

BISHOP PAUL ASKS FOR PRAYERS FOR UKRAINE HOMILY IN THE CATHEDRAL, FEBRUARY 27, 2022

Last month, I received a letter from the Ukrainian Catholic Bishop in Melbourne, Bishop Mykola Bychok, asking for prayers for the people of Ukraine. At that stage, more than 100,000 Russian troops had been positioned on three sides of Ukraine and people were fearing a full scale invasion. Bishop Mykola recalled that Ukraine had already been invaded in 2014 and there had been war in some regions of the country for the past eight years. This is what Bishop Mykola wrote last month.

“Since 2014, Ukrainian society has lived under a cloud of mourning and grief. 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.”

At that point, there was growing fear of a further invasion. Bishop Mykola wrote, “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.”

Sadly, those fears of a further invasion have been realised and the suffering has increased. Last Thursday, after attacks began in many parts of the country, Bishop Mykola wrote again, renewing his appeal for prayers for peace and justice for Ukraine.

The opening prayer for this Eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time was written many years ago, but the words are very relevant to today. The prayer looks to God’s peaceful rule among the nations and the gift of peace for the Church to live the Christian faith, free of persecution. Today we could well pray for that blessing of peace for the nation of Ukraine and for the Ukrainian Catholic Church.

“Grant us, O Lord, we pray, that the course of our world may be directed by your peaceful rule and that your Church may rejoice, untroubled in her devotion.”

Each time we come to Mass, as we prepare to receive communion, we pray that we might be delivered from evil and that we might be blessed with peace. It is always good to pray for deliverance from any evils in our lives and it is always good to ask for the gift of peace. However, this prayer is all the more urgent in time of war. When we pray these words this evening, we might pray them particularly for the people of Ukraine.

“Deliver us, Lord, from every evil, graciously grant peace in our days, that, by the help of your mercy, we may be always free from sin and safe from all distress. Lord Jesus Christ, who said to your apostles: Peace I leave you, my peace I give you, look not on our sins, but on the faith of your Church, and graciously grant her peace and unity in accordance with your will.”

Each time we come to Mass, we can bring to God all the concerns that are in our hearts. Among those concerns now are the plight of the people in Ukraine and the distress of Ukrainians in Australia and around the world. May God be their help and their refuge.

I invite you to pray with me in your heart as I read from the final lines of Bishop Mykola’s letter.

“God is the Lord of history and the Lover of Humankind. God’s grace changes the most hardened hearts. Ukraine has been brutally invaded, the society traumatised. May God convert the promoters of violence. May God protect Ukraine and her people. May God’s gift of human dignity be honoured.”

Bishop Paul Bird CSSR