

Chrism Mass Homily
St Patrick's Cathedral, Ballarat
Monday, April 11, 2022

In January this year, I received a letter from the Ukrainian Catholic Bishop in Melbourne, Bishop Mykola Bychok. He was 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. He wrote, "Since 2014, Ukrainian society has lived under a cloud of mourning and grief." 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."

Sadly, those fears of a further invasion have been realised and the suffering has increased. In this past week, the Archbishop of Kyiv spoke of "rivers of blood, a sea of tears". The people of Ukraine are enduring a time of great suffering, like the sufferings the prophet Isaiah spoke of in this evening's reading, with hearts broken, and homes destroyed and great mourning over lives lost. Yet they courageously endure. They bear their sorrows with hope for deliverance.

They look for the kind of deliverance that Isaiah promised. "The spirit of the Lord has been given to me, for the Lord has anointed me. He has sent me to bring good news to the poor, to bind up hearts that are broken, to comfort all those who mourn and to give them for ashes a garland; for mourning robes the oil of gladness, for despondency, praise."

In the gospel text this evening, Jesus quotes these words of Isaiah and he says that Isaiah's promise is being fulfilled. Jesus says to the people in the synagogue in Nazareth, "This text is being fulfilled today even as you listen."

The people of Ukraine are bearing this time of trial with strong Christian faith. They are enduring great suffering, like the suffering of Christ that we remember in these days of Holy Week. Yet they hope for the deliverance that Christ came to bring. They hope to share in the joy of Easter, the joy of Christ risen to new life.

As we celebrate the Chrism Mass this year, we are very conscious of the suffering in Ukraine. We also know that people are suffering in many ways in countries all around the world. We know that people have their burdens in Australia. We know that people in our own diocese have their sorrows to bear. And as we remember all these burdens, we can pray for the deliverance that Christ brings.

We will bless the oil of the sick. We pray that Christ will pour out the oil of comfort on those who are struggling with illness in the homes and hospitals of our diocese and in homes and hospitals around the world. We will bless the oil of catechumens. We pray that Christ will pour out the oil of mercy on those to be baptised. May they have strength to live their Christian lives to the full. We will bless the oil of Chrism. We pray that Christ will renew the anointing of the Spirit in all those confirmed and all those ordained. May we be inspired anew to give our lives in service.

I pray that the words of Isaiah will be fulfilled through each one of us. "The spirit of the Lord has been given to me, for he has anointed me. He has sent me to bring good news to the poor, to proclaim the Lord's year of favour." May these words be fulfilled through us day by day.

Bishop Paul Bird CSsR