seek the comfort and consolation that can overcome it and give it no respite," he said. "In the church, this means never being alone."

"Finding someone who cries with you and gives you strength is a medicine that we cannot do without, because it is a sign of love. Where pain is deep, the hope that comes from communion must be even stronger," he added.

The pope highlighted the collective anguish of entire peoples "crushed by the weight of violence, hunger and war."

"The true consolation we must offer to those around us is showing that peace is possible," he said, appealing to the leaders of nations to listen to "the cries of so many innocent children and ensure them a future that protects and consoles them."

"Even in the midst of so much arrogance, we are certain that God will inspire hearts and hands to provide help and consolation: peacemakers who can comfort those who are in pain and sadness," he said.

Among the many prayer intentions read aloud were pleas for those who are: persecuted for their faith; victims of violence and terrorism; children who are abused and neglected; victims of human trafficking and their captors; abandoned by others; suffering from addiction; and mourning the death of a loved one or child.

At the prayer service, people were given a gift of the "Agnus Dei," a wax medallion depicting the Paschal lamb, a symbol of resurrection and a sign of hope. On the other side was a representation of Rome's Marian icon, the "Salus Populi Romani," ("Salvation of the Roman People"). The medallions were blessed by the pope.