
Prayer Vigil for Peace in Bari. Msgr. Satriano: “We must not remain indifferent and pursue every avenue leading to dialogue”

"The oil that will be poured into the uniflamma lamp at the tomb of St Nicholas will ignite the flame of prayer, but it will also be a balm for humanity's wounds": Monsignor **Giuseppe Satriano**, archbishop of Bari-Bitonto, spoke about the prayer vigil for peace in Ukraine promoted by the Italian Bishops' Conference together with the archdiocese.



From Kyiv to

Bari: why a Prayer Vigil for Peace? St Nicholas is a point of reference for the Catholic and Orthodox worlds. The 2017 pilgrimage of the Saint's relics to Moscow remains a memorable event. On the days leading up to Christmas and after the feast of St Nicholas celebrated according to the Julian calendar, we wish to come together to open the heart of the Church in Italy to an embrace of solidarity and intercession for our brothers and sisters facing the suffering and hardships of war. Bari is a fundamental crossroads for the Mediterranean.

We must shoulder the burden of a greater commitment without remaining indifferent, and challenge ourselves to pursue every feasible avenue.

St John Chrysostom said that "the man who prays holds the helm of history in his hand." We believe in the redeeming and intercessory power of prayer, especially in the footsteps of a great Saint. **Bari is a city that symbolises ecumenical dialogue. Yet today the dialogue between 'brothers' is not so easy...** Pope Francis' tears on the Spanish Steps are emblematic. They testify to the efforts being made to bring hearts back together and to weave a shared fabric. The hypertrophy of ego gave rise to a throwaway culture. Human relations are growing increasingly difficult, especially in contexts marked by poverty and vulnerability. The Pope places great emphasis on proximity and fraternity. This is no wishful thinking, but a historical requirement. Our gaze at history must start with the poor. **What will you ask St Nicholas, a Saint that the Ukrainian and Russian people hold so close to their hearts?** To place my heart alongside the suffering people, through prayer. I hope there will be a ceasefire for Christmas time to bring some respite to the population and to enable works of mercy for the dead. I hope that a dialogue process will begin, within a reasonable timeframe, in order to initiate genuine peace talks. **You refer to prayer as the most revolutionary action recorded in history.** The man with a hardened heart does not pray, he narrates himself. The man who prays puts himself in the position of acting as a bridge connecting various situations of human suffering. We must divest

ourselves of the pride that dwells within us in order to make room for the other person. It is the greatest struggle in this century. Our fellow other has become an alien. Our gaze is fixed on ourselves alone. We are willing to face hardships only when they are about ourselves, if not, we are not interested. It's the drop-out culture, mentioned by Fr Tonino Bello: we must turn our gaze to those who have fallen off the wagon and risk being left by the wayside. **We witnessed the horror of mass graves, from Irpin to Bucha. The corpses of tortured civilians, the torture chambers in Kherson, the crimes committed against women and children. How can we reject hatred of the enemy and find a path towards peace?** We must practise intercessory prayer that is the whole of Christ's ministry. It is the prayer of those in pain, abused and violated, who invoke forgiveness and reconciliation. This prayer, stemming from the bottom of our hearts, leads to personal conversion and openness to our enemies. In the light of the Gospel, war can never be legitimised. Christ's teachings are not emotional appeals. We have to take a stand by making non-violent choices, which must shape Christians' lives. And we are looking at a war between Christians. **Will all Italian dioceses join in prayer?** Christmas Novena prayers are prayed with great intensity in all Christian communities. As Christmas draws near, people's hearts are open to greater concern for others. I find that the fact that Cardinal Zuppi and Bishop Olivero, President of the Bishops' Commission for Ecumenism and Dialogue, will preside over this occasion, is a beautiful thing. These are clear signs of the Italian Church's commitment to unity in the invocation of peace.

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