
Russian attack on Odessa. The Catholic Bishop to SIR: “It's not war, it's terrorism”

“This is not war, this is terrorism. They are attacking Odessa, they are destroying cities. The rockets continue to fall. The number of dead and wounded is increasing. This is terrorism. I call on the faithful to pray, that is all we ask.” Contacted by telephone by SIR, Monsignor **Stanislav Shyrokoradiuk**, Latin Catholic Bishop of Odessa, is at a loss for words as he describes what has happened in his city over the past few hours. On the night of the 23rd of July, after a rocket attack by the Russians, the Orthodox Cathedral of the Transfiguration in Odessa was destroyed. The cathedral is a UNESCO World Heritage Site, as is the entire historic centre of Odessa. Fortunately, Kasperov's icon of the Mother of God, the patron saint of Odessa, was pulled from under the rubble of the cathedral. The glass of the icon case containing the miraculous image was damaged, but the image, although dusty, was spared significant damage. Video footage taken at the scene shows the rescue operation and hundreds of Odessa residents gathered in front of the destroyed cathedral to pray before the icon of the Holy Mother of God. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5sdJuTlkvZE> **Sadly, there have also been casualties.** After the attack of July 23, the toll rose to two dead and 22 wounded. But on Sunday night another six people were injured, also in Odessa, and a grain warehouse was hit in another attack, this time by Russian Shahed drones targeting the port. “Our cathedral, all our churches and our faithful are fine, thank God,” says Bishop Shyrokoradiuk, “but there are problems in Odessa. Russia attacked the city again during the night. “There is nothing we can do. All we can do is pray and wait for the day when this vicious war will be over.” The bishop said he had read the Pope's words at the end of yesterday's Angelus, in which he remembered the city of Odessa. “I am grateful to the Holy Father,” said the Franciscan prelate, “for his unceasing prayers for the suffering Ukraine. This is a precious reminder for all of us.” The Bishop of Kyiv, Monsignor **Vitaly Kryvytskyi**, a native of Odessa who is currently in the city, also commented on the Russian attacks on the port city. “Last night,” he wrote in a Facebook post, “it was impossible to sleep in Odessa. There was a lot of noise, it was upsetting.” “In the morning, on my way to the church service, I saw destroyed houses and citizens working together with public servants to clear the aftermath of the overnight shelling. The worst hit area was the historic centre of Odessa, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, where tourists from all over the world flock every summer”, especially - the bishop recalled - the Russians, “who are now destroying what their forefathers built.” “It will take a long time before Odessa's inhabitants overcome their hatred of the Russians”. “The scars of the war caused by the aggressor will be added to the historical record of the suffering of the whole people”.



Those in the city struggle to understand. Russian weapons destroyed a church that had remained faithful to the Russian Church. The most plausible assumption is that it was a tragic mistake caused by increasingly inaccurate missiles. **Metropolitan Agafangel of Odessa** condemned the attack in the strongest terms. "The missiles - he said in a statement issued by the diocesan press office - have wounded the heart of every citizen of Odessa who, with their hard work and prayers, had rebuilt this sanctuary, which was destroyed in 1936." "Whatever the purpose of the shameful so-called 'special military operation'," the Metropolitan continued, "nothing can justify the killings and the violence, the destruction and the forced displacement. We still cannot understand: from what are they trying to save us? From life? This is a real genocide of the Ukrainian people. It is the madness of all those who give the orders to bomb Ukraine, to kill our soldiers and our people," the cleric noted. The Orthodox Diocese of Odessa welcomed yesterday's decision by the Italian Council of Ministers to offer 'its unique expertise in restoration' to help rebuild Odessa Cathedral and other artistic treasures in Ukraine. "The Russian aggressors are destroying grain storage facilities, leaving millions of hungry people without food. They are destroying our European civilisation, its sacred symbols. A free nation will not be intimidated, barbarism will not prevail", reads the note issued yesterday by the Italian Prime Minister's Office and published on the website of the Diocese of Odessa.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oXcNAMOcclU&t=123s>

M. Chiara Biagioni