

Ukraine. Msgr. Yazlovetskiy (Auxiliary Bishop of Kyiv): "We have just one wish: peace"



. auxiliary bishop of the Kyiv-Zhytomyr diocese, president of Caritas-Spes, could answer the phone.
What will Christmas be like this year given these circumstances? This Christmas is bound to be different compared to the past years. We are missing the lights. There are no Christmas dinner tables filled with food, houses have no heating. Yet in this darkness, we have a clearer view of what is essential. When everything is brightly lit, when Christmas lights, music and ornaments adorn the streets, the true meaning of Christmas, which is Jesus, is hard to perceive. Here, in the darkness, we are experiencing the essence of the feast that is God's birth on earth. At least that is my hope. I see so many around me who are preparing to live out this expectation in a different way this year and who, in spite of everything, will not lose the joy of this upcoming Christmas. **People are suffering, many have lost their loved ones, some have lost their father, others their husband, many even their children. How can one feel the joy of Christmas while grieving a loved one?** That's true. The greatest sorrow is the death of a child. As priests, we find it very hard to tell the parents something meaningful. If a child dies, all the years of life they had ahead of them are gone forever. So we remain silent. As priests, we celebrate many funerals. I just buried a 35-year-old young man. He belonged to our church and served at the altar. When the war broke out, he returned from Poland to serve the nation, but he was killed, his body recovered. When we celebrate soldiers' funerals, on the one hand there is immense sorrow, but on the other the family members are serene. They grieve but they know that their son, their husband, the father of their children went to the front line to defend their country and their family. He returned dead but he returned a hero. **Are you afraid of holding Christmas celebrations for fear of attacks?** Yes, not least because attacks happen especially during the holidays. We are afraid. But our people appear to be braver than the bishops and priests. For example, we have tried to celebrate more Holy Masses during the daytime, and especially on feast days so as to avoid crowds. Nevertheless, the faithful want to attend services. The churches are

always full. With regard to the Christmas celebrations, it will depend on the time and the situation. We are watching and following the news. If Iranian drones are launched, those weapons will strike and target specific infrastructure. Our soldiers can intercept them but if they fire a missile, it's much harder. It has the power to bring down an entire building. So the situation could get worse, and in that case, Holy Mass could be held in our locations or even cancelled. We shall see. **Do you think there could be a cease-fire at Christmas time?** We had high hopes at the beginning of the war. We hoped that Putin was not crazy enough to do what he eventually did. So we have little hope today. I hope that our troops are willing to stop the war this Christmas. But I don't think the Russians are. It should also be said that our military are not advancing right now. They are defending the positions that the Russians have taken. So from a human point of view I hardly believe there is hope for a Christmas truce. But there is also the perspective of belief. And for a believer, God works miracles. **You were elected new president of Caritas-Spes. What do you need the most right now?** First of all, thermal clothing against cold weather. We also need generators, power banks to charge mobile phones and PCs, torches, gas or electric stoves that can be connected to the generators. We also need field kitchens that can be transported to the combat zones, to small towns and villages that suffered heavy damage, whose inhabitants have been with no electricity for a long time and need warm food and hot beverages that they appreciate so much. We also need money to purchase food and basic necessities here, thereby avoiding transport costs while supporting the country's economy. **What is your wish for your homeland, for your people, this year?** We just have one wish: peace, peace, peace. Peace is like the air we breathe. It is essential. We need peace to live. Peace occupies first place in the wishes of the Ukrainians today. I therefore wish peace to all. **Would you like to make an appeal?** I call on everyone to appreciate the loved ones who are close to us, the God-given gifts, light, gas, warmth. I invite them to appreciate peace. Peace is fragile. It can be extinguished like the flame of a candle. By blowing on it just once. So let us try to foster wherever we are a peace-enhancing, peace-protecting and peace-sustaining environment. Let us not allow evil to steal peace. And please help our country, because peace in Europe depends on the peace in Ukraine.

M. Chiara Biagioni