

**"I WILL NEVER LEAVE YOU!" (Heb. 13, 5)  
Pastoral Letter of the Synod of Bishops  
of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church of 2023  
to the clergy, religious and laity of the UGCC  
and all people of good will**

*It is the Lord who goes before you. He will be with you;  
he will never leave you nor forsake you. Do not fear or be dismayed (Deut. 31:8).*

**Beloved in Christ!**

This year's synodal sessions were held on September 3 to 13 in the premises of the Pontifical College of St. Josaphat in Rome. We, the bishops of the UGCC, came from all corners of the world against the background of a full-scale war that has been going on for 18 months due to Russia's criminal and deadly aggression against the independent state of Ukraine and against the Ukrainian people – a people who have their own history, culture, spiritual identity, and their natural and spiritual gifts. We called our gathering a “Synod of Hope” because, despite all trials, suffering, and losses, we sense and continue to feel God's unceasing presence and closeness as we bear witness to the fulfilment of His infallible promise to us: “I will never leave you nor forsake you,” and also “The Lord is my help; I will not fear; what can man do to me?” (cf. Heb. 13:5-6).

During these synodal days, together with intense prayers for a just and lasting peace, we also thanked God for the fact that our country survived the most difficult, decisive weeks and months of the present Russian aggression. Indeed, it is only because God did not abandon us in times of trial that we persevered and repelled the enemy's attacks against our very existence and against the foundations of human civilization. With the words of the Psalmist, we can rightfully say: “If it had not been the Lord who was on our side when people rose up against us, then they would have swallowed us up alive, when their anger was kindled against us; then the flood would have swept us away, the torrent would have gone over us; then over us would have gone the raging waters. Blessed be the Lord, who has not given us as prey to their teeth!” (Ps. 123:2-6).

Indeed, the fact that our state and our people withstood the superior forces of the enemy, especially in the first weeks of the full-scale Russian invasion on our land, can only be defined by the word “miracle.” The Polish nation describes their salvation from Russian invaders in 1920 as the “Miracle on the Vistula.” Analogously, our nation became a witness and co-creator of what can be called the “Miracle on the Dnipro.” This happened when the enemy was driven from the Ukrainian capital and from the banks of the Dnipro and put in motion an unstoppable march towards the complete and definitive liberation of our entire country from the occupiers.

It is not by chance that we call our nation a co-creator of this miracle because Ukrainians became a sign of God's strength and presence in these difficult days and months of trials. Our people drew and continue to draw strength from on high from their faith in the God of truth, love, and life, to fight for their dignity and freedom. And today we thank those who did not abandon their own country in the hour of need, who stood in defence of their land, the life and dignity of their native people, and the future of their children and grandchildren. It was in these brave and self-sacrificing people of our region – men and women, adults, the elderly and those still very young – that the Lord manifested His

presence among us. He strengthened them for the deed and for sacrifice, before which not only every conscientious Ukrainian, but also people of good will worldwide bow in reverence. Before the courage and loving strength of the defenders of the people, "foreigners lost heart and came trembling out of their fortresses," because in them God showed His greatness and power, "exalted us above those who rose against us" granting us his mercy and his salvation." (cf. Psalm 17:45-48).

We express our profound gratitude to those pastors who did not abandon their flocks but shared in the sufferings, pains, anxieties, and fears of their people, and, in circumstances of mortal danger, served as a sign of God's loving and invincible presence. The very presence of a priest in the midst of his people represented the most convincing preaching of the Gospel and a promise of the inevitable victory of light and truth over the darkness of hatred and malice. We thank our pastors who, out of love for their sheep, did not abandon them to the ferocious invading wolves, but following the example of Christ the Good Shepherd, were ready to give their lives for them (cf. Jn. 10: 1-15).

In time of trial, our hope is also strengthened by the loyalty and solidarity of millions of brothers and sisters in faith, and people of goodwill throughout the world. When Russian bombs and shells exploded in various corners of our Motherland, an unheard of and, certainly for many, unexpected wave of sympathy and solidarity arose simultaneously throughout the free world. Streams of humanitarian aid poured into Ukraine. And from the hearts of millions, prayers rose up to heaven from our people for their unshakeable choice of the good, and for victory. Being in Rome, in the heart of the Catholic Church, we had an opportunity to express our heartfelt gratitude, on behalf of the people, to all who were and are still with us. We began by thanking the Holy Father, Pope Francis, whose help for our people cannot be overestimated, and concluded by thanking the millions of caring people throughout the world, who extended a helping hand to Ukrainians and, with open arms and sincere hearts, welcomed into their countries and often to their own homes our fellow citizens who sought a roof over their heads and security from the threat of war. In this merciful human love, the faithful presence of the Lord was clearly manifested among us. It is precisely how He often acts in the history of mankind – through other people, through their solidarity. He himself speaks of this through the mouth of the prophet Hosea: "I led them with cords of kindness, with the bands of love, and I became to them as one who eases the yoke on their jaws, and I bent down to them and fed them. They shall not return to the land of Egypt..." (Hos. 11: 4-5).

Those Ukrainians who did not leave their closest relatives, friends, and acquaintances, who were wounded and traumatized by the war, deserve special respect and support. The loyalty of wives to their husbands, the loyalty of the betrothed to their beloved, the loyalty of families to their sons and daughters, brothers and sisters who returned from the front, often bearing visible and invisible wounds on their bodies and souls like the stigmata of the Lord Himself, wounded by human sins and lawlessness... this loyalty moves us to tears!

However, to the loyalty towards those the nearest and dearest we must add the loyalty and gratitude from each of us towards our defenders, lest we not forget them, and not leave them alone in their suffering and challenges. Let us not abandon them, as they did not abandon us or the Motherland! Let us also remember the most vulnerable and defenceless victims of war – the families of the deceased, the widows and orphans, who will need to feel God's caring presence throughout their lives through bonds of effective merciful human love.

Dear Brothers and Sisters! Prayerfully reflecting on the mystery of God's and man's active presence in our current trials, we the bishops of the UGCC also reflected on the pastoral accompaniment of war victims, which we designated as the main theme of our synodal sessions. At the same time, we paid special attention to the treatment of wounds and the healing of traumas as a priority for the ministry of the Church to its people, in the current circumstances. Each day, the full-scale war brings to millions of our fellow citizens immeasurable pain and suffering, manifested in different ways, such as: the loss of close family members and mourning the deceased; the pain of separation from relatives and loss of family, hearth, and home; uncertainty for the future and a constant state of anxiety and sense of threat; and for those abroad – difficulties with integration, longing for the Motherland and, frequently, a nagging sense of guilt. In short, each of us carries the imprint of this terrifying war on our soul, and many have its marks engraved on their bodies due to severe wounds and injuries. Upon all these wounds of our souls and bodies, the Lord seeks to pour the healing ointment of His merciful love through the service of the Church.

Reflecting on the period that has passed since the beginning of the full-scale Russian invasion on our lands, we affirm with gratitude that our faithful, together with the monastic-religious orders and clergy in Ukraine and abroad, have done a great deal to counter and overcome the consequences of Russian aggression. Obviously, we were not able to satisfy all necessities and needs, but we did not ignore the grief and suffering of our fellow citizens. Through prayer, humanitarian support, psychological accompaniment, and often simply through being present, we sought to bear witness to the motherly nature of the Church, which strives to accept everyone and embrace those in need with care, concern, and love, so that all might everyone can be see that "Your Church is always with you!"

Today, Ukraine, like the biblical Rachel, cries for her children who are not there (cf. Jer. 31:15; Mt. 2:18): for the deceased, the captive, the missing in action, as well as for the millions who were forced to leave their native land, seeking refuge abroad. However, no matter where Ukrainians are scattered, the Church as Mother will always try to be close: praying to the Lord for liberation and salvation, serving through the Word and works of mercy, providing mutual support in the Lord. He is a source of hope and strength for His people, and a pledge of rebirth and victory, as God's Word reassures us: "The LORD is my strength and my shield; in him my heart trusts, and I am helped" (Ps. 28: 7). In our synodal resolutions, we established directives for this ecclesial ministry and for this caring closeness of the Mother Church to those in need. We call on all members of the Church in a spirit of Christian *diakonia* to actively participate in the implementation of these resolutions for the common good of the Ukrainian people.

Let God's love, which is stronger than evil, death, and hell itself, be the driving force in this battle for final victory and freedom. And let the first sign of the approach of this victory be the overcoming of our internal enemy – sin, and an ever-greater fidelity to God's life-giving law. Yes, the Lord has not abandoned us and will not abandon us, as He Himself assures us: "Behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age" (Mt. 28:20).

However, there will always be the threat of apostasy, the danger of abandoning God and His law, thus depriving ourselves and our descendants of His active and blessed presence. The Holy Scriptures warn against this: "Thus says the Lord, why do you transgress the commandments of the Lord? So shall you not prosper; for you have forsaken the Lord, and he will forsake you" (II Ch. 24:20). Let this not happen to us! On the contrary, having worthily overcome such great trials, let us adhere even more faithfully to God and His law, in order to revive the "assemblies of human souls," heal the wounded heart of our

people, and renew the face of our land disfigured by the shells and mines of this terrible war. Only in unity with God, our loving Heavenly Father, will we be able to build a future that does honour to the sacrifice of our defenders and is worthy of the best aspirations of our dear people.

Beloved Brothers and Sisters! We call on everyone to persevere in doing good, to perform deeds of merciful love, and, above all, to persist in prayer. May the Lord, who is a "a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness" (cf. Ex.34:6), always be with our protectors. May He bestow wisdom on our leaders, may He heal the wounds of our people, may He wipe away the tears from the faces of the suffering and grieving, may He gather the scattered ones and return them to our native land, so that we, united in faith, peace, and security, may look to the future with hope, and build this future under the maternal care of the Most Holy Theotokos and through the intercession of all the saints and the righteous of the Ukrainian land!

The blessing of the Lord be upon you!

On behalf of the Synod of Bishops  
of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church

† SVIATOSLAV

Given in Kyiv,  
at the Patriarchal Cathedral of the Resurrection of Christ,  
on the day of the St. Philip the Apostle, one of the seven deacons, and  
The Venerable Theophanes the Branded, Bishop of Nicaea, creator of the canons,  
On the 11th day of October in the 2023rd Year of our Lord

*We instruct the parish clergy to read this Pastoral Letter to the faithful after each Divine Liturgy on Sunday, October 22 of this year.*