

Sermon for the thousandth day of the war in Ukraine

Predigt zum tausendsten Tag des Krieges in der Ukraine

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In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit!

Today, on this Day of Prayer and Repentance, we set our minds and hearts to spiritual reflection on the most important things in our relationship with God and our neighbour. Awareness of our own sinfulness and need for God's grace, a sense of our own inability to purify and improve ourselves, and a thirst for Christ's forgiveness and love – these are the things that fill us on this special day. This year the Day of Prayer and Repentance coincided with the 1000th day of the war in Ukraine.

How can we link these two events? There are probably many analogies and associations with various passages from the Bible. But in these dark days, it is the words of the Sermon on the Mount that resonate most loudly in my heart. In particular, one of the Beatitudes proclaimed by Jesus in his Sermon on the Mount:

“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God” (Mt. 5:9).

The Beatitudes have a special appeal. They proclaim the greatness of those virtues which, on the one hand, are well understood by each of us and, on the other, are so majestically unattainable that only by God's grace can we realise them in our lives. They reveal to us the nature of the Kingdom of God as the presence of Christ in us, among us and beside us. This is the only way to become 'pure in spirit', 'meek', 'merciful', 'pure in heart' and 'peacemakers'. All these qualities reflect His Kingdom and are beyond the power of a flesh and blood human being whose will and understanding of happiness are corrupted by sin.

It is the height and inaccessibility of the Beatitudes that leads us to the foot of the Cross, to accept God's forgiveness and healing, to a life renewed by the Holy Spirit.

“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God”.

These words once sounded so simple and clear to me at the beginning of my meaningful Christian life. Perhaps not just for me, but for many of us. Seek peace with all people, avoid conflict, say and do things that promote peace among those around you. It is so simple and pleasant, is there a challenge in it? I

can say that I have been able to put this commandment into practice in my life, and its observance has brought quiet joy and peace to my heart.

Until the war broke out. Now, for many of us, this commandment sounds like a challenge that we can only accept together with Christ, because we cannot do it alone. And it's not just the waves of anger and hatred that sometimes wash over us towards the enemies who have come to our land to kill, plunder and destroy. The challenge goes much deeper.

What does it mean to be a 'peacemaker'? Perhaps it is more than seeking good relations with our neighbours. It means bringing God's peace, which 'passes all understanding', to the broken hearts that do not have it.

How do we do this?

What do you say to people who live with death every day?

Every day we receive news of our relatives, friends and countrymen who have died. Every day we hear of new civilian casualties from rocket attacks in the depth of our territory and the bombing of towns and villages close to the front line. We know the whistle of cruise missiles and the hum of drone engines. In every town there is a military graveyard that grows every day.

How can we speak of *peace*, Lord?

"How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who proclaim salvation, who say to Zion, "Your God reigns!" (Is. 52:7)

For a thousand days we have been praying for peace in our country, but the war continues to this day, claiming more and more victims.

For a thousand days we have been asking God for a miracle for us, but miracles happen not so often as we expect. The most dramatical experience is when those we pray for by name are killed.

For a thousand days we have struggled with our inner anger at those who have treacherously attacked our country, but they show no signs of repentance or compassion.

For a thousand days you have been with us, O Lord, we know. You give comfort and peace in the midst of darkness and emptiness, in the midst of hopelessness.

For a thousand days, Christ, you have suffered with us.

What shall we say to those who do not believe in you?

Where can we find the right words, O Lord, when our own faith is being severely tested?

We also admit that now our faith is put to unbearable tests. But after the hours and days of pain and devastation comes a time of comfort and peace from the Holy Spirit. On the other hand, we are aware that we are experiencing something very important and profound in our spiritual life. It is an experience of faith that comes from God Himself, that does not need to be fed by miracles, that rises above pain and disappointment. Then we experience that indescribable peace.

In these dark days we feel the support of our brothers and sisters in Christ from other countries. We feel your prayers, we hear your voices of encouragement and support, and we thank you for the help you give us and our country. Peace fills our hearts as we realise that we are part of the Body of Christ, the Church of God.

Oh Lord, teach us to share this profound experience with our neighbours, help us to be true peacemakers!

What does it mean to be a peacemaker? Perhaps it means understanding your neighbour's pain, knowing its moral nature, and not opening a painful wound. Peace-making is not *appeasement*, and treating pain is not the same as numbing it. True reconciliation is impossible without sincerity and openness, in which the aggressor must admit his guilt and not present himself as a victim too.

Are any of us prepared to tell the mother of a fallen Ukrainian soldier, his wife or children, that somewhere in Russia there is another mother crying for her fallen son? Are any of us prepared to equate someone who died defending their own country with someone who came to ruin and destroy that country? Especially when the latter went to fight to make money out of blood. Is this true reconciliation? God's peace is a just peace.

Will we have the strength to speak of unconditional forgiveness to an enemy who does not repent and continues to kill? Will we be able to say this to a father who lost his wife and three daughters in a single moment, killed by a rocket attack? Are we prepared to tell the mothers whose sons died defending their country that they are just like those who came to kill and conquer? Will equating the defender with the murderer, the victim with the aggressor, bring peace to the heart? God's peace is a just peace.

Only through the grace of Christ can we achieve true peace, true reconciliation and experience the beatitudes of the kingdom of God. To be a peacemaker is a great challenge, and it is most difficult to accept it in a crisis situation. Only the peace of the Holy Spirit can lift us above all painful issues and inner conflicts of the heart and allow us to know the mystery of God's love.

“And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 4:7).

Thank You, God, for being with us all these days! We believe that You will lead us further.

Thank You, Lord, for Your Church, for the support of our brothers and sisters! We believe that we will be together in the Body of Christ forever!

Thank you, brothers and sisters in Christ, for standing with us in these days!

Lord, we have accepted the challenge to be peacemakers, give us the strength to be them!

Amen