

2022 PASTORAL LETTER OF THE UKRAINIAN CATHOLIC BISHOPS OF
CANADA, ON THE OCCASION OF THE FEAST OF THE RESURRECTION OF
OUR LORD

To the Very Reverend Clergy, Monastics and Religious Sisters and Brothers,
Seminarians and Laity of the Ukrainian Catholic Church in Canada:

Christ is Risen! Indeed He is Risen!

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ, Jesus said to them, “*Do not be afraid*” (Mt 28:8)

Easter and the Resurrection: A Journey from Fear to Joy and Hope

Today, we celebrate the glorious Feast of the Resurrection of our Lord, Jesus Christ. Today, we rejoice in Christ’s victory over sin and death. Today, all things are filled with joy.

As we celebrate the Feast of the Resurrection of our Lord, and as we try to make sense of what it means for us today, let us reflect on the myrrh-bearing women – the first to encounter the news of the Risen Lord, and their incredible journey from fear to joy and hope.

The myrrh-bearing women are the eyewitnesses of Jesus’ death and the place of his burial. They are also the witnesses of his resurrection. They are the ones who receive the glorious news from the angel, who tells them, “Do not be afraid; you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised; he is not here. Look, there is the place they laid him. Go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you” (Mark 16:6-7).

Yet, in the Gospel of Mark’s telling of the Resurrection account, we read: “So the myrrhbearing women went out and fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid” (Mark 16:8).

“Terror and amazement had seized them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.” Fear had the potential to prevent the myrrhbearing women from fulfilling the task given them by the angel. Fear had the potential to paralyze them, to bind them. Fear brought about in the myrrh-bearing women worry, terror, panic, anxiety, an inability to act. Fear could have prevented us from ever learning about the Resurrection of Our Lord, instead leaving Jesus buried in the tomb forever.

Yet, somehow the myrrh-bearing women were able to overcome their fear. Matthew’s Gospel tells us: “So they left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples. Suddenly Jesus met them and said, ‘Greetings!’ And they came to him, took hold of his feet, and worshiped him. Then Jesus said to them, ‘Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me’” (Matthew 28:8-10).

The fear of the myrrh-bearing women had turned to joy and hope. Their newfound courage and strength transformed them into witnesses and messengers of the Resurrection. Their testimony allowed the Good News of the Word of God to spread and the number of faithful to increase greatly, so much so that today some 2.38 billion people around the world are followers of Christ, that is, one-third of the world's population.

In the context of this year's celebration of the Feast of the Resurrection of Our Lord, the whole world watches in disbelief and dismay that Ukraine has been invaded by Russia, causing massive destruction and the loss of thousands of innocent lives, many of whom are women and children. The fear of war once again, like that of the myrrh-bearing women, has the potential not only to paralyze the people of Ukraine but the entire world.

Yet, this is clearly not the case. The people of Ukraine have found courage to fight and to defend their families and neighbours in the midst of the chaos that war brings. Furthermore, the people of Ukraine fight bravely not only to defend their nation but the very fabric of freedom and democracy, upholding the fundamental ideals and principles of justice and human dignity that the world values and promotes.

We might ask ourselves just where does the courage of the people of Ukraine come from? The short answer is faith in God and in the Risen Lord. Already in the first century, Saint Andrew the Apostle, according to the chronicle *The Tale of Bygone Years*, erected a cross on the banks of the Dnipro River, prophesying that a great city would be built on its shores – today's city of Kyiv, which has stood through the centuries as a centre of faith and witness to God's love for God's people. For centuries others have coveted these lands, yet each time the people of Ukraine, led by the Church, have emerged victoriously from the catacombs, experiencing in their own right Christ's passion and crucifixion, journeying to the Resurrection and the newness of life. In this the people of Ukraine find strength.

Today, fear has the potential to silence the voice of the people of the world. Like the myrrh-bearing women, let us find courage to overcome our fear. Let us continue to speak with one voice and one heart, speaking on behalf of the people of Ukraine whose voice is being attempted to be silenced by foreign aggressors. Let us speak truth about what is happening in Ukraine, in solidarity and with conviction that war is wrong, and that peace is the only path forward. Our voice is being heard. The world has responded in an outpouring of prayer for peace in Ukraine and love for its people by providing unprecedented humanitarian aid in response to the world's worst humanitarian crisis since the Second World War.

We pray for peace in Ukraine, and throughout the world. We pray in particular for the people of Ukraine as they endure the war. We pray for their safety and for their families. We pray for those who have left Ukraine and those who remain. We pray for those who have died. May God bless you and may the Mother of God spread her omophorion of protection upon you. As we celebrate the Feast of the Resurrection, let us be the myrrh-bearing women of today. Like them, let us break free from any fear that holds us back.

Let us go tell others, boldly and with courage, of the joy of the Gospel message, of God's love and mercy in the world, so that they too may experience joy and hope in their lives.

As the Ukrainian Catholic Bishops in Canada, we pray that God's grace and love fills your heart, and that of your family and friends, and brings happiness and peace to all people. Christ is Risen! Indeed He is Risen!

Sincerely Yours in Christ,

+ Lawrence Huculak, OSBM, Metropolitan Archbishop of Winnipeg

+ David Motiuk, Eparchial Bishop of Edmonton; Apostolic Administrator of New Westminster

+ Bryan Bayda, CSsR, Eparchial Bishop of Saskatoon; Apostolic Administrator of Toronto

+ Michael Wiwchar, CSsR, Bishop Emeritus of Saskatoon

+ Stephen Chmilar, Bishop Emeritus of Toronto