
The Ukrainian people's voices at the Assembly of the Italian Bishops' Conference. Msgr. Ryabukha (Donetsk): "Please continue being there for us"

"My heartfelt gratitude goes to the Italian Church and to the Italian people for having shown closeness, fraternity and hospitality towards our people", said Msgr. **Maksym Ryabukha**, auxiliary bishop of the Donetsk exarchate, ahead of the General Assembly of Italian bishops in Rome, which he will be attending in his capacities as a delegate of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church and of His Beatitude Sviatoslav Shevchuk. "Soon after the Russians invaded our country, many people fled. They reached the border zones and did not know what to do or where to find refuge," Msgr. Ryabukha recalls. "Italy offered hospitality immediately. We experienced welcoming, fraternal closeness. On the one side we saw our people's everyday life come to a halt, while at the same time humanitarian aid was flooding in for everyone, through every possible channel - without which we would not have survived. We never felt alone. The humanitarian aid we received has been and continues to be an important sign of hope for us, a sign of life, a sign of fraternity which gave us the strength to move forward, to hold out, to not be afraid." **According to the latest news, the Russians appeared to have captured the city of Bakhmut, which belongs to the Exarchate of Donetsk. What is your reaction to the news?** As a Ukrainian and as a member of the Ukrainian Church and people, my heart is weeping. We are witnessing the destruction of humanity.

I saw photographs of the city: there is nothing left.

Deep in my heart, I dream that all this injustice will be healed and there will be a return to life. That what happened in Warsaw, destroyed during World War II and brought back to life today by the grace of God and the efforts of so many people, may happen here too. My dream is that also Bakhmut may see new life. I am sad because the destruction of humanity will not end there. The Russian control of Bakhmut clears the way for sowing more death in the inland regions of our country. Faced with this scenario, our only hope rests in God. He can end this destruction, He can wipe out this wickedness and bring humanity back to life. **Is anyone still in the city? What news do you have?** According to the last news I received, there were people sheltering in the basements, families who remained in the hope that the city would be liberated and conquered by Ukrainian forces. But we don't know what has been happening in the past few hours, and I can't even imagine it. **On Saturday it was officially announced that Card. Zuppi, president of the Italian Bishops' Conference, was appointed by Pope Francis to lead a peace mission to Ukraine. What was your reaction?** We welcomed it with a Christian spirit, for we all know that life is our greatest gift and it should not only be lived but also cherished and accompanied. We believe in the inestimable value of human life bestowed by God, and we must all be involved in protecting it. To us, reaching a solution clearly means returning to the truth, and the truth is about the integrity of human life, including the integrity of the life of a people.

For us, peace means restoring what was unjustly seized.

Let us hope that each person - according to his or her role and modus operandi in the world - will do all they can to contribute to the conversion of hearts. That beacon of hope is what guides us all. Occasionally, as we look at Jesus' life, we see that he faced numerous impossible situations. But in the presence of God, whatever seemed impossible became possible. Let us accompany this mission with prayers and with the hope that truth will return to be part and parcel of our lives. **You mentioned impossibility, and right now every prospect of talks and negotiations do indeed seem to be impossible. What hope for peace today?** Many people are praying, with strong faith in the miracle of life. It's a miracle that many of us are awaiting. God is not only Creator but also Father and, with

His fatherly heart, He hears all our invocations, sees all our raised hands. We trust in God's timing.

We are not overwhelmed by disappointment, by despair. We all hold onto hope unswervingly.

What would you say to Card. Zuppi? What advice would you give him? How does one reach the hearts of the Ukrainian people? When you speak with your brothers, you understand a lot more. The Ukrainian people feel very close to Italy. Many Ukrainians, especially women, have been working in Italy for many years. We are not far away, we are not strangers, and this gives me reasons for hope. Not only words touch the human heart. I am sure that the Cardinal will prove to be an instrument in the hands of God. **What is your message to the Italian bishops?** Please continue being there for us. Do not lose courage, let us look to the future together, believing in life as the Christian world has always done, even in times of trials and hardships.

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