

## **ECUMENICAL PRAYER FOR PEACE IN UKRAINE, MELBOURNE, AUSTRALIA**

**A DAY OF PRAYER AND FASTING FOR PEACE IN UKRAINE ON THE OCCASION OF THE FIRST ANNIVERSARY OF THE FULL-SCALE INVASION WAS HELD IN THE MELBOURNE EPARCHY OF THE SAINTS APOSTLES PETER AND PAUL. DURING THIS DAY, MANY PARISHES TOGETHER WITH THE CLERGY AND THE FAITHFUL SCATTERED THROUGHOUT AUSTRALIA, NEW ZEALAND AND OCEANIA, HAVE BEEN ALL UNITED IN THIS SPECIAL PRAYER. REPRESENTATIVES OF THE CLERGY OF DIFFERENT CHURCHES AND DENOMINATIONS ALSO JOINED THE PRAYER.**

The prayer day began with a Moleben to the Most Holy Theotokos in the Ss. Peter and Paul Cathedral I in Melbourne, which Bishop Mykola Bychok led. Eparchy of Melbourne was co-served by Bishop Peter Commensoli, Archbishop of Melbourne, Bishop Philip Freier, Archbishop of Anglican Church, Bishop Philip Huggins, Anglican Church, Bishop Bosco Puthur, Ordinary of the Syro-Malabar Church in Australia, Bishop Evmenios Vasilopoulos, Greek Orthodox Church, Bishop Paul Bird, Ordinary of the Diocese of Ballarat, Bishop Shane Mackinley, Ordinary of the Diocese of Sandhurst, Bishop Gregory Bennet, Ordinary of the Diocese of Sale, Bishop Terry Curtin, Auxiliary Bishop of the Archdiocese of Melbourne, Bishop Martin Ash, Auxiliary Bishop of the Archdiocese of Melbourne, Bishop Tony Ireland, Auxiliary Bishop of the Archdiocese of Melbourne, priests, deacons and many faithful.

During the sermon, Bishop Mykola said the following words: “Today is the first anniversary of the terrible war in Ukraine. This anniversary is not one to celebrate, but something to remember for future generations. Today the Eparchy of Melbourne of Saints Apostles Peter and Paul unite in a special prayer for peace in Ukraine as the living Body of Jesus Christ, which is the Church. The 24<sup>th</sup> of February, 2022 is a day that changed the lives of all Ukrainians, and the whole world. The modern world is experiencing the largest war in the heart of Europe since World War II. During the course of the past year, cities such as Bucha, Irpin, Borodyanka, Mariupol, Izyum, Kharkiv, Kherson, Bakhmut became famous just for one reason – the excessive cruelty of Russia to the innocent citizens of Ukraine. After that, Ukrainians had many questions: Why can another state freely kill our people? Where is justice? Why do innocent children suffer? Where is God in this war?

Some answers we can find in the Bible. Among the many Old Testament examples of patience and faithfulness, we can highlight the person of Job. He is an example of a patient man of God. His patience is very similar to the pain and patience of the

Ukrainian people during the war. But despite all the patience, he remains faithful to God.”

The Bishop noted: “Amid tragedy, if you want to find God, look where the suffering is. God is there suffering with us. This is the message of the Incarnation that God is with us. So don’t look at the heavens and shake your fist. Look at the dirt and the earth. And dig your hands in. For that is where God is, with us in the midst of it all. In this our current trial, as in the story of Job, Jesus is likewise telling us that God, when we feel most lifeless and hopeless and worthless, isn’t going to leave or forsake us or send us to the fires. Rather, God is entering into our lifelessness, hopelessness and worthlessness with compassion, love and forgiveness.”

In conclusion, Bishop Mykola added: “The war showed us many miracles. The first miracle is that Ukraine has been fighting for its independence firstly for 9 years since 2014 and for a whole year since 24<sup>th</sup> of February 2022. While the whole world gave our country only 3 days, when our enemy fired thousands of rockets at us, in a strange way some of these rockets returned back; more than once there was a storm at sea, because of which warships could not enter the Black Sea and to fire rockets at us; many people in Ukraine and around the world have united in their efforts to repel the enemy.

In today’s prayer we not only pray for peace, but above all, we remember our fallen heroes, volunteers and civilians, who gave their lives in order that others might live. May Almighty God have mercy on us all and Our Lady of the Perpetual Help protect us and save us. Amen.”

At the conclusion of the prayer and actions for peace and support of Ukraine, Bishop Mykola Bychok addressed the bishops, clergy, religious, representatives of other religions, politicians and faithful with words of gratitude and a request to continue the prayer that is so necessary to end the war in Ukraine. The Hierarch also reminded everyone present that every Friday of the week is declared as a special day of prayer and fasting in the Melbourne Eparchy.

After the Moleben to the Most Holy Theotokos at 7:30 p.m., a candlelight vigil was held in Federation Square. Also, to commemorate the first anniversary of the full-scale war in Ukraine, the Australian government illuminated iconic buildings in Melbourne with yellow and blue colors, including Federation Square, the Royal Exhibition Building, Melbourne Town Hall, the National Gallery of Victoria, and others.