



MISSIONARIES IN ACTION

DOMINICAN MISSION FOUNDATION

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Making Peace with Suffering



Dear Mission Friends:

Over the years, several of Fr. Martin's October newsletters began similarly: *"When you receive this newsletter, the season of autumn will have already begun. Nature is preparing to go into a deep sleep in order to reawaken in the springtime with fresh new life. This is the time of year the Church calls us, through the Feasts of All Saints and All Souls, to especially remember our dear, departed family members and friends and to meditate on the theme of life through death."* His was always a gentle and comforting introduction, bringing to mind a pretty rainbow of unblemished leaves drifting capriciously to rest on the soft, welcoming ground. **How does one get there, Father, to that peaceful acceptance and understanding of the theme of life through death, particularly when suffering is involved?**



Ukrainian children placing food on the grave of their mother, who had died of starvation.

I'm still a long way from there, especially in terms of global atrocities. I feel anger, guilt, grief, despair, or numbness, depending on the day and the news. And there's never a shortage of evils to choose from. Here are random lists from recent op-eds: *"Whether it be the erosion of the middle class, chronic unemployment, the waging of expensive and senseless wars, mass atrocity crimes, or the despoliation of the environment, there are lots of reasons to feel crushed, or wanting to just tune it out."* Or, *"our world is full of angry people shaming others, dishonest people using their power for gain, violent people trying to terrorize others."*

Even the Pope, in a recent encyclical, identified his own list of evils, *"the dark clouds plaguing our global disunity,"* mostly stemming from our focus on self and disdain of others not like us: *"the loss of respect for cultural history, limitless consumption, throw-away cultures, stalled expansion of human rights, fear of immigrants, and the superficiality of digital media with all of its negative effects."*

Currently I've been concentrating on the suffering victims of the war in Ukraine, an evil which checks off many of the items on the above lists. For months rockets and bombs have fallen daily somewhere in Ukraine and most Ukrainians have come to accept the war as a fact of life.



The lady on the right had just discovered her murdered child at the bottom of a well.

...normal, pre-war world for those who have been suffering.” The latest of those is a luxury many thought they would never smell or taste again—hot, freshly-brewed coffee! We can’t do much about the bombs or rockets, but we can help to brighten many mornings with a good hot cup of coffee and a chair to sit in and savor it.

Sometimes it seems like life would be easier if we could just turn our eyes away from the suffering—turn off that 24-hour-a-day news coverage—and, like Ukrainians, accept it as a fact of life. But unlike them, we have a choice. We can mute or minimize the voices of suffering, but then we are removed from the life-force that keeps us connected. The need to feel, to be one with our fellow man, doesn’t go away. If we watch too much of it, however, we drown in the sadness, which leaves us paralyzed and unable to help in any way.

In a beautifully-written article, “Hearing the Cries of the World,” poet and philosopher Mark Nepo writes, “Each of us must make our peace with suffering and especially unnecessary suffering, which doesn’t mean our resignation to a violent world.” **It means doing what we can.**

Early in the invasion, we devoted two newsletters to it and your response was profoundly generous. That the fighting has escalated on both sides and billions of dollars have long been spent on ammunition and equipment, with more coming every day, does not mean that your donations don’t count for much.

We chose to aid Ukraine because we have close ties to the Dominican communities there and in neighboring Poland, ensuring that your gifts are received by them in total and used directly to feed, clothe, and house both Ukrainians who have fled to Poland and those who have stayed in Ukraine. Indeed, contributions are needed and appreciated even more now with the harsh winter coming. Fr. Misha and other Dominican friars and sisters from the House of St. Martin are “*sending food all the time to eastern and southern Ukraine. [We recently] brought 600 pounds of food to Slovyansk. We’re also helping three kitchens that prepare food in Kherson, where the situation is very difficult. As long as we can get there, we’ll keep helping people. And we want people who live there to know we haven’t forgotten them.*” Volunteers are already making plans to winterize the temporary housing provided for those whose homes were destroyed. Fr. Jarosław Krawiec, O.P., Provincial Vicar, writes from Kyiv, “*Apart from building materials for renovating destroyed or temporary houses and necessary items like medicine, flour, oil, canned meat and bread, the volunteers from the House of St. Martin (where a good chunk of your donations go) make a huge effort to provide some token of a*

The war doesn’t always have top billing on the news anymore, and we who are already overwhelmed with today’s evils are not anxious to think about it too much, but **we mustn’t forget.** Dominican Fr. Balog, Associate Director of the Thomas Aquinas Institute in Kyiv, wrote last month, “*Every time I talk with brothers and volunteers in Ukraine, we constantly repeat: the free and democratic world must not forget about this tragedy, and we have a duty to keep reminding people about it...The war demands great endurance, and not only from the soldiers. All of us — regular people standing on the side of goodness and truth — need patience to be in solidarity with each other.*”

Indeed, each of us can make a difference, alone as well as in our own personal sphere of influence (e.g. family, friends, parish, workplace, social media). Besides donations and of course prayer, of vital importance today is dialogue. Divisiveness stops progress on so many topics—we are either too angry to talk to each other or too afraid to let others know how we feel. Dialogue, however, provides our only hope of moving forward, but it must respect another’s rational view in an effort to grasp the whole truth.

Kids playing war in an all-too-real setting.

We must create processes that teach people how to have healthy encounters, respecting each person with equal rights and dignity and accepting differences. **Not only must we seek to understand our fellow countrymen with whom we disagree, we must also somehow seek to understand those fighting on the other side.** Master of the Order, Fr. Gerard Timoner III, O.P., made a plea to *“Let us also pray for our brothers and sisters in Russia who suffer the consequences of being in a country embroiled in an unjust war of aggression.”* That calls to mind the Russian soldier who asked an elderly Ukrainian, who refused to leave her home, if he could hide in her house because he couldn’t shoot one more Ukrainian soldier; she welcomed him in with a big bowl of borscht. Or the Russian paratrooper, Pavel Filatyev, who wrote and courageously published online 141 journal entries written while recuperating from an eye infection, entries that exposed the *“utter chaos and a complete breakdown of order and discipline among Russian troops.”* He described his tent jammed with 40 soldiers, no sink or shower, old rations, ratty uniforms, rusty, defective guns.

One of thousands of mass graves.

“Everyone looked exhausted and ran wild...We searched the buildings for food...we ate everything like savages.” Starving, sleep-deprived, cold, and filthy soldiers were reportedly *“shooting themselves in the leg to collect the \$50,000 promised by the government to injured servicemen. No one knew why they were there. Their commander didn’t even know what their next step was.”* Filatyev said he hopes that sharing his experience will awaken people to the reality of the situation in Ukraine. The majority in the Russian army are dissatisfied with what is happening there. ***“It may not change anything, but I will not participate in this madness.”*** He disclosed that many had gotten out of fighting by paying a \$5,000 to \$10,000 extortion fee to the military. He has been moved into hiding...

Try as we will, we can’t eliminate or solve such suffering, but as our heart breaks with compassion, it strengthens itself and all of humanity. ...That we go numb along the way, when the heart can take in no more, is to be expected. Always, on the inside of our numbness, or anger, grief, guilt, or despair is the face of compassion through which we can reclaim our humanity (Mark Nepo).

And so to make peace with suffering, we must seek and hold tightly to ideals that remain constant, that *“do not change with the vagaries of human whim and history. They are ahistorical ideals which guide and inspire us: Truth, Love, and Justice. A commitment to such ideals, which are bigger...than we are and will outlast us, can also be a source of sublime inspiration. They can be a source of faith in the future and faith in our own efforts to build that future. Such a faith can enable us to look at our efforts over the long range and can thereby save us from despair and [lasting] pessimism. Even if we fail in the moment to triumph over evil, to have lived in the service of ideal ends is to wrest from defeat a spiritual victory, which alone validates the effort and makes our struggle, as well as life itself, sublimely meaningful and worthwhile”* (Dr. Joseph Chuman, Institute for the Study of Human Rights).

Following is a recent meditation by Fr. Timothy Conlan, O.P., our missionary in Rabinal, Guatemala and our unofficial poet laureate. He writes about the sometime need to join the fighting, which Pope Francis also reluctantly supports, echoing Pope John Paul II in acknowledging that on rare occasions a *“humanitarian intervention,”* backed up by force, may be the only way to defend people who otherwise have no hope.

In hope of peace,
Lesley Warnshuis



Your Life for Freedom

Fr. Timothy Conlan, O.P.



Battles rage with guns, big guns blasting away.
Screaming rockets fly to their mark and burst into flames,
Obliterating human dwellings of peaceful peasants,
Scorching the earth as the screams of victims echo in the night.
We sit by the television watching the war-weary pilgrims
Cross to the promised haven of a welcoming neighbor.
What can we do?

Millions of people displaced, hundreds of thousands killed,
many more wounded.
The land seeded with deadly mines to maim, kill, or plant fear.
Hope is on the way—better guns for a counter offensive.
Ammunition will outlast the people who resist until there are no more.
This is war and only the lucky survive.
What caused the war?

Ideas—
Formed in the polluted labyrinth of the brain waves of criminals
Planning to rob humanity of any pretense of rising above animals.
The solution?

Ideas.
We see the strength of truth.
We must not give in to falsehood.
Life must be cherished, protected, fought for to preserve.
The sign of victory is the Cross of Him who gave us life.
He took on death to free us from that fear of losing life
And freed us for living with Him in unending life.
But first we must enter the trenches to fight the ideas that kill.
The most powerful weapon is suffering. It is redemptive.
Raise the banner of the only kingdom that promotes pure good,
The kingdom of the God who is love and Jesus Christ his Son
Who live in the one Godhead with the Holy Spirit. Amen.

St. Martin de Porres Feast Day Triduum

In honor of the November 3rd feast day of St. Martin de Porres, the patron of our missions, Masses will be offered at St. Dominic's Church in San Francisco on November 1, 2, and 3. We invite you to fill in and return the enclosed list of petitions which will be placed on the altar and remembered each day. And please join us in praying the Triduum in his honor.

All Souls' Day Remembrance

November is the month for us to pray especially for our loved ones who have gone before us. You are invited to list the names of your departed family members and friends on the enclosed slip and send it in to be placed on the altar at St. Dominic's Church in San Francisco. Your loved ones will be remembered at daily Mass throughout the month.

St. Martin de Porres Triduum

November 1, 2, and 3

First Day: *St. Martin, you always had sympathy for the poor and those who were suffering. I need your help and now ask for it with great confidence in your goodness and power. Please remember me, as you adore God. Amen.*

(Your petitions, followed by Our Father, Hail Mary, Glory Be and Closing Prayer.)

Closing Prayer: *Dear St. Martin, I turn to you in my sorrow and anxiety to seek your friendly protection. Please intercede for me with our merciful Father in heaven so that I may be truly sorry for all my sins and be freed from the evils that shackle me. Ask that I might have something of your spirit of love and self-sacrifice, and so be at all times reconciled to God's holy will. Oh heavenly Father, in the name of your Son and of His blessed Mother, and by the merits of your faithful servant Martin, help me in my trouble and do not forsake me. Amen.*

Second Day: *St. Martin, we praise God for the manifestation of His love. The favors you received from God encourage us now to seek your intercession and help. We ask you most humbly to befriend and assist us from your place in heaven; but most of all, we beg you to commend us to our beloved Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.*

(Your petitions, followed by Our Father, Hail Mary, Glory Be and Closing Prayer.)

Third Day: *Brother Martin, when you were here on earth, you spent your life loving God and your neighbor. This we know from the testimony of your own Dominican brethren. Now that you live in the presence of God in paradise, intercede for those who stand so much in need of the healing help of God and beg the Divine Physician to give us health of the soul and body. Amen.*

(Your petitions, followed by Our Father, Hail Mary, Glory Be and Closing Prayer.)