

Vox Episcopi – the Voice of the Bishop

23 March 2022

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

The war in Ukraine has entered its fourth week and while world-wide condemnation of the Russian attacks grow, so does the death toll. Men, women and children. Hundreds of thousands of people are trapped in besieged cities decimated by missiles, ten million have fled their homes and more than three million have fled to neighbouring countries. This is an humanitarian crisis.

What can we do? Many have very generously donated to various appeals to help relief organisations on the ground in Ukraine with medical and food supplies.

We can also pray.

I urge the People of God in the Diocese of Broken Bay to join their prayers with Catholics around the world, and with those of Pope Francis, when he consecrates Ukraine and Russia to the Immaculate Heart of Mary this Friday, 25 March on the solemnity of the Annunciation of the Lord.

The act of consecration places the warring countries under the protection of Mary, the Mother of Christ, trusting in the power of her intercession. Such an act looks towards God, the source of all peace, and seeks God's peace through Mary. This renewal of the consecration that took place in Fatima more than 100 years ago, will occur on 25 March at 5pm Rome time, Saturday at 3am in Sydney.

However during the day on Friday, I encourage you to devote yourself to prayer – attend Mass, pray with your family or friends. Take opportunities in silent prayer at a local parish or chapel or in whatever way you can. I also invite my clergy to look for opportunities for people to gather, in person or virtually, so we may be united in prayer at this troubling time. It is my hope that many of our parishes will provide opportunities for people to come together locally in pastorally creative ways to join in solidarity at this time. It may be that a parish has a special Mass intention for its celebration of the Feast of the Annunciation of the Lord, or a special version of the Stations of the Cross, or a Rosary or recitation of the Divine Mercy chaplet either in the parish church or online.

We must pray earnestly for a swift end to the crisis in Ukraine. This war has already brought immense suffering for many thousands of people, deaths and homelessness, and will continue to have lasting and devastating effects on the Ukraine economy. Pray for peace and the freedom of people to live in peace. Nothing can be gained by war.

The Australian Catholic Bishops Conference has made available the following prayer for use at this time.

Prayer for Peace and Justice in Ukraine

God of peace and justice,
who change the hardened heart
and break the power of violence,
we entrust the people of Ukraine to you.
Protect them in this time of mortal peril;
let them know not death but life,
not slavery but freedom.
You are Father of all;
we are brothers and sisters.
Give us the strength
to live that truth in love,
choosing peace not war.
Through Christ our Lord.
Amen.

I will also join you in prayer on Friday with a special video message, along with the provision of other resources, on our Diocese of Broken Bay website www.bbcatholic.org.au

Please share this with your family and friends.

With my prayers and blessing

+ Anthony