
Ukrainian youth at WYD in Lisbon. Father Demush: "Despite the pain of war, we will be there."

"The presence of Ukrainian youth at World Youth Day in Lisbon is meant to be a testimony. We want to say that there are so many innocent young people dying in Ukraine to defend their country. So they are telling their peers in Europe and around the world that even today it is possible to live and give one's life for great values. We will be there in Lisbon to embrace those who are helping us to survive and to ask the world not to forget the tormented people of Ukraine." Sir reached out to **Father Roman Demush**, deputy head of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church's youth ministry office, who tells how the preparations from Ukraine to the Lisbon WYD are progressing and in what spirit they are working. The organization is not a simple matter, not least because it unfortunately has to deal with an ongoing war that is putting a strain on the Ukrainian people. A single organizing committee was founded in September, in which representatives of both the Greek Catholic and Latin Rite churches participate. "At first we dreamed of bringing between 100, at most 200, young people to the WYD in Lisbon. But thank God to date we have about 500 young people from Ukraine who have expressed a desire to participate. We are talking about Ukrainian youth living in Ukraine." In addition to this number there are also several youth groups belonging to various movements, religious orders, from the Salesians to the Redemptorists, and various Catholic organizations in the country.

The participation of Ukrainian youth from all over the world, especially from the countries of Europe, will be high. They are young war refugees from England, Poland, Germany, France. About 100 young Ukrainians from Italy will participate in the WYD.

Father Demush confides that there are several difficulties they are facing in organizing such a participation. There are economic and logistical problems but also issues related to the impossibility of leaving the country. "But we are solving them because it is really important for us to be there and to be able to experience communion with young people from all over the world." The organizing committee has already made a site visit to Lisbon and met in the Vatican with the heads of the Dicastery for Laity, Family and Life. Regarding economic difficulties, in response to a request made by H.B. Shevchuk but also by several Ukrainian bishops, the organization can also count on help from the Dicastery's solidarity fund to cover expenses and ease the burden of the cost on the young people. "Young people as Pope Francis says," Father Demush notes, "are the today of our country and our Church. The weight of the war has especially fallen on their shoulders. It is the young people who have gone to the front lines to defend our country. They are the ones who have committed themselves to helping the people as volunteers. They are the ones who have stepped forward to allow, in many ways, life to continue in spite of everything!"

"We really can say that our young people are our today. That is why as a Church we have an obligation to bring them together, guide them and accompany them in these challenging times."

"With our presence in Lisbon," Father Demush continued, "our foremost intention is to assert our existence to Europe and the world, despite the efforts of those who are doing everything to destroy us. We want to be embraced and also extend our embrace to all those who are helping us in our resistance during this conflict. The Ukrainian youth yearns to convey the truth of our experiences, the truth of Russia's aggression against the innocent people of Ukraine. We have an obligation to speak the truth, and furthermore, a responsibility to bear witness that even in the 21st century, we can wholeheartedly live by the commandment of love."

"So many young Ukrainians are sacrificing their lives today to protect their families, their

nation, and their cities. So many innocent young people are dying."

"This is the testimony they want to give: to say that even today it is possible to die for the love of one's neighbor, but that by dying one does not lose, because the one who defends the truth is always on the side of victory. During this Easter season, we continue to intone the Eastern song that is raised during our liturgies: Christ by his death has conquered death, and the Ukrainian youth by their death are conquering death, they are winning in this unjust war."

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