
The parish priest of Mariupol: "They are firing at pregnant women and children. Mine is not anger, it's desperation"

"We were told that they shot at a convoy of cars travelling from Mariupol to Zaporizhia yesterday. Children and pregnant women were inside. Their presence inside the cars had been clearly marked so they knew exactly what they were doing! How can Europe even negotiate with such a wicked person? It's a diabolical war! Father **Pavlo Tomashewski**, of the Order of St Paul the First Hermit, parish priest of Our Lady of Czestochowa in Mariupol, spoke to SIR with words of desperation. His description of the difficult situation in his city is tragic. He managed to escape from Mariupol a week ago with a group of parishioners. Telephone communication with those who are still in the city is very difficult, virtually impossible, making it hard to obtain any reliable information or details about the situation on the ground. It's impossible to know if friends and acquaintances are safe or if they died under Russia's bombings. "The situation in the city is critical", says the parish priest. "Only today I was able to communicate with people who have left the city. They are now in Berdyansk. They are trying to find fuel for their cars, they are on their way to the city of Zaporozhye. *It's impossible get in touch with those who remained in the city of Mariupol. We only managed to talk to one person and the conversation was short*". **Mariupol has virtually been wiped out.** The curia of the diocese of Kharkiv, which includes Mariupol, confirms that 90% of all residential buildings have been completely destroyed. In the words of Father Pavlo: "The city of Mariupol is relentlessly being razed to the ground by the Russians, bit by bit. Planes are dropping bombs on the city every day, there is also continuous artillery firing. Almost half of the city is controlled by the Russians. There are ongoing fights on the streets of the city. *There is no food, water, light, internet or communication. People are using water from the river but it's extremely polluted and they are trying to purify it in any possible way. The situation is so serious that I have no words to describe it.*" **The "good" news is that rescue workers have started to extract the first survivors, 130 so far, from the rubble of the Mariupol Drama Theatre**, shelled on Wednesday. The number of survivors is unclear, but we know that hundreds of civilians, including children, had been sheltering there in the days preceding the attack. Those who succeeded have fled the city. Local reports suggest that some 30,000 civilians have fled with their own vehicles. Some 350,000 people are still in the city, hiding in shelters. As many as 11,525 people arrived in Zaporizhzhia, a city in south-eastern Ukraine, in the last two days alone. **"You cannot negotiate with the Russians,"** says the parish priest. "They are insidious. They are killing civilians. They know exactly what they are doing. They are firing at civilians from tanks. Children and women are being killed and they are bragging about it!" *Georgia, Chechnya, Ichkeria, Abkhazia. Father Pavlo's list is a historical record. "They have always acted in this way," he says. "Theirs is a 'scorched earth' strategy."* "That's the way they have always been. They tell lies on TV and spread propaganda. They say they went to war to protect us from the Nazis. How can you even talk about peace? European humanism is a weakness for them and they laugh about it." **What can we do from Italy?** "I really don't know what to say. All I ask for is prayer. Especially for politicians. For European politicians," the parish priest replies. "We have asked NATO to help us close the skies over Ukraine, but NATO is afraid and that is why innocent women and children are dying every day in Mariupol". He concludes: "Mine is not anger. It's despair. When you know that your parishioners have taken refuge in basements, where they are right now, without water or food, and they could be dying; when you realise that you can't help them in any way, you are overwhelmed not by anger but by despair."