



EPARCHY OF SS. PETER AND PAUL OF MELBOURNE
FOR UKRAINIAN CATHOLICS IN AUSTRALIA, NEW ZEALAND AND OCEANIA

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Page 1

AN APPEAL

OF THE UKRAINIAN CATHOLIC CHURCH IN AUSTRALIA

"PRAY FOR PEACE AND JUSTICE FOR UKRAINE. BE INFORMED. SUPPORT THE SUFFERING"

"Herod is going to search for the child to destroy him" (Mt 2,13)

As we celebrate Australia Day, we give thanks to Almighty God for the blessings we receive living in this Great Southern Land of the Holy Spirit. Australia Day also allows us to reflect upon our accomplishments as well as our failures as a nation. It is a day of national celebration for many, and for others a day of sorrow. Above all, our national day should be a day of hope for a better future, building on past accomplishments whilst at the same time learning from our mistakes. A day of reconciliation amongst all the diverse people that make up our great nation.

His Holiness Pope Francis has asked that the whole world join with him in praying for peace in Ukraine on 26 January – Australia day for us. "I am following with concern the increase of tensions that threaten to inflict a new blow to the peace in Ukraine, and call into question the security of the European continent, with wider repercussions," the pope said after his weekly Angelus address on 23 January. "I make a heartfelt appeal to all people of good will, that they may raise prayers to God Almighty, that every political action and initiative may serve human kind, rather than partisan interests," he stated.

In our Eastern Christian Christmas tradition, we rejoice and celebrate that "God is with us," singing the praises of the Prince of Peace in hymns and carols. Yet as we reread the Nativity account, we encounter the homelessness of the Mother of God, the anguish of Joseph, and the refugee status of the newborn Jesus. Herod appears, a homicidal tyrant craving hegemony, who massacres innocent children in Bethlehem in order to kill the Messiah – a vivid image of the lust for power. In fact Herod's determination to dominate was so overpowering that he even murdered three of his own sons. The Holy Infant, who bringing salvation to all, was a threat to a tyrant pathetically clinging to his self-importance.

During this Christmas season, more than 100,000 Russian troops have been positioned on three sides of Ukraine: a nascent democracy, a country on a pilgrimage to freedom and dignity from the fear of a totalitarian past in which 15 million people were killed on Ukrainian territory.

Today, the world watches and wonders: Are religious freedoms, free press, robust public debate, and accountable government in a sovereign state to be punished through the escalation of an invasion that began in 2014? Are the Ukrainian people's exercise of their God-given dignity a threat to a modern Herod's thirst for power and hegemony?

This is a question of life and death, as nostalgia for an empire lost, has led to senseless slaughter and immense suffering throughout Ukraine.

President Putin has repeatedly stated that "the dissolution of the Soviet Union was the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the 20th century" not the genocides perpetrated against Armenians, Cambodians, or Rwandans, not the Nazi Holocaust of European Jews, not the Ukrainian Holodomor terror-famine or the deaths in the Soviet Gulag labour camps or China's Great Leap Forward; not even the two world wars with their tens of millions of deaths. No, according to President Putin, the greatest catastrophe of the past century was the collapse of a murderous totalitarian empire, a prison house of nations. And that, Mr. Putin insists, is what must be restored in one form or another.



God-given human dignity and freedom threaten rulers who seek to dominate others, build empires, enslave, and colonize. Those with the audacity to resist, who dare to move from the fear of totalitarianism to freedom and dignity – people in Georgia and Ukraine, Belarus and Kazakhstan – are mercilessly punished.

“A voice was heard in Ramah, sobbing and loud lamentation; Rachel weeping for her children, and she would not be consoled, since they were no more.” (Mt 2,18) After eight years of war initiated by Russia, Ukraine has lost a substantial part of its territory. 14,000 people, including children, have been killed, 1.5 million have been internally displaced, several hundred thousand agonize near the frontline, and millions suffer from post-traumatic stress. There are 400,000 traumatized veterans of the Ukrainian-Russian war and thousands who have lost their loved-ones.

Since February 2014, Revolution of Dignity on the Maidan, when 100 peaceful protestors were killed in cold blood in Kyiv, Ukrainian society has lived under a cloud of mourning and grief. Just one of our brother bishops in Ukraine, Stefan Sus, has officiated at 134 funerals of Ukrainian soldiers. Every city and town, and hundreds of villages, have fresh graves—sons and sisters, husbands and daughters, fathers, and grandfathers who gave their lives for what God promises to every human being – freedom and dignity.

The war in Ukraine is real. It kills, maims, and destroys daily. An escalated Russian invasion will generate additional millions of refugees, more dead and injured, more tears and pain. Still, the people of Ukraine courageously endure. As they stand with a gun to their head, they ask for our solidarity.

What can we do?

Pray. Pray for peace and justice in Ukraine. God is the Lord of history and the Lover of Humankind. His grace changes the most hardened hearts. Ukraine was brutally invaded, its territory annexed, the society traumatized. May God convert the promoters of violence. The Lord miraculously liberated the peoples of the Soviet Union without war. May God protect Ukraine and her people from further harm. May God’s gift of human dignity be honoured and protected.

Be informed. Know the facts and fight falsehood in a public debate being warped by Russian disinformation. Inform others. The world cannot look away; you should not look away. Seek and share the truth, which gives authentic freedom and wisdom.

Support. There is a huge humanitarian crisis in Ukraine. People near the frontline often lack the basics—clean water, fuel, food, clothes, medicine. Heal the wounds. Help the victims of this senseless invasion.

*Give ear to my prayer, O God;
And hide not thyself from my supplication...
I am distraught by the noise of the enemy,
Because of the oppression of the wicked...
But I will trust in thee. (Ps. 55, 1,2-3; 23)*

IN CHRIST OUR REDEEMER,



✠ MYKOLA BYCHOK, CSsR
BISHOP OF THE EPARCHY
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