
Pope Francis to the people of Ukraine: “Your pain is my pain. I remain close to you”

“I would like to unite my own tears with yours and tell you that there is not a day in which I am not close to you and do not carry you in my heart and in my prayers. Your pain is my pain”, reads the letter of Pope Francis addressed to the people of Ukraine, exactly nine months since the outbreak of the war. The letter is a long, heartfelt, detailed tribute to a people recognised as “bold and strong” throughout the world. “A people who suffer and pray, weep and struggle, resist and hope: a noble and martyred people.” Once again, as he did at the end of last Wednesday's general audience, when he first coined the term “martyrdom of aggression”, Francis mentions the “terrible genocide of Holodomor.” He writes: “In this sea of evil and pain, I admire your good fortitude.” “I remain close to you with my heart and prayers and with humanitarian concern that you may feel accompanied, that you may not get used to war, today and especially tomorrow, when there may be a temptation to forget your suffering”, assures the Pope. **“The irrational insanity of war has been unleashed on your land** for nine months already,” Francis writes in his opening remarks: “The ominous rumble of shells and the eerie sound of air raid sirens echo ceaselessly in your skies. Your cities are hammered with bombs, while a barrage of missiles brings death, destruction and pain, hunger, thirst and cold. Many have had to flee your streets, leaving homes and loved ones behind. Alongside your great rivers flow rivers of blood and tears every day.” “In the cross of Jesus today I see you—you who suffer the terror unleashed by this aggression.” The Pope’s letter continues: “The cross that tortured the Lord lives again in the tortures found on the corpses, in the mass graves discovered in various cities, in that and in many other barbarous sights that entered our souls, that made us cry out: why? How can men treat other men this way?”

“I weep with you for every child who died because of this war,

like Kira in Odessa, like Lisa in Vinnytsia, and like hundreds of other children: in each one of them the whole of humanity is defeated”, Francis writes: “How many children have been killed, injured or orphaned, torn from their mothers!” “And how can anyone not feel anguish for them and for all those, young and old, who have been deported?”

The pain of the Ukrainian mothers is beyond words.”

"I also think of you, young people, forced to take up arms instead of the dreams you had cherished for the future in courageous defence of your homeland," the Pope continues: "I am thinking of you, spouses, you who lost your husbands. Biting your lips you go forward in silence, with dignity and determination, to make every sacrifice for your children. I am thinking of you, adults, you who try in every way to protect your loved ones. I am thinking of you, the elderly, who instead of enjoying a tranquil sunset were plunged into the darkness of war. I am thinking of you, women, you who were subjected to violence and carry heavy burdens in your hearts; to all of you, wounded in body and soul. I think of you and I remain close to you with affection and admiration for the way in which you are facing such harsh ordeals. On the national authorities “rests the duty to govern the country in tragic times and to make forward-looking decisions for peace and for economic development during the destruction of vital infrastructure, in cities and in the rural areas”, the Pope's plea. Francis continues with a pressing list: "I am thinking of you, volunteers, you who devote yourselves to the people every day; you, Shepherds of the holy people of God, who - often risking your own safety - have remained close to the people, bringing God's consolation and the solidarity of your brothers and sisters, creatively transforming community sites and convents into lodgings that offer hospitality, relief and food to persons in acute difficulty." The Pope's thoughts then go “to the refugees and internally

displaced persons, who are far from their homes, many of them destroyed.” “In the coming months, as harsh weather conditions make your predicament all the more tragic, I pray that the embrace of the Church, the power of prayer, the love of so many brothers and sisters across the globe, may be caresses on your faces,” the concluding message: “In a few weeks it will be Christmas, and the pangs of suffering will be felt even more acutely. Yet I would like to return with you to Bethlehem, to the trial that the Holy Family faced on that night, which seemed only cold and dark. Instead, light shone: not from men, but from God; not from earth, but from Heaven. May His and our Mother, Our Lady, watch over you. Together with the world's Bishops I consecrated the Church and humanity, especially your country and Russia, to her Immaculate Heart. To her Motherly Heart I present your sufferings and your tears. To her who, as was written by a great son of your land, "brought God into our world", let us not grow tired of asking for the longed-for gift of peace, in the certainty that 'nothing is impossible to God'.”

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