

## A letter from the Provincial Vicar of Ukraine

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*Dear sisters and dear brothers,*

*Let me start with Fastiv today. The House of Saint Martin de Porres run by the Dominicans and lay volunteers has been a place of escape and rest for people affected by the hostilities, ever since the beginning of the war. One of the ladies who had been among the first to take shelter in Fastiv and now is already safe in Poland, is from Hostomel, a town located just a dozen kilometers from Kyiv. She told me a couple days ago that her daughter Victoria and her little son stayed in the city. Just like many other people from their "Pokrowskyj" neighborhood, they found themselves under Russian authority, without water, food, or heat. Constantly seeing guns directed at them. One gentleman honestly confesses, "I am a Russian, and I'm very ashamed of it. They turned Hostomel into their military base. People live there in horrible conditions, among them my daughter." The inhabitants became a human shield protecting the enemy's army. Hostomel is not the only one; many Ukrainian cities are treated in the same way.*

*Stories like this would already make a thick book, and the church in Fastiv and the House of Saint Martin are filling with people's tears, with longing for loved ones who lost contact, with longing for home and peace. I talked today with Father Misha; these days it's very hard to get a hold of him by phone; at the end I asked him what good I can write about, since he told me so much about the people who find shelter with them, people from Fastiv, Irpin, Bucha, Kyiv... He was surprised by the question, although he's never been a pessimist or a dark type. Lots of good, however, still happens around us. By my estimate, if we took a scale like the one held by Themis — the Greek goddess and personification of justice, law, and eternal order — the good side would definitely outweigh the other. Thanks to the commitment of a large number of noble people from Ukraine and Poland, buses of refugees are leaving from the courtyard of our church every day. Sometimes a couple of them in one day. The same buses which come here to pick up people bring us food and medications.*

*I would like to express my gratitude and bow with great respect before all of those drivers who sit behind the wheels of buses, trucks, minivans, and their private cars, going to the places where people need their help. Among them are priests and religious sisters. Today our priory in Kyiv was visited by Fathers Valentine and Vyacheslav from Dunavtsi (the diocese of Kamianets-Podilskyi). Their minivan was filled with food, including a couple buckets of handmade pierogies and a multitude of vegetables. All these things were immediately delivered to the sisters, the Missionaries of Charity (the ones of Mother Teresa of Calcutta), who run a center here in the capital of Ukraine for the homeless and those in need. For many years already, the Dominican brothers have been celebrating Masses for them twice a week, usually in English since the sisters come from many nations.*

*We have also received a delivery of things that were sent to us a couple days ago from Warsaw by Charytatywni Freta, as well as a gift from Father Peter from Legionowo. Peter served for many years in Ukraine and now celebrates monthly Masses in Ukrainian in our Dominican Priory of Saint Hyacinth in Warsaw. He has a great heart for Ukraine! All those things arrived first by train from Poland to Zhytomyr and today were delivered by Mr. Leonard by car from Home Church. Here are the real modern-day heroes! They go to places engulfed by war, delivering humanitarian help. They go even when they know that the return route might be cut off. They go, even risking being shot at. Those trips often take many hours, even days, because one has to find a way through destroyed roads and bridges, wait in long lines at multiple checkpoints, and scavenge for fuel. I'm getting to know this new reality and becoming more certain that during the war, what is needed is not only soldiers but also all the people behind the scenes. They deliver food and medications. And when necessary, they evacuate people to safe places. Leonard told me that yesterday he helped evacuate a young family from Kyiv. The young mother had a little infant in her arms. In 2014 they had to escape from Luhansk, and today the Russian army forces them out of Kyiv. May this be the last time; may they finally find a place to live and raise their children in peace. Leonard's friend who is a soldier recently told him, "Because you helped my wife to safely leave the town, I have more peace, and I can defend my country with a rifle." He is right. It is good that we have people like Leonard and*

*priests like Valic and Slavic.*

*March 8 is the Day of Women. In Ukraine it is a national holiday and a day off work. One could already see tulip sellers yesterday at the entrance to the store near our priory in Kyiv. Ahead of me in line to the cashier at the supermarket, I saw a soldier with five boxes of chocolates. I know they are for the women soldiers in his unit. I rarely buy flowers, so I don't know how much they cost before the war, but they are certainly much more expensive now. Without hesitation, Father Thomas and I purchased 12 tulips because we wanted to express to the women among us how important and needed their presence is. The Kyiv florist tried to convince us that one should not give an even number of flowers (that's for a funeral), but we had no energy to explain to her that the bouquet we purchased is for a larger number of women. She was confused but finally sold us 12 yellow tulips. Business is business, and for us this number has good associations, twelve apostles for instance.*

*Other heroes of our daily lives, in my eyes, are the "Women Behind the Counter". Yesterday I was standing in a long line at the pharmacy to buy medicine for a sick person. I observed with wonder a young pharmacist working alone in the whole shop, explaining to every client with great patience what she could and could not offer him, and what kind of medicines he or she could replace with another. She was doing that while answering phone calls. I would probably go mad after an hour of this work. Another time, when I was finishing my shopping, I told the lady at the cashier to take one of the chocolates I had just purchased, that it was for her. She was very surprised and asked why, to which I responded with a smile that if she wasn't there, I couldn't do any shopping at all. All the other stores around were closed. In the present conditions, everything that used to be normal work, at least to me, acquires now a new and deeper meaning.*

*Yesterday I went with Father Thomas to the subway station. It was already past 4pm, the streets were relatively quiet, and the sirens were not blaring. The underground did not lack people, however. Some of them were laying on the platform on mattresses, reserved far in advance, someone was reading a book, and some young people were lovingly holding on to each other. Two families were standing together, and their children were joyfully playing around. Cartoons were projected on the wall. I'm sure the subway station fills up completely with people in the evenings. I suspect that's also how it was last night, since many times and not far away, we heard explosions.*

*Father Peter announced today that he still wants to give an online lecture on Holy Scripture, according to the original plan. It is obviously for all of those students from the Saint Thomas Institute who can and are willing to participate. It is a great idea.*

*Over the last couple days, I have kept in my head one of the intercessions to Our Lady of Perpetual Help: "More beautiful than the cedars of Lebanon, Mary we beg you." Isn't today her holiday too?*

*Warm greetings and request for prayers,*

*Jarosław Krawiec OP,  
Kyiv, March 8, 2022, 4:45pm*