
Kostiantynivka market massacre. Father Ladnyuk (Salesian): “We are not afraid, as long as we survive”

Ukraine under attack. Now the strategy is to hit civilian targets. The death toll is high. Fr **Oleh Ladnyuk**, a Salesian priest, has just returned from the Donetsk region, where he and the staff of the International Volunteer Service for Development (VIS) and the CUAMM medical team transported and distributed medicines from Kramatorsk to Novodonetsk. Contacted by telephone, Father Oleh immediately gave us an "update" on the massacre in the market of Kostiantynivka, which was hit by a rocket on Wednesday September 6, killing 16 people and injuring 33. The Ukrainian police confirmed the toll after a "visual examination of the remains". It was a massacre. A child was among the victims. "Kostiantynivka," says the Salesian priest, "is a fairly large town near the front, a few kilometres from Bakmuth. It's a town without a military base, so there was no reason to attack it. The rocket hit an open-air market in the centre of the town. These attacks were clearly directed against civilians in order to cause unrest in the country and sow chaos among the population. A school and some residential buildings in Zaporizhia were also damaged. There have also been reports of deaths and injuries there. Air raid sirens sounded across the country for more than an hour throughout the night. But the strikes were mainly aimed at the southern region of Ukraine. After failing to renew Ukraine's grain deal, Russia bombed grain warehouses in Odessa city. Sixty thousand tonnes of food were destroyed, preventing the product from being exported worldwide and causing prices to rise by up to 8%.

“We are not afraid,” assures the Salesian priest. “The Ukrainian people will not surrender. We have become used to it by now,” he adds. “The general feeling is that we have been hit by a great catastrophe, and we hope that it will all be over soon. But one thing is clear to the people: we cannot afford to lose this war. If we lose it, the Russians will complete the genocide they have already begun against our people. There is no fear, as long as we survive. Father Oleh is constantly busy with the distribution of humanitarian aid in the regions close to the front lines. There, despite the fighting, some people have not left their homes. The government is doing all it can to evacuate people, especially children, from the worst-hit villages,” he says. “But many parents do not want to be separated from their children. There is also the problem of finding a place for all the families, and they have asked us for help with the evacuation of family members from their homes.

“Our appeal to the Italian people”, said the Salesian priest, is “to not grow weary of the war. We have are not weary of it. We are involved in this war, each one of us has a loved one who has died, either as a soldier at the front or simply as a civilian victim of attacks. But we have not grown tired of defending the values of freedom and democracy that are embedded in the European and Christian heritage. This war is not only our war. We are fighting for European, Christian values, for human rights, against all forms of totalitarianism.”

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