

The Ukrainians' Way of the Cross

366th station

ENTRY TO THE WAY OF THE CROSS

CARITAS SPES UKRAINE

Lord, it has been a year since the beginning of the full-scale invasion of Ukraine by the Russian Federation. For a year now, the aggressor has been hatefully torturing our country. During this year, we have buried many fallen soldiers and civilians, millions of displaced people were forced to leave their homes, hundreds of towns and villages were completely destroyed, many people's lives and plans were irrevocably broken.

On the anniversary of this tragedy, we have gathered together to present to you, God, our most intimate prayer. This is what each of us has hidden behind our daily routine and what was revealed while contemplating Your suffering. Each Station of this Way of the Cross was written with the pain and hope of Caritas-Spes Ukraine employees and reflects a human tragedy during the war. God, please accept these reflections as a prayer for our homeland.

Lord, during this year our country has also been walking, and unfortunately continues to walk, its own Way of the Cross, to some extent similar to Yours, which happened 2000 years ago. When You were carrying a heavy Cross, someone sincerely sympathized with You and cried, someone was thirsty for Your blood, because they screamed: "Crucify Him!", someone split Your clothes thinking of enrichment, someone came just for the sake of entertainment so to escape from the boredom, and someone did not come at all because they were indifferent to You and Your suffering.

Your Way of the Cross has divided people around You, or rather revealed what they are really like inside. When we talk about the war in Ukraine, not only individuals, but also entire nations have been divided in their attitude towards it. We have seen who is our friend and who is our enemy, who is crying with us and who does not care about us at all. It is gratifying that just as on Your Way of the Cross there was no lack of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Veronica, other women who were crying, Simon and the Apostle John, there is no lack of those who care about the fate of the Ukrainian people.

We are grateful that these civilized nations, to which we also belong, have become our close friends. We understand, however, that our cross must be carried to the end by ourselves, as a nation, or rather not by ourselves, but with Your help and the help of Your and our Mother, whose presence we feel since the beginning of the war until now.

Lord, be with us, guide us, protect us and support us. Only Your help is the key to the victory and peace we so desperately need. And we, as employees of Caritas-Spes Ukraine, are ready to be at Your service.

1. *Jesus, sentenced to death (Olga Marchuk, Communications officer)*

Jesus, you are condemned to death. You stand all alone. Nobody speaks up for you. Nobody helps defend you.

What are you feeling at this moment? Is it fear? Is it pity? Is it helplessness?

When I think of you at this time, I think of all Ukrainians who faced not a natural death, but were condemned to death by another human. Condemned simply for being themselves, being the truth and living the truth in their native land. Many of them did not even have time to realize the inevitability of death, to feel anything at all, to accept this death.

I also think about those Ukrainians who are now captured by the enemy and who do not know if they will survive and see their loved ones again.

Please give us all the courage and fortitude to accept those things we cannot change. Help us to resign ourselves to God's will with such humility and love as you did. Help us stay strong and develop a deeper trust in Him.

2. *Jesus puts the cross on his shoulders (Pavlo Loskutov, Economist)*

Mom... Dad... Son... Daughter... Wake up... A full-scale invasion of our country has begun. The war... These were the words we heard from our relatives, friends and close ones in that early morning... Sirens and explosions are already heard in the cities. The son quickly packs his things, hugs and calms his parents, wife, children and goes to the armed forces to defend his country. He realizes that it will be his Way of the Cross with its trials and sufferings. But he accepts it and is ready to carry it for the sake of peace ... Each of us realizes that it will be a difficult Way of the Cross, where rage, contempt, pain, humiliation will reign. We stand together around the Cross. We hear the words of Jesus, where He speaks to us: "If anyone wants to come after Me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow Me."

Lord, we trust you and pray for your help and presence at the time when each of us takes up and carries our cross.

3. *Jesus falls under the cross for the first time (Khrystyna Harbus, Project Assistant)*

Jesus, you are just an ordinary man, but you accept the will of our Father and obediently go to death for the sake of forgiving the sins of all mankind. How many people are walking beside You and do not recognize You as their Savior. You walk alone in Your suffering, carrying a huge cross on Your back. How many sins, how much impurity, how many lies and judgements of all the people are placed in that cross... And, for the first time, You fall down because our sins are too heavy. Jesus, teach us how to treat our neighbors with care. Teach us how to live

according to Your commandments and to remember Your sacrifice in every our action. In every dialog, accept the pain of our neighbor as our own cross. Teach us, Jesus, how to accept all our hardships with humility for the sake of lightening the burden of Your own cross. Teach us how to find that unique support that was strengthening You when You again got up on the feet to carry Your cross.

Teach us, Jesus, how to do the same! Amen.

4. *Jesus meets his mother (Olena Kava, Project Manager)*

Mom, Mom!

I had a nightmare!

Mom, Mom! I was in a fight with the boys and I'm hurt!

Mom, Mom! I lost my comrades, there are only three of us left out of the whole squadron of thirty people, I'm scared!

And what about this mom? When she hears these words, she pretends to be brave, strong, and almost almighty. Though she looks fragile, sensitive, tender, indeed she is almighty - almighty in the love for her child. This is the love that gives a child the needed strength, courage, and endurance to go forward, uphill.

You don't need many words for support, all you need is a look, a voice, a breath full of love... and then a terrible dream, burning pain, overwhelming fear disappears.

How many people are now looking for a meeting with the Mother, with a look that does not condemn, does not pity, but understands, loves, and supports.

God also needed to meet with His Mother on His Way of the Cross. How big is the mission of a mother in a human life, when even God needs to meet her. In the moments of greatest suffering, we seek Her support. In the most difficult moments of His life, Jesus also gives us His own Mother, so that She can be our Mother as well.

Mary, Mother of God and our Mother, protect every child who suffers, especially because of the terrible and unjust war against Ukrainian people. Give us the strength to go through this thorny, blood-spattered path and not to lose our faith and love.

5. *Simon of Cyrene helps Jesus carry the cross (Vitalii Pazdrii, Logistics Manager)*

"We, like Simeon of Cyrene, in the whirlwind of everyday life and work, were not prepared to be forced to take up the cross on February 24, in a specific, cruel, unexpected way and time.

But having taken it up, we have to help everyone who has lost their home, is unable to earn for daily bread, is on a long journey as an emigrant or is in some other kind of need. In the thousands of people's faces we see one face - our God, Jesus, who was burdened under the frame of the Cross for our sins and for my sins as well.

We have been called to be God's children, but let us not allow ourselves to be infantile like children in our ministry, work and family. When we take the cross of

Christ, let us carry it to the next stage of life – in our developing, when we learn new things, open ourselves to other people and overcome the sumits that were unreachable for us before.

We pray for all the leaders, ministers and volunteers of Caritas-Spes, religious and humanitarian organizations, so that at the moment when the cross needs to be taken they will not lack courage, strength, endurance. We also pray for openness - to His gaze through the gazes of the suffering, the guards and just the people around us. May the Eyes of the Suffering God open our spiritual eyes to the mercy, duty, responsibility and the way of Christ!"

6. Veronica wipes Jesus' face (fr. Vyacheslav Grynevych SAC CEO)

When I was a child, my parents would take me to the river. When my lips turned blue from swimming, my mother would call me to the shore to cover me with a large semi-transparent shawl. This shawl did not warm me enough, but it gave me a sense of security. It was like a mobile shelter, through which no enemy could get in.

Suddenly, the sound of sirens, the ground shaking. The shawl instantly became a bulky slab of a high-rise building that trapped the woman's body. This woman could still hear her son's voice in her head: "Mom, I've already packed the toys, please turn on a cartoon about tractors." Fettered, helpless, she was calling her son, begging the universe for help. "Woman, shout once again! Give us a sign! We can hear you! One more time..." this is what was heard through that war-torn shawl.

I saw St. Veronica's shawl on a destroyed bridge of Irpin, with hundreds of frightened faces looking out from under it. In the crowded metro station "Maidan Nezaleznosti" where the girl Victoria was born. In fully packed evacuation trains at the main railway station in Kyiv.

Today, among the bloodstains on the war-torn shawl, the face of Christ can be seen, woven of hospitality, solidarity, cooperation, and embrace.

7. Jesus falls under the cross for the second time (Olena Shevchuk, Project Manager)

I feel like my hands are falling off. I started my day with a letter that I didn't finish yesterday. Sometimes it seems that I have neither the strength nor the desire to move on. But suddenly I receive a call from Odesa, Kharkiv or Dnipro that brings me back to myself. And I realize that there are people who don't give up, who continue their daily exhausting work. Day after day. They continue to bring our Victory closer every single day. The victory of light and goodness. Thanks to their Faith. Like Jesus they carry their Cross, do not complain, do not grumble. They sincerely share everything they have: food, water, clothes or shelter.

Jesus fell three times, but He found the strength to get up and continue His Way.

Who am I? This is the question I ask myself every day. And every day I feel His love and support. And I take another step. A step forward. Together with all Ukrainians. Together with whole Ukraine. To hear the call from Zaporizhzhia, Kherson or Sumy once again.

8. Jesus comforts the weeping women (fr. Vyacheslav Grynevych SAC CEO)

The city was rushing outside the window. Twilight was falling down. The woman closed the curtain. "I'll wait for the dawn and look forward to seeing him again... The closest one I have, to whom I gave birth to 19 years ago."

Sharp sound of a phone call broke into the mother's thoughts. For 4 months now, the phone has been a source of hope and anxiety. "Hello... No, I didn't hear any news, no one is saying anything... Valentyna's son has been returned from the Russian captivity. He says it was such a hell there that no one could survive, but I don't believe him. We just have to pray and wait."

The black and white world became filled with colors. She opened the damp front door. Suddenly the light has captured all her vision and everything seemed frozen - except for the young man on the bench. The woman immediately recognized her son. She ran over to hug him right away. But he pulled back from her hands saying: "Mom, don't hold me... I'm alive. I will come back."

And he seemed to disappear into a consciousness that was like waking up from a dream.

"Lord, thank You for this dream, for the gleam of hope," she prayed in the morning.

It seems like these days have no ending. And then... "Maybe they made a mistake, maybe someone else had his passport, his phone, his rosary. Or maybe his fingers were frozen on the mystery of the resurrection?"
Tears could not extinguish the burning fire in her heart.

"Lord, I am left alone in this world, just like your mother. Let us see in the windows of our hearts at least a shine of hope for resurrection."

9. Jesus falls under the cross for the third time (Olena Noga, Head of the Project Department)

The heart doesn't hurt anymore when the siren wails, already used to live in someone else's house.

Reading the news... someone is being buried again... they are being buried every day... so you grit your teeth, wipe your tears and stubbornly go forward. For the sake of those who are still alive. For the sake of those who will be born.

But the missiles are flying on us again. They sow death everywhere they go. They don't bother to choose. Who's next? Maybe me?

Cold, darkness and frustration. There is no more strength to hold on. Maybe my salvation is in death?

We take the cross on our shoulders together with the whole Ukraine. The entire world supports us when Ukraine falls under the burden of trials, tortures and humiliation.

Lord, You withstood every fall and You ascended to Calvary. Give us the strength to rise and the faith that our suffering will lead us to victory.

10. *Jesus is stripped of his clothes (Tetiana Kalinichenko, Communications Manager)*

Jesus is stripped of his clothes... Jesus consciously accepts this public humiliation, he is willing to take off even his own skin for our sake. Ready to strip himself to the bone in order to redeem our sins...

A girl from Dnipro, all naked in the ruins of her own bathroom in ten-degree cold. In the lenses of the world media and the eyes of the viewers... Her nudity is a torture. The only difference is that this torture is performed in a different way: with the voice of a commander giving an order, with the hands of a Russian soldier who fired a missile into a house where these people live. Or to be more precise, lived...

Women in Bucha, Izyum, Mariupol, Kherson and hundreds of other cities and towns whose clothes, virginity and lives were ripped away... This was going on here for the past 8 years. The last year is just more intense.

Jesus, I do feel involved. I feel involved in their pain, their wounds and their nakedness. I feel that it is me in each of them. Just as in every destroyed house, in every execution room, in every grave. But I would not be able to stand it all alone.

Jesus, give my people the strength to endure and after that to be reborn once again. Give us the strength to resist and not lose our dignity. Be with us, Jesus, on this Way of the Cross of my people. My Lord, You feel our nakedness, our vulnerability and fragility like no one else in this world.

11. *Jesus is nailed to the cross (Yevhen Holynsky, Legal)*

Jesus, You were nailed to the shameful tree of the cross together with Ukraine.

Together with Ukraine, they exposed you, thus disrespected you, disregarded your dignity, crossed it out. Just as rusty nails were hammered into Your pure and holy hands, nails were hammered into the cities of Ukraine in the form of carpet bombing.

How many Ukrainians have been deprived of their limbs by the terrible nails of this war, how many children will now not be able to hug their parents or take a walk in their favorite place where they grew up.

Jesus, we know that You suffer with these innocents, Your Most Sacred Heart is full of sorrow and indescribable pity for Your children.

And now you have been finally nailed to a tree, you are bleeding, the whole of Ukraine, nailed to the cross of war, is bleeding with you: Mariupol, Kharkiv, Olenivka, Dnipro, Kramatorsk, Zaporizhzhia, Mykolaiv, Kyiv, Bakhmut, Vinnytsia...

How many groans and blood was shed during this time of war... We believe that the martyrdom and death of so many Ukrainians are not in vain, we believe that you are creating history with our people to reveal your Glory in them!

12. *Jesus dies on the cross (Nastia Mykhailova, Communications officer)*

Every night I put my 4-year-old daughter Maya to bed, who is the embodiment of light on this earth. She asks me: "Mommy, why do bad people come to us? Will you help me?" and I answer: "Yes, my love. I will always be with you and will help you." During these moments, I try to remember the size of her palm, the smell of her hair, the rhythm of her breathing - things that photographs can not capture. Because maybe tomorrow I won't be able to lull her to sleep anymore... Death is so close.

In these moments, I try not to hate our enemy, because that's what they want. They want us all to dive into the darkness of evil and hate. They want us to lose the light in our souls. They want us to die spiritually. But it is really hard to keep faith when death is so close.

I ask you, Lord, to give me the strength to withstand these trials, to save the lives of my family and every Ukrainian. After all, there has been so many deaths that it is the time to start living.

13. *Jesus is taken down from the cross (Yana Trubiichuk, Project Assistant)*

When Jesus was taken off the Cross there were only a few of His Apostles around. Only a few of them were brave enough to take that breathless body and carry Him to the grave. But Nicodemus and Joseph were there. That was a moment when their mighty and wise Teacher was no more able to cure people, cast out demons, raise the dead or command any living creature on Earth. But those two were there, holding His cold and humiliated Body.

I often imagine how our country will look once the war is over. Once Ukraine passes all the stations of its Way of the Cross - who will be there to pull all the metal nails from its hands and feet. Who will be there to take it on the loving and carrying shoulders when many of us will become hopeless, homeless, or worth – will no longer be willing to live in such ruined country. Will we or will I be there? Ready to accept millions of challenges, disappointments, horrifying truth, which are waiting for us right after the corner, right after this nightmare is over. Or will we just disappear

as many of the Apostles did. They were too scared to walk with Jesus on His very last Road.

Our Mighty Father, whatever the end of our Way of the Cross will look like - let us be at least remotely similar to Nicodemus and Joseph – they loved Him when He was alive, and they took care of Him when He was no longer powerful or magnificent. Give us the strength to follow that example and bring our imperfect love and care where it is most needed.

14. *Jesus is laid in the tomb (Mira Milavets, Project Manager)*

Lord Jesus, by laid into the tomb and then rising triumphantly from it, you have restored our life.

Today marks one year since we saw many innocent Ukrainians not only laid in the tombs, but also tortured before being dumped, undignified, in common graves. Your story, Jesus, seems to be repeating.

The Gospel of John, testifies that Calvary is located in a garden where there is a tomb that had never been used. It is said that a deep silence covered Calvary. Right there the disciples of Jesus lay down his body.

Today, many pits have been found in the Ukrainian land, which is sacred to us, covered with the same silence in a deep forest and corpses that were laid one on top of the other have been removed and laid in graves, to give full dignity and respect to each of them.

Jesus, the only consolation in all these places can only come from You, who gave Your life for each of those who are already with You today. We know that after three days that body rose again. Therefore, Jesus, we ask you to be close, to personally accompany all those who have lost loved ones and all of us on our earthly journey, through joys and tribulations.

Jesus,

On this way of the cross of Ukraine, we meet you, on your way, like Simon of Cyrene met you. He was a passer-by and he was asked to carry your cross. Simon carried your cross, Lord and it must have transformed him forever. Help us to do the same, to help carry the cross of the people of Ukraine. This cross that the people have been carrying already since many years due to the war, which has intensified so terribly since the full-scale invasion a year ago.

As Caritas we want to continue to be here. For as long as you walk on this way of the cross, we want to help alleviate the burden of your suffering people. Like Veronica, let us stand ready to wipe the blood and sweat from your face: to give you a moment of respite. Help us do the little we can for the people suffering in Ukraine and the people suffering across the world.

Give us the strength to continue to support for as long as is needed. Let us never leave you alone. Help us stay with you. Also when you are crucified, let us stay next to your cross. Crying - and staying.

It is so difficult to keep the faith when death is so close, we heard tonight. We need to help one another to keep that fragile flame of faith and hope alive. We need to stay together, close to the people of Ukraine, help one another to keep hope, help to keep faith, even when it is hard to do so.

Jesus you are our only consolation. You share our sorrows, our grief, our pain and our joy, yesterday, today, this night, tomorrow and for life. Whilst we don't know the end of this way of the cross, we know that darkness and even death never will never have the last word. In the midst of this night, we trust you, we know that you are eternal Light; and we know that you are Life.

And Mary, Mother of God, the mother of the people in Ukraine, the mother of this world, of every one of us. Mary, Our Mother, stay with us, pray for us and help us persevere.

Amen.