



# MISSIONARIES IN ACTION

## DOMINICAN MISSION FOUNDATION

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### MITIGATING MISERY



Dear Mission Friends:

I expected things to be less ambiguous and more clear-cut as I got older and supposedly wiser. But every day I have more unanswered, and probably unanswerable, questions. Just take Ukraine, for example. How is such barbaric warfare happening in this day and age? Should the U.S. help to stop it? What should the priority be—end it the fastest? the most effectively? with the least amount of collateral damage to civilians? with the lowest possibility of a nuclear backlash? How are those fighting for Putin able to perform the inhumane acts that they do: shooting randomly at homes and buildings filled with civilians; cutting off hands and legs and heads; raping and then killing mothers in front of their children? Is there forgiveness for these atrocities? Is there redemption for the leaders or the perpetrators? Are the Ukrainians and their allies fighting a clean fight? Is there such a thing? Am I any better than any of them when I feel in my bones that I could shoot or stab Putin myself if given the chance? Or if I heard he had been poisoned and I rejoiced?



*Ukrainian family escaping their war torn hometown, exhausted after running to train station with whatever they could carry in their arms.*

In *Islands in the Stream*, Hemingway said, “Being against evil doesn’t make you good. Tonight I was against it and then I was evil myself. I could feel it coming just like a tide... I just want to destroy them. But when you start taking pleasure in it you are awfully close to the thing you’re fighting.” But what can we do as individuals? How do we go on with our normal routines? How do we laugh and have fun? **There are no easy answers, no defined good guy/bad guy like in the old westerns or today’s video games, just ambiguity and nuance, frustration and impotence, and profound sadness.**

I was a young girl myself when I first read Anne Frank’s *The Diary of a Young Girl* and I became obsessed with her optimism and unconditional acceptance as depicted in the line, “In spite of everything, I still believe that people are really good at heart.”

I wanted so much to believe that while hiding in a crowded space, having put her life on hold, rationing food, keeping her voice to a whisper, living in constant fear of being found, and eventually having to endure unspeakable horrors, then *I* could certainly believe it too. I was sure that people were born good and it was outside circumstances that caused them to do bad things. Every paper I wrote in high school was an attempt to explain and show forgiveness for the villain’s actions, from Jack in *Lord of the Flies* to Pap in *Huckleberry Finn* to *Othello*’s Iago.

It wasn’t until college that a professor reminded me that Anne Frank wrote what she did *before* being taken to the concentration camp. Oh... *right*. And just like that, her famous line had been rendered meaningless to me.

This is Anastasiia Yalanskaya.

She was killed yesterday, just outside Kyiv, delivering supplies to a dog shelter that was without food for 3 days

The car she was in was targeted at close range.

Yalanskaya stayed behind in Kyiv to volunteer as everyone around her was leaving the city.

Putin killed her for no reason at all.



*Man saying goodbye to his wife and children through train window in Odessa, March 5. He would return to fight while his family headed to Lviv, which had not yet seen violence, but unbeknown to them, was soon to be destroyed.*

I wonder what she would have said about people and goodness as she was being rounded up to go to the showers. I myself began to admit that evil people did indeed exist, people whose actions could never be explained away or justified. Some people were born good and others were born bad. To that theory, however, truly wise thinkers, like Solzhenitsyn here, in *The Gulag Archipelago*, responded, “If only it were all so simple! If only there were evil people somewhere insidiously committing evil deeds, and it were necessary only to separate them from the rest of us and destroy them. **But the line dividing good and evil cuts through the heart of every human being.** And who is willing to destroy a piece of his own heart?”

Like the Russian writer, my professor suggested that human nature is indeed more complex: that we all have the capacity for both good and evil; that if we didn’t have some evil tendencies, we wouldn’t be able to recognize the good; and that we generally have the freedom to choose.

In illustrating our choice, George Bernard Shaw quipped, “A Native American elder once described his own inner struggles in this manner: ‘Inside of me there are two dogs. One of the dogs is mean and evil. The other dog is good. The mean dog fights the good dog all the time.’ When asked which dog wins, he reflected... and replied, ‘The one I feed the most.’”

So not only were we not born innately good (or evil), we are all capable of both and allowed to choose between the two. My professor believed that knowing our capacity for both good and evil should actually cause us to be more aware of the potential negative influences in our life and thus more conscientious and thoughtful, choosing to *feed the good one the most*. When you know the darkness that dwells within you, you’ll strive harder to go toward the light. But by now I had lost any confidence I may have once had in human nature’s wisdom to choose good over evil.

It was the late 60s, during the questionable Viet Nam War, and I’ll never forget hearing about the My Lai massacre in which U.S. soldiers tortured, killed, and mass-buried 400-500 South Vietnamese civilians, including women, children, and babies, after raping girls as young as 12 and dismembering limbs.

Any remaining idealism had been overtaken by cynicism and despair. I recall reading that one of the common slogans after the Holocaust was, “Never again!” But My Lai happened, among countless other horrors since WWII, and as I write we are witnessing similar atrocities in Ukraine: confiscation of homes and belongings, starvation, dismemberment, rape (victims range from 9 to 87), mass burials, and “filtration” camps. And just because they aren’t televised on a daily basis, we mustn’t forget the horrific consequences for those in China’s hundreds of “re-education” camps, for example; or for the growing number of Chinese children who have tested positive for Covid and



*Early March, Russian forces fired at a bridge used by evacuees fleeing Kyiv, killing a mother and her two children. Ukrainian soldiers are seen trying to revive the father.*

have been taken from their parents, being made to sleep three to a crib in government shelters; or for those victims of continuous corruption and injustice in places such as Rwanda, Ethiopia, Syria, Iraq, Cambodia, Myanmar, and Venezuela who live in constant fear of armed battles and inter-tribal conflicts, genital mutilation, rape, sterilization, and other forms of torture.

It's all too much and we often find ourselves just spinning our wheels, not knowing how to help. Even if we focus solely on Ukraine right now, how can we avoid emotional paralysis and provide concrete and practical aid? We instinctively feel sorry for others who are suffering, along with pity and sympathy. There are slight differences among these reactions, but none of them does any good. Even empathy, which allows us to imagine 'walking in the shoes' of the afflicted, feeling what they feel, is inadequate, leaving us overwhelmed and drained of energy.

We are so distressed at feeling others' pain that we have nothing left with which to help them, often leading us to avoid watching the news at all. Having compassion, however, a less emotional and more cognitive understanding of others' feelings, is better for them and us. Compassion follows empathy but is more than a feeling; it is something we actively choose (like goodness or evil), invigorating us and giving us the energy to help. This compassion, or mercy, or love, is not a reaction to others, but a course of action we choose to follow. And most of you who are reading this have already made that choice.

**Now comes the hard part, the practically unattainable part for mere mortals: to choose to love those causing the suffering.** Jesus said, "You have heard..., 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you... Your Father in heaven...causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.

If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that?" (Matt 5: 43-46) At times like this we must willfully choose not to follow our emotions but to do what we know is right and good, even if our emotional reactions to persons or actions don't want us to go there.

Jesus asks us to consciously choose not to hate all Russians now, but to love them—not only those who are against this war but afraid to speak out; and not only those soldiers who have found ways to numb their minds, deaden their hearts, or get drunk so as to follow their increasingly inhumane orders; and yes, even including those who enjoy torture for the sake of torture. "Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ, God forgave you" (Eph. 4:31-32). Many wise thinkers echo what Jesus is asking of us. The leader of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, Archbishop Shevchuck, recently stated from Kyiv, "Let us be Christian and human, even in the [throes] of war." C.S. Lewis wrote, "To be a Christian is to forgive the inexcusable because God has forgiven the inexcusable in you."

And Martin Luther King, Jr. offers hope, saying, "I believe that unarmed truth and unconditional love will have the final word in reality. This is why **right, temporarily defeated, is stronger than evil triumphant.**" I know, like Anne Frank, he wrote that before he was brutally killed. But it is said that King and all "the great moral exemplars, be it Gandhi, Einstein, Dorothy

Day, ... and multitudes of others [I would add President Zelenskyy, as well as our missionaries around the world, all of whom could escape the misery of their jobs but choose to stay] ...had a deeply intuitive commitment to truth, love and justice that transcended the conditions of the moment no matter how oppressive, unjust and bleak they may be. A commitment to such ideals, which are bigger, greater than we are and will outlast us, can also be a source of sublime inspiration,...a source of faith ...and can thereby save us from despair and long range pessimism. **To stand for such ideals, and to be inspired by them, even if we lose the struggle of the moment, can put us in touch with the farther reaches of what it means to be human in the best sense.**" (Dr. Joseph Chuman)

Right now, however, we are focused in the moment, committed to helping ease the immediate needs of those so brutally affected by the Ukrainian invasion. Let your compassion be manifested through prayers and, if possible, sending relief funds, which go directly and totally to our brave Ukrainian and Polish Dominican friars and sisters who have been providing aid since day one. (Indicate "Ukraine" on your check or return envelope, or, if you charge on our website, check the button dedicated to it.)

In pursuit of compassion and truth,  
*Lesley Warnshuis*



*Top left and right, citizens and soldiers helping old and young in Kyiv.*



*Other photos of Dominican friars and sisters collecting food, clothes, supplies; secretly celebrating Mass in hallways.*

**Upcoming Mission Appeals**

- June 4-5: Our Lady of Perpetual Help, Bakersfield (Fr. Mark Manzano)
- June 11-12: St. Bruno, San Bruno (Fr. Emmanuel Taylor)
- July 9-10: Sacred Heart, Bakersfield (Fr. Jordan Bradshaw)
- July 16-17: St. Dominic, Benicia (Fr. Jordan Bradshaw)
- July 30-31: St. Joseph, Lincoln (Fr. Jordan Bradshaw)
- Aug. 6-7: San Clemente, Bakersfield (Fr. Jordan Bradshaw)
- Aug. 27-28: St. William, Atascadero (Fr. Jordan Bradshaw)