



# OCD

N. 376

04 · 2022

# COMMUNICATIONES

---

## Holy Week CHRONICLE - UKRAINE

### A VOYAGE TO THE HEART OF HORROR AND HOPE

*Fr. Miguel Márquez, ocd*

**DAY: 13<sup>th</sup> April 2022, Wednesday of Holy Week**

**POLAND - UKRAINE**

**P**aweł and Piotr picked me up at the Krakow airport. I arrived at 8.30 in the morning.

We went to the Carmelite nuns of Łobzowska, in Krakow. A very cheerful community.

We met the Kiev sisters, who have been staying there for a month.

An intense and emotional dialogue. It gave me great joy to meet them, we shared a lot about the harshest times of the war and the escape to Poland. They wanted to recount and say everything they had gone through.

The Eucharist in Latin.

We had a meal with them, then set out for the Przemysl monastery on the border. We were greeted by Christof the Prior, and we spend an hour talking with the friars of the community.

We left for the border: Piotr, Paweł Baraniecki and Paweł Ferko, who belongs to the Berdichev community, and since the beginning of the war has been in Przemysl to organize aid and cars that are sent twice a week from Poland to Berdichev with food, clothes for soldiers, bulletproof vests, generators, night binoculars, etc.

We arrived at the border and crossed on foot. Piotr and Paweł stayed on the Polish side. Before the border, we came across a multitude of NGOs from all over the world in order to give help and support to those who were coming from the Ukrainian side: food, clothing, etc. etc.

We found a group of young Spaniards who had come on their own from Cadiz, Malaga, Barcelona... and they had placed

their tent in the entrance corridor with a multitude of other organizations. They asked us if we were going to celebrate the ceremonies at the border, because they would like to share in these days of Holy Week.

Paweł and I managed to pass with relative ease the Polish and Ukrainian border. There were many people on the Ukrainian side, waiting to cross to Poland. Many families and children. Waiting for us on the other side was Rafał Myszkowski, who had made a

seven-hour drive to come to pick us up.

The greeting here these days is *Dobryy vechir / den. My z Ukrayiny* which is to say, *Good night / day, we are from Ukraine*.

Today, we spent the night in Mostyska, at the Little Sisters of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, founded by a Capuchin, Father Honorato Kozminsky. Sisters Alina and Edithson were kindness personified. The dinner, welcome, room, were all very exquisitely prepared.

## DAY: 14<sup>th</sup> April, 2022

### HOLY THURSDAY

**A**t breakfast, they had placed three hyacinths next to each one's plate to celebrate our priesthood. Sister Alina greeted us. She says that they congratulated us and prayed for us with the three bulbs, Faith, Hope and Charity.

We said goodbye in the street, and I was very surprised by the warmth of their welcome, true sisters.

We set out on our way to Berdichev. It takes seven hours.

Some sections I travelled through were full of potholes.

Many control barricades and many soldiers all the way. We got through without problems and without being made to stop.

We passed through a city where you

could see the effects of the bombs.

We left at 7.20 a.m., and we arrived in Berdichev at 2.20 p.m.

We were welcomed by the whole community of friars. I visit the Sanctuary, our Mother of Carmel. We ate a typical Ukrainian dish. We chatted animatedly. In a while, at 6.00, we will have the celebration of the Lord's Supper. It is overwhelming to be here and to see the joy and liveliness of the friars. God bless them.

**Holy Thursday evening.** The church, the Sanctuary of the Virgin of Mount Carmel of Berdichev, patron saint of the Ukrainian Catholics. Beautiful icon of the Mother with the scapular, offering her protection. Full church. The elderly, young people and children... a large

group of altar boys in perfect Vatican harmony open the celebration with scrupulous detail. I have to say that rarely in my life have I celebrated a Holy Thursday with so much emotion within. The singing, attention to every detail, care for the flowers, acolytes helping one another to vest for the Mass...

I washed the feet of the friars in the community. Here, the celebrant dons a kitchen style apron to do it. Significant. I kiss the feet of my brothers who take care of all these people here. I kiss Jesus in them.

Although Vitaly, the prior (Ukrainian), presided, I gave the homily, explaining the mystery that is celebrated, with examples of the war and current situation surrounding these days. The Breaking of Bread reminds us of the broken bodies of so many people in some cities. Tomorrow the broken body of Jesus remains a mystery that we do not understand and, while apparently defeated, gave life to the world.

At the end of the Mass, how could I describe the atmosphere of family and affection of the people? They greeted the priests with a touching affection. Everyone congratulates us and hugs us. They bring fruit, flowers and gifts. Everyone wants photos. Everyone says words of thanks for being with them. Everyone tells me, thanks to you all for praying for Ukraine. A grandmother

asks me that when I go to Rome, please would I tell the Pope to come.

When leaving the Church, another very cordial time of discussion with volunteers, families, friends.

A relaxed and very fraternal dinner.

A very pleasant time of recreation without wanting to finish it. They celebrated the presence of the General and also of Paweł, who since the beginning of the war has been living on the other side in Poland, to organize humanitarian aid and the transport of material, twice a week. Not a moment of silence in our conversation which consisted of intensity of topics and questions from them about known friars, and mine about the situation and what they are going through at the moment.

It was about 10 o'clock at night in Ukraine, when the siren began to sound for a few minutes. It was announcing that some projectile had left Belarusian territory.

But the friars continued their friendly conversation without moving themselves much. They worried about whether I was afraid. I was confident in their calmness.

And so the day ended... with the vivid sense of communion and family in times of war. Before sleeping, another siren sounded, and a prayer asking for True Peace.

**DAY: 15<sup>th</sup> April 2022**

**GOOD FRIDAY**

**T**oday we celebrate the passion and death of Jesus in this war-torn land. With the crucified and the victims of all wars and injustices.

I am awakened by the sound of sirens that does not cease for a quarter of an hour, until 6.00. Sirens and bells sound, warning of danger. It looks like a new air offensive. I am not sure.

At 8 o'clock in the morning, we celebrated the Office of Readings and Morning Prayer, with very beautiful hymns. From this hour, in the church there is a group of about one hundred people, and the day begins before Jesus by welcoming the surprises the day holds.

I visited the monastery and the bunker under the Church, which the Mayor had asked them to have ready, for when it was necessary for people to come and take refuge. In the early days of the war they frequently came to sleep.

With Vitaly I visit the Little Sisters of the Immaculate Heart, also known as Honoratas, the sisters who hosted us on the first day past the border. We shared a long time, without haste, with the four sisters. It is a house for retreats and they welcome some children during the day. One of them, the youngest, interviewed me for a Catholic newspaper in Ukraine. He asked me about my impression of the situation in Ukraine and what I am experiencing. I told him about my desire to come here to celebrate Easter in order to be with my brothers and the people,

making present the unity and affection of the entire Order of Carmel and the Church. Unity makes us strong in the face of every threat.

Today some of us do not eat as a gesture of communion with Jesus and with those who are wounded by hunger and injustice.

At about 4 o'clock, Rafal had assembled a group of altar boys and teenagers, called Oasis, with whom he usually meets every Sunday to share and also to engage in activities. They sing, play games, pray and encourage each other.

In the afternoon at 5pm, an emotional Way of the Cross. I was asked to carry the cross during the first three stations. It was an honor. By the third one, it was already weighing heavily upon me. But here, nothing is romanticism and everything has the weight of a reality that hurts. The liturgy is not theatre, it speaks of a real and bleeding Way of the Cross. Any small effort and gesture is a sign and a communion in the living Jesus for Life. I followed the stations, discovering behind me a small army of girls who, very recollected, were following the stations. One of them subtly distributes sweets to her companions. Two of them have their father on the war front.

At 6.00pm, the Celebration of the Passion of the Lord. The ceremony lasts two hours. No one sits during the Passion. The elderly and children stand steadfast, with a devotion without a

hint of haste. It edifies and moves me. The Sisters of St. Therese, who assist in all the work of the Shrine, work with the chaplains who are at the front. I gave them part of the shipment of rosaries that I brought, which the soldiers had requested.

After the celebrations, I farewelled the friars, who ask with interest how I had been here these two days. They wanted to know if I had been all right. I tell them not well, but very happy to be with them and

proud that they are protecting the people and being Jesus in their midst. Also, I feel blessed by the Faith and warmth of this united Church.

The friars soon went to bed. On their faces you could see the tiredness and commitment.

A communion and silence with all those who celebrated the Passion of Jesus throughout the world.

## DAY: 16<sup>th</sup> April 2022

### HOLY SATURDAY

It is a day of silence, an overwhelming experience of deep emptiness, in the wounded warmth of Mary, the Mother; in the hearts of all mothers, who represent the watchful soul of the world, and who always harbour hope, in the midst of so much pain. How overwhelming is today, like an abyss of silence, which contains something that we do not yet know, and that is always sprouting! And that will dawn... it always dawns.

It is eight minus a few minutes in the morning in Berdichev, and we greeted the Lord and his Mother in the basilica. We prepared for the trip to Kiev. I will be taken by Vitaly and his brother Olek. It is a three-hour journey, but it depends on the traffic and the difficulties on entering. We dealt with some of the controls without difficulty.

They told us that some rockets had fallen on Kiev.

Voices of friendly people from Spain and other corners of the earth arrived with news of danger in Kiev...

We stopped to have a coffee, and to get petrol. Only 20 litres of petrol can be bought at a time, but the girl attending us is from the parish and we can fill the tank. In addition, Vitaly is “famous” for knowing where to go.

All the way, our conversation continued to be very lively.

As we approached Kiev, we saw the horrors of war: tanks, trucks, houses, buildings, burnt and shelled, as if emptied of their soul. Houses and remains of vehicles that smelt of a desolate, lifeless Holy Saturday, with no apparent resurrection.

We take a detour to enter Kiev, avoiding the main road. About another 30 km.

We arrived at our parish in Kiev, and were greeted by Jozef. What a great joy to

embrace him! What a joy to have arrived and be here! Marek is here, the parish priest and prior. And also Benedict, who is in charge of humanitarian aid and care for the soldiers: our three Carmelites at present in Kiev. A Polish priest who has an international organization and brings humanitarian aid to Ukraine is here today: Maciej. And also staying since the destruction of their village, a father and a son: Andrzej and Daniel.

Much joy in meeting with the friars and lunch with Jozef and Marek, reporting on many things about the war and the pastoral work during these weeks. Marek talked about the horrors of war and showed photos of the bunkers; care for the sick, and intense activity as a parish priest. For some time this was the only Catholic parish in Kiev. When Mother Teresa of Calcutta came, after receiving the Nobel Peace Prize, she asked to be able to go to Mass and was brought to our church. It is a small and cozy church. I accompanied Jozef to bless the food, which is a typical custom here: the first Easter foods, sweets, Easter eggs and other things. Swieta brought Easter eggs for the friars. She gave me a very affectionate hug and asked for a blessing.

We went out to see the Bishop of Kiev, Vitaly, who received us in a simple place; he is young, very cordial. Very informal conversation. He thanked me very much for being here and was very grateful for the pastoral service and dedication of the Carmelites in Ukraine. It was an hour of discussion about the situation and the Church in Ukraine. I spoke to him of the prayer of all of Carmel, right throughout the whole world: our prayer for him and for the Ukrainian Church and people.

Jozef asked me if I had anything to give to the Bishop, and as I went out I said to the Lord, "Let's see... and what can I give him if I no longer have anything special left in my backpack..." While talking to the bishop, I was thinking and put my hand in my bag to discover that I had a relic of St. Therese, of her hair. I gave it to him and he told us that she is his favorite saint... The surprises of the Lord!

We take a walk through the city center, the famous Maidan Square, the Independence Square of Ukraine, where, in 2014, 98 people were shot dead. We visit the place for remembering the fallen and prayed for them.

We returned home, visiting on the way some places destroyed by rockets... We prayed for the people who inhabited those now desolate buildings. It is time to prepare for the Vigil...

United in emotion with the whole Order, as we approached this night.

Let us remember Syria, Burkina, Peru, Colombia, Congo, Lebanon, Iraq... Let us pray as ONE only... for LIFE THAT DOES NOT DIE nor any bomb is capable of destroying....

This arrival in Kiev is another chapter, different from Berdichev... because here the horrors of war feel even more evident... the signs are smoldering, and people's stories are constant... I cannot tell in this chronicle everything I have heard. Some of the friars would ask me if I minded them telling me about those horrors, and I told them I did not mind... there have been very long periods of conversation. I

omit details. They are in contact with the chaplains who accompany the soldiers, and they themselves have confessed the soldiers. I have given them about three hundred rosaries for the soldiers.

The celebration of the vigil, simple and heartfelt. The chapel looked to me like a small Noah's ark, an enclosure of salvation. The liturgy began in the street with a simple fire, and an icy cold. After several attempts, we barely managed to keep the flame of the candle alight.

I preached, and Jozef translated into Ukrainian.

At the end of the celebration, songs and shared joy. A long line of people for a hug, a blessing, and to thank me very warmly that I am here. A young woman told me that there used to be 400 people at her work and that 200 had fled to safety in a secure place, and that the fact that I had come was a special sign for her. Thus marriages and families went by to be blessed and embraced. I did not seem to be in a place of war, there was a very strong sense of communion and complicity... A young woman who has lost her home in Mariupol is now helping others... a young soldier who asked me for my blessing before going to the front. I gave him my rosary.

And the day ends in friendly conversation, spending a span of two hours with Jozef, Marek, Benedict, the priest Maciej, and father and son, Andrzej and Daniel. What an intense time of lived experiences. How much need they had of telling what they have lived through what they know... how much they appreciated my presence. I told them that the whole Order was here with them.

The day ends, tomorrow we will go to visit Bucha, the city of the massacre. As well as some other of the most devastated cities, the seminary and other places. But tomorrow will be another day, a today with the people of Kiev; the risen Lord Jesus appeared to me, smiling, and blessed me with his smile... a young woman blessed me spontaneously.

In Berdichev I heard the sirens five times, in Kiev once, as I left the bishop's house. But no one goes down to the bunkers anymore. If something falls, it will fall, if something happens, it will happen. But today, Christ has risen for me in the faith of a people, in their hope. How lucky I am to be here! And that you are here with me!

HAPPY FEAST DAY OF THE RESURRECTION... My Love and My Hope is risen.

**DAY: 17<sup>th</sup> APRIL 2022**

## SUNDAY OF THE RESURRECTION

**F**or the rest of my life, I will never forget this Sunday of the Resurrection. Never.

Life dawns. And more on a day like today, Easter Day. But this life was born to us in the ordeal of the Cross, and has become a light in the empty tomb.

At 8.00 in the morning begins the celebration of the Eucharist in our parish of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross, Kiev, with a procession of the Blessed Sacrament around the parish. It was very cold, but the small church is full. The procession is a metaphor for life itself. We sing joy and trust in His Resurrection in the midst of death. In the celebration there are several soldiers and policemen in uniform who live this time intensely.

Father Benedict presided and the priest Maciej preached, whose organization PRO SPE travels almost every week to Ukraine for humanitarian aid. His words and his presence are also a gift of ecclesial communion these days.

At the end of the Mass, very heartfelt thanks from the people. They give me a sweatshirt that says "Long live Ukraine", and some yellow flowers. Two lay people from the parish thanked me for the courage to come as the shepherd in the midst of the sheep in danger and they were thankful for the lives of these Carmelites who have stayed to

accompany and care for the people. They tell us that they too need everyone's care and support to continue to support and encourage others. They sang me a moving song that said "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord." I thanked them warmly for their precious, sincere speech and expressed my pride in my brothers, for their dedication and for being here. I named each of them and gave thanks for their lives. I blessed the lives of all present. I will never forget this Easter Sunday. At the end I gave them a gift: a relic of St. Therese and her parents, Zelig and Luis, and also of Mariam of Bethlehem, invoking a blessing on all of them, their families and the families who have suffered some important loss these days, so that Therese may shed light on the night of our days and so that Mariam may make us live the God of life in humility and the nothingness of the empty tomb, the fullness of mercy. They celebrated the gift with great joy.

After Mass, I was blessed with their hugs and smiles. All greeted me with the Easter greeting in Ukrainian.

We had breakfast, which here is like a meal. In fact, today we will have our next meal around six in the evening.

And so, Benedict, Jozef, Maciej, Bogdan (volunteer friend) and I set off on our way to very significant and terrifying places.

We first visited the major seminary of



Kiev (Worzel), which is in a forest, in the countryside, a few kilometres from the city, and were received by the rector, Father Ruslan, young, thin, with cassock and fleece jacket, together with some volunteers and people who work with him in humanitarian aid to families. The seminary was looted by the Russians and they took everything they wanted. A cluster bomb had fallen in the courtyard of the seminary, the effects of which shocked us. Some pieces of shrapnel entered through the windows and hit the stature of the Virgin Mary of Fatima, tearing off the head. We checked the hole in the yard left by the bomb and its destructive power.

Father Ruslan and other volunteers accompanied us throughout the day to the next place, which is the camp in the forest of the Russians responsible for the Bucha massacres. We carefully entered among the trees. We found everything as they had left it 15 days ago; trenches dug into the ground, temporary installations. Everything left us absolutely perplexed and with our soul pierced by unanswered questions: How can human beings reach such atrocity in the middle of the year 2022? It is not a film, it is not a black and white report from the 1942s, it is not a biography that speaks about Auschwitz. The Russians left here a fortnight ago and just thinking about it makes my hair stand on end. There is fruit in the boxes, a coffee maker, hanging socks, empty vodka bottles, boots on the floor, Russian boxes containing food, vitamin pills, etc. etc. We trod on this ground carefully in case they had left mines; but we wanted to see and be witnesses

to be able to tell the world what we had seen. A true story and not science fiction. The soul shrank, indignant, as if pierced by a cluster bomb from head to toe. My god! How is this possible? From here they went to neighboring villages and did atrocities. From here they received from their superiors the task of freely doing whatever they wanted. I spoke to Jozef, thinking out aloud: each one of them too would have had a mother and sisters and grandparents and children. So how can life be hurt to such an extent...? We remained silent and prayed. We embarked on the path of horror through the streets of Borodzianka, Bucha and Irpin. I cannot describe in words what we saw. You are going to see some photos, and I ask you not to look away, because this film is real and the victims deserve that we do look, that we wake up and that our life becomes conscious. Shattered tanks, burnt houses, ruined buildings, emptied hospitals, a sinister, demonic spectacle... bridges destroyed, cars overturned. And the feeling of being privileged and stunned witnesses that the Hitlers and the Stalins, the Mussolinis and the Pinochets, the Gaddafis have not disappeared from the human scene, although it is hard for us to believe it. Just think, an immense mass filled with enthusiasm cheered Hitler and greeted him as the savior. Please, I will not stand anyone justifying this horror with ideological goodness of whatever type there may be.

In the heart of Bucha, where the bodies of 98 people shot in the streets were deposited, we prayed, overcome, at the site of the mass grave. And from right here

we send our message of Easter greetings to the entire Order. In this empty and royal tomb, Jozef, Benedict, also Marek who remained in the parish, and I, express the communion of the entire Ukrainian Carmel with the whole Order.

Next to a door, on the ground where there was the corpse of an old man, they had placed some yellow flowers. We prayed to Mary and we prayed for everyone. Christ has overcome death. Christ is risen. They are not here, they are already in the house of life. They enjoy the Peace of God in their home which has no end.

I embraced Ruslan, the young rector who had accompanied us so kindly, and who has been in contact with all the leading figures and with families of the victims and we assured each other that we would pray for one another. I told him that Carmel will pray for the 25 seminarians of Kiev and for him. A very heartfelt hug. We set out on our way to the parish of a Dehonian priest, Tadeusz, who has stayed in the most difficult of times in Irpin, one of the massacred cities. He showed us his chapel, dedicated to St. Therese. We gave him a fireplace to heat the parish, which we carried all day in Maciej's van.

We returned home in time for an Argentine radio program. We also visited Veronica and Alexander, members of the Secular Carmel in Kiev. They received us with such affection in their humble house also damaged by a cluster bomb. Veronica speaks enthusiastically about the Secular Carmel and gives us some gifts, and a book published in Ukrainian with passages from the Saints of Carmel, from the little

published in Ukrainian about our saints. They infected us with their enthusiasm. We prayed for the entire Secular Carmel in Kiev and in Ukraine.

We returned to the parish. It is very late. The curfew is at 10 pm. A very heartfelt hug by both parties.

I was very happy to see them comforted. I was very happy to have arrived in Kiev and let myself be touched by their witness and their paternal and fraternal presence with the ordinary people. They are a living sacrament of God's unconditional closeness to every human being. God bless you, my brethren. I feel proud. And I said goodbye wishing them, in Polish, encouragement and courage.

We left Kiev with difficulty. The GPS did not know about barricades and closed streets. After a while we managed to get out of the city. We had little petrol, only for about 40 km., and we have about 150 to go. Jozef prays to the Holy Spirit who, he says, never fails him. We passed many closed gas stations. It is too late. I imagined sleeping in the car, but in passing one service station, we saw a small light and we got, not 20, but 30 litres. And the gentleman who was selling confided in Jozef, relating his feelings. When finished, he made a gesture of prayer with his hands.

Before we could arrive, there were many military checkpoints. They ask us for documentation. We recited Vespers and Compline. We prayed for all the people we have met, and we plead with God for peace and an end to so much evil. Our journey takes us almost four hours since leaving for

Gwozdawa; a quiet house in the countryside, in which the friars celebrate daily with the village, of about one hundred inhabitants.

We were welcomed by Maksymilian, the superior. It is very late, past 11 p.m., and

the day has been exhausting, impressive, overwhelming.

The Risen Christ heals the land of Ukraine, heals its wounds. Heal our world.

## DAY: 18<sup>th</sup> April 2022

### EASTER MONDAY

**D**awn in Gwozdawa. I was quick in getting up to go with them for the time of prayer. We began with Morning Prayer. Mass followed at 7.20. The church was filled with lovely people. There were some children in the front row, elderly women and some middle-aged, the group of men was scarcer. Jozef celebrated and left the preaching to me. At the beginning of the Mass, Clementina addressed a few words to me, welcoming me with a simplicity and joy that moved me.

In her words she expresses the joy of this small village for my presence in a time of war, and the joy of having Fathers Maksymilian, Piotr and Jozef among them, the joy of having daily Mass. They gave me a porcelain Easter egg and some chocolates.

At the end of Mass we embraced each other as a lifelong family. I bless everyone individually with the laying on of hands. I gave them the rosaries that I had brought from Spain and that were made by Father James, a good and simple friar, who lives in Madrid (90 years old). They appreciated the detail very much. When I blessed

them, they held my hands and kissed both my palms, as if it were my first Mass. They opened out the priesthood to me with such affection. I took some photos with them. Afterwards, I showed some of these pictures to friends and told them that I have fallen in love with these people. I am the one blessed.

We had breakfast in an atmosphere of celebration and joy. I visited the house and surroundings with the friars. A country place, tranquil and quiet. There is just one community, that of Berdichev, which attends to this place of silence and retreat, taking care of the piety and trust of this small village, so full of faith and so tested since the time of communism.

When Jozef and I completed an interview with Anastasia (honorable sister) for the Church newspaper in Ukraine, we bid farewell with mutual gratitude. Rafal from Berdichev had come in the morning for the farewell. An embrace and blessing for the friars.

The road to the border takes 7 hours, with two stops. As we move away from the centre of the country, life feels more

normal, although there are controls from time to time. More cars and entire gas stations and nothing broken. It becomes strange, after the surroundings of Kiev, to see cities with the buildings almost all standing and without signs of war.

The journey with Vitaly and Olek, who arrived with the kind offer to take me, was lively and full of friendly vitality. I really appreciated their company.

We arrived at the border and it was sad to say goodbye to the country, to the friars, to Vitaly, but I promised to return.

At the border, a queue of about 200 people. Families and children. It starts to get quite cold. We waited an hour and a half or so because of the very slow flow of the queue. Meanwhile, volunteers and the Red Cross offer us water and blankets, dolls to the children and chocolate and tea... They pass by the line of people again and again asking what we needed. I am moved by this humanity protecting this exodus of Ukrainians in the face of the heartbreak and barbarism that I contemplated yesterday.

I finally managed to pass the two Ukrainian and Polish police checkpoints, after so long on my feet. On the other side, NGOs welcomed people and offered everything. I accepted chocolate from the Spaniards and greeted other volunteers.

Andrezj picked me up and we started on our way to Częstochowa, without stopping in Przemyśl. I am going to visit the Carmelites of Kharkiv who are there, staying in an independent place prepared for them, in the Sisters of St. Joseph. I could not wait to give them a hug.

We arrived after midnight. Ana María, the prioress, and two other sisters received me. We greeted each other with the long-awaited hug. They had dinner prepared. We chatted without haste despite the time, almost to 1a.m. There was so much to share, so much consolation in this deep and true fraternity that overcame every border and achieved communion in the common language of feeling UNITED. What warmth in the midst of so much cold in our world! If all human beings could enjoy this brotherly and sisterly affection that was given to me. If only this warmth of Resurrection and the warmth of the best of being human could be felt within by girls who had been violated or people shot, families bombed or people devoid of homes. But that dream still has not been achieved on this wounded earth. And we do not stage non-existent reconciliations, because Russia and Putin continue in their determination to massacre Ukraine, which they call “fascist” – a cruel irony!☹, but we pray with peaceful violence for truth and justice. And yes, may there be forgiveness, that heals and frees broken victims and cruel executioners, and grace that heals the deep pain of the Cross of our day and fills the empty tomb with an announcement of invincible New Life. But it is still war and there is still no whip of conscience on the part of those who feed it and those who consent to it. Bombs are still whistling in the air and falling on Lviv as we pass through its surroundings at dusk on Easter Monday. And we still have so much to pray for and so much to wake up and so many to embrace and comfort, without giving up.

Let us not deceive ourselves. The forgiveness of Jesus on the Cross is also on our lips and in our hearts: “Forgive

them because they do not know what they are doing.” And he said it from the Cross. But the roots of evil and horror are hidden and alive in this earth we tread, and its boots ready to continue trampling on helpless human beings. We have a moral duty to arm ourselves for this war. I invite you to bring to light this violence to the peaceful, by standing up to so much political hypocrisy, so many ideological lies and so much cowardly silence, to make a common front of the courageous Gospel with a prayer and a life without backing down.

Pardon this letting off steam. I am so annoyed by the politics of our day.

I respect politicians who serve the people, who do not tell lies, who fight without being slaves to party ideologies, politicians who do not seek power and who are not narcissistic. Those who build for everyone. I can't stand our continuing to argue whether we are in favor of Russia or the United States, whether we are to the right or left, whether we are for Pope Francis or Benedict XVI... falling into a stupid trap that does not let us see the reality of the evil that stalks us. And the insanity of unscrupulous leaders.

I end the day exhausted and happy to be with my sisters.

**DAY: 19<sup>th</sup> April 2022**

**EASTER TUESDAY**

**T**he Eucharist with the Sisters of Kharkiv is a precious time of prayer, thanksgiving and song that expresses hope and life.

I was very moved by my encounter with them. During the morning we used up the time until the last second in sharing what we had lived through. The sisters needed to tell me what they have been through. The panic, the fear, the haunting sound of the bombs, the uncertainty, the resistance to leave until the last moment, an exodus without time to think, and the presence of the pastor, of the bishop making their way on an unsafe road to reach them and to celebrate the Eucharist and to comfort and shelter. Community dialogues with a diversity of opinions. Doubts, and

prayer to ask for light. The bishop made a statement that left everyone in shock: tomorrow, first thing in the morning, you have to leave, danger is imminent (the day before they had decided to stay despite the danger). But a short time later, it was even more pressing and without possible discussion. “In an hour the cars will be at the door and you have to get out.” Consume the Blessed Sacrament and collect what is strictly essential... And a journey of insecurity in trying to avoid danger zones. How much anguish in reaching a safe zone, including one of the two cars getting lost and the anxiety until they met up again. Hours of waiting at the border and, finally, leaving behind the land that has been home for a lifetime for the eight sisters from Ukraine, and so

many years for the three from Poland, and the sister from Slovakia. Everything forced them to this departure when the news of the atrocities of the unscrupulous Chechen and Russian army arrived. (In all the chronicle of these days I have omitted unnecessary details that my ears and heart will never forget.)

I listen, moved to tears. And in the meantime they honour me with Easter songs and with a joy that makes me cry, without understanding how so much pain and such boundless life is possible. There is so much joy that I perceive in them because of my visit, and for my presence in these days of more uncertainty, and the great joy I have in their gratitude. Tears come to the mother's eyes as she is telling us. The same for the sisters.

They asked me if I had a word to say to them to help them live through this time. I told them that YES is the most important word, pronounced in the land of the present, wherever it may be. That John of the Cross and Teresa of Jesus lived the most fruitful moments of their lives in the most inhospitable and most persecuted times, of extreme fragility. That before arriving at the promised land God wishes to give them, he asks them to give. This time that they are in is now a privileged one of covenant and surrender. We have come to Carmel to give our lives. And we never imagined where the Lord might take us, but we know that wherever we go, He will be our home and our infinite comfort. Carmel is reborn in the hours of maximum poverty.

The President of the Federation was present, who has been a mother to them,

preparing everything. Also present was the Provincial of the Sisters of St. Joseph who welcomed them in this place that they had prepared, precisely to welcome families of Ukrainian refugees. God's providence.

We exchanged some details. And, above all, such sincere hugs, so necessary in this hour of uncertain cold. I was given a beautiful statue of the Virgin of Ukraine that I now have next to my bed.

We bid farewell with a blessing. I blessed them, and I felt blessed in them. They said goodbye in the street with guitar and drum, so full of joy that I would not want to leave them. The whole of Carmel has been delighted in this communion of fraternity. And all of Ukraine can be certain that the whole of Carmel is praying relentlessly and without respite that Peace be made.

Before leaving Częstochowa, we paid a visit to the sisters there in this city, who were so eagerly waiting in the church for a blessing. Avery rapid and very joyful visit.

My journey through the lands of Ukraine and Poland ends. I will never forget what I have experienced. A wound has been opened within that I do not want ever to heal. I have a hard time digesting it all, and the helplessness of what I have seen leaves me speechless within. I allowed myself to go through without fear of hearing, seeing, feeling, crying, being indignant... and I allowed myself to be embraced by those whom I was going to comfort. I have embraced friars who seemed strong and comforted many and they needed to be comforted

and sustained, and I allowed myself to give thanks for their gaze. I blessed a young soldier who asked me to pray for him before going to the front and I was disarmed by the smile of a young woman who had lost everything she had in her house in Mariupol.

Thank you for accompanying me on this terrible journey to the heart of the war. We are all at war. And together we need each other. We must be prepared with the weapons of light, let no one erase our smile and hope, it is the greatest treasure I bring from Ukraine. They are not poor massacred people, they are a people that will rise from their ashes because they have Faith and in their wound, they awaken us all to live and to stand up.

Thank you for your prayers. My last word is the gratitude of the ordinary people, of the friars, of the nuns and the sisters, the smiles of the children and the kisses of the grandmothers squeezing my hands tightly and kissing them. Their thanks to all of you. They know that you will continue, that we will remain by their side no matter what. And goodness will overcome horror and cruelty. I promise you.

God bless us all. "Peace be with you, it is I. Do not be afraid," says Jesus, "Know that I am with you always; yes, to the end of time."