
Ukraine. Appeal from priests: "Create humanitarian corridors to bury the dead"

Ukraine is experiencing another emergency: its deaths. Lifeless bodies left on the streets of armoured and encircled cities, amidst heaps of rubble. Corpses that have not been returned to their loved ones and given a proper burial. We discuss the situation with Father **Mykhajlo Melnyk**, priest of the Kamienets-Podilskyi diocese of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church. "Some of our cities here in Ukraine have become open-air cemeteries. Russian missiles are decimating our population, torching our cities. Over 2,000 people were killed in the city of Mariupol alone, and cities in the vicinity of Kyiv, such as Irpin and Bucha, are encircled by Russian troops, who are not allowing us to take the corpses and bury them." Father Melnyk was with a group of priests in Irpin on Thursday. "We put on our priestly garb and went over to the Russian soldiers to ask if we could take the civilians' dead bodies and give them a proper burial." *After extensive talks, 63 bodies were recovered. They had been left on the streets for 2/3 days. They were placed in a black bag and thrown into a mass grave. The group of priests drew near and each was permitted to recite a prayer and bless the bodies.*

Based on that experience, Father Melnyk sent out an appeal. "International law envisages humanitarian corridors for the safe passage of people and aid in emergency situations. We are asking for corridors to allow the burial of the dead civilians and soldiers. Moreover, there is a risk that the large number of unattended bodies and the rising temperatures could spark off epidemics." The appeal is addressed to all parties, to both Russians and Ukrainians: "Also the Russian mothers have a right to pay their last respects to their sons", says the priest. "I hope that the Orthodox Church of Moscow, and Patriarch Kirill in particular, will exert pressure to ensure that the bodies of the dead soldiers are returned to their homes, to their mothers. It is a duty of Christian mercy and respect." There is a right to give a name and surname to the bodies, be returned to their families, be buried. "It is an inherent right of the human condition. Do unto others as you would have them do unto you. Hopefully, that spirit of humaneness will prevail over any military and geopolitical rationale." The priest adds: "While being here, I have understood the meaning of peace. It used to be a word. Now it is a value. I have understood that lives depend on the word peace. I hope that European and world governments will not say they are proud of the money they have invested in purchasing weapons. Those weapons are killing people, destroying cities and devaluing human dignity. *We must stop this horror, work towards a ceasefire. Here civilians are dying, children are dying, innocent people are dying. There are no strategic reasons that can justify such a massacre.*" **Father Andriy Zelenskyy is a military chaplain. Each day he posts on Facebook photos of young Ukrainian soldiers who have lost their lives on the battlefield.** "It's hard to speak about them", he concedes, his voice cracking. "They are not just people I knew. They were part of my life. Someone goes missing every day. Maybe sometimes we don't realize it. But behind that face, that name, that loss, there is a history, there is a loved one, there are children, there is a mother and a father. Those lives were filled with passions, commitments, jobs, friendships. *Every time there are reports of soldiers killed in action, a part of my world collapses. It's hard to cope with and I don't know how I will be able to process it. The world of a human being disappears.*" Father Zelenskyy, a Jesuit priest, has been reflecting on this life and death experience for several days. "The fate of humanity is in our hands today. However, responsibility begins with honesty. If we are not honest, if we do not call things by their right name, if we fail to recognise evil and firmly and loudly tell evil to "stop!", that evil will only grow stronger tomorrow."