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OCD

COMMUNICATIONES





Young OCD Associates begin YOUTH DAY in Fatima

Prior to proceeding to Lisbon for the official YOUTH DAY celebrations with Pope Francis, some young OCD Associates gathered in Fatima under Our Blessed Lady's mantle on 31 July. We were about 200, coming from different countries and three continents.

That morning in the Paul VI Pastoral Centre, these young people with OCD connections had an animated dialogue with our General, Fr. Miguel Maria Marquez. He challenged them to focus their lives on the essential – friendship with Jesus – at the service of the Church like Sts. Teresa of Jesus and John of the Cross and to pay attention to the little events that life presents to us.

The afternoon was spent in visiting the surroundings of the Fatima Shrine, sharing in two workshops and attending a concluding Mass in the Rosary Basilica. One couple conducted a period of reflection on the history and charism of the Discalced Carmelites and then Sister Angela Coelho organized a presentation about the Venerable Sister Lucia, one of the Fatima seers.

During the concluding Eucharist, Fr. General thanked God for all the good that the smallest ones do for the Church and for society. He placed a fragment of a bomb that had damaged a part of Ukraine on the tomb of Sr. Lucia. This fragment had been given to him by a Ukrainian mother so that he could bring it to Fatima and we would all pray for peace.





Spain: Seminar on Intellectual Life among Discalced Carmelites

From 27 to 29 June, CITEs (Avila) hosted a seminar on intellectual life in the Discalced Carmelite Order. There were 17 participants from 6 different countries (Spain, France, England, Italy, Poland and Switzerland). Their discussions and reflections centred on the interpretation of the fonts of Carmelite Spirituality. The meeting had been prepared in collaboration between the OCD General Curia, the Pontifical Theological Faculty of the "Teresianum" (Rom)e and CITEs (Avila). This was the second seminar on this subject: the first had taken place last year at the Teresianum. The theme of this Avila meeting was the study of readings from our Carmelite authors, Sts. Teresa of Jesus and John of the Cross. Commentaries followed from five participants: Saverio Cannistra (Italy), Juan Antonio Marcos (Spain), Emilio Matinez (Spain),

Jerzy Nawojowski (Poland) and Christof Betschart (Switzerland). Among the participants there were also three Carmelite nuns from England, Italy and Spain. During the meeting the necessity of promoting a cultural change in the Order was keenly felt, with a consequent encouragement for greater application to study. The creation of this new cultural mentality in the Order can only become a reality through the joint contributions of the General Government, our Centres of Study, the various OCD Religious Provinces and their Superiors. Our Carmelite Nuns must also take active roles in the process. Among these latter there is certainly a greater interest and desire to learn more about our Saints in a more systematic way but, for various reasons, they encounter greater difficulties in frequenting academic theological studies.



Italy: OCDS National Congress



Secular Carmelites from all the Italian OCDS Provinces gathered in considerable numbers in Ariccia from the 12th to 15th July to celebrate their National Congress. The theme for this year's meeting was **"The search for the meaning of life – What St. Therese of the Child Jesus says to the people of today"** and to reflect on, deepen and share together about the Teresian charism in the light of the teaching of "little" Therese and her parents.

The presence of our General, Fr. Miguel, with Fr. Ramiro, the General Delegate for the OCDS and Fr. Aldo, the OCDS Italian National Assistant, all helped us to feel that we were a real and special family. Their



reflections and fraternal friendship encouraged us to live our vocations as lay Carmelites with joy and fidelity to our charism with its commitment to our apostolate and mission after the example of our Lisieux saint. The profound and stimulating reflections of Frs. Emilio Martinez and Johannes Gorantla, the life experiences of different members of the OCDS and the theatrical production of 'A Holy Recreation of Teresina' by a group of young people from Loano, all contributed to make this Congress a rich and beautiful experience for all those who attended it.





Colombia: 18th National Congress of Discalced Carmelite Seculars

From 4th to 8th August the 18th National Congress of the OCDS in Colombia, was held at La Mesa de los Santos (Santander). Carmelite Seculars from all the regions of Colombia where they are present (Bogota, Bucaramanga, Cali, Cartagena, Cucuta, Medellin, Palmira, Pereira, Sonson, Tumaco and Villa de Leiva) took part, as well as a number of their Assistant Friars.

The main theme of the Congress was "St. Therese of the Child Jesus, our sister, who teaches us to live faithfully in following the Lord in our trials and in our dark nights". With our Eucharist, conferences, workshops, periods of prayer and recreation, a lovely time of joy and mutual sharing was had by all.



UKRAINIAN DIARY OF V. R. FATHER MIGUEL, GENERAL OCD



Friday 14 July

I arrived at Cracovia airport at 8 a.m. Tadeusz, the Provincial of our Polish Province was waiting for me along with Pawel, a friar who is on his way these days to join the community of Berdichev.

At 10.30 a.m., we reach Przemysl, a city on the Ukrainian border. They tell me it is one of the most beautiful cities of Poland. In 1800 the Austrians made the city into a fortress to defend it from Russia. Poland did not exist then.

We have a meal at 11, with the kind brothers of the community here.

We move towards the border, 8 Kilometres away, at midday. Karol, from the community of Przemysl, meets us at a border post. There are as yet no ONGS at these posts to deal with refugees. We are on a cleared pathway that leads to the Polish border posts and then on to Ukraine. There is tranquillity on both sides. About a hundred people wait to enter Ukraine and a similar number to exit Ukraine.

Fleets of trucks wait to pass the frontier. They will wait for days.

At 12.43 p.m. we cross the Ukrainian border without any difficulty.

At 12.50 we meet Rafal Myszkowski coming from the other side.

We begin our journey. It will take us seven hours to reach Berdichev. Rafal took the same time for his journey coming to meet us earlier this morning.

In half an hour we pass through Lviv. It had been bombed the day that I left Ukraine on my last visit. And they tell me that it has been bombed again a few days ago.



17.50 Time for a break at Hunter's Lodge with its collection of original and rustic timber.

We reach Berdichev at 22.05. An emotional meeting between brothers Vitali and Pawel and the visit to Our Lady in her National Shrine. The community prepares flowers for tomorrow's feast. The church is beautiful. It has been an exhausting day, so intense and enjoyable. We must rest. Tomorrow we have an intense evening programme for Berdichev's great feast.



Saturday 15 July

A tranquil dawn. They told me that the sirens had gone off once yesterday. Frequently last year they used to blare a few times a day. At the moment life is apparently calm albeit the war continues and lives are being lost. Yesterday they showed us the photo of a young soldier killed at the front-line. His family lives here in our parish. We pray for him and the family.

At 10.00 we go to visit refugees in Zhytomyr. This city is continually attacked and bombarded because some specialized Ukrainian forces are based here. On our journey we meet up with various groups of pilgrims as they walk towards Berdichev with their Bishop, their elderly and children and, as always, with their flag. Father Benedict is waiting for us in the centre of the city. He is a military chaplain and the new delegate for Carmelites in Ukraine. He is very involved in helping refugees and catering for the needs of soldiers at the front.

After a visit to the Catholic Cathedral of Zhytomyr we go to a city centre library for children where some families are waiting to chat with us and share their stories. They are all refugees who have arrived from Donetsk, Marinka, Kharkiv, Kherson and Zaporizhia. This meeting makes a huge impression on me. There were elderly, middle aged and children. Three volunteers with Fr. Benedict help in distributing food and other necessities.

All of these refugee had experienced bombing

raids. They were in tears as they recounted their horrific stories. The Russians destroyed the dam in the city of Zaporizhia (Kajofka) and it has remained without water due to the flooding. More than 500 old people died.

With Zaporizhia flooded, some 200 people fled into Zhytomyr. An 87 year old lady spoke with us and was so grateful for the help and support they were receiving. Another man, an ex-boxer but suffering now from cancer and undergoing chemotherapy treatment, also shared his story. They are very grateful for our prayers. Each family received a bag of food and sweets. It was a heartfelt meeting for all of us.

We met with a Protestant Pastor from a Messianic Jewish Church. While we waited for him at a restaurant, we spoke about Benedict's work with young people and with refugees. Benedict has a black belt in karate. Another volunteer also shared his story. He was a bandit who had his own gang that stole cars. He now helps with the church and has learned karate from Benedict. They know each other since 2092. While his friends stole cars and were involved in other crimes, Benedict worked on teaching him karate and reforming his character. He tells us that Faith came afterwards.

Pastor Borys arrived at the restaurant, all smiles and sharing numerous experiences about the war and the miracle of still being alive. He tells us that Jesus has assured him that his whole team will survive the war.

He is convinced of this as he looks towards heaven, all the while relating anecdotes from the battle front-line from which he has just now come to meet us. He fought in Afghanistan as an 18 year old. And he is now fighting here in the most dangerous war zone. He suffered a traumatic experience after the Afghanistan war but overcame this by confessing and re-discovering spirituality. He became a Pastor in order to serve others more. In 2014 at the outset of the war with Russia he was invited to join up. His wife said that they prayed for enlightenment.

Looking at Christ, he felt that Jesus said to him: "I am going", without forcing himself. He decided to join Jesus who was going to the front-line. On all sides, he saw how God acts in people, in people's hearts. On one occasion they were shot at and their vehicle was practically destroyed but they managed to travel a further 25 Kilometres. When they arrived at a petrol station they realized that they no longer had a petrol tank to be filled! He considered this to have been a real miracle.

In a certain city, when surrounded by tanks and it seemed that escape was impossible, (continued Pastor Borys), he invited his soldiers to pray and told them that his Faith assured him that they would be invisible to the Russians surrounding them. He and his companions succeeded in passing through all the tanks without being shot at. The soldiers expressed their surprise that God does exist. This all happened in Lysychansk.

He told us that today many young men are dying and showed us a photo of his soldier companions in the woods.

"God has a plan for Ukraine", Pastor Borys assured us, "and all of us have a part in that plan".

Throughout the afternoon the Pilgrims continue to arrive at the Berdichev shrine. We have the Solemn Mass at 18.00 with 7 Bishops and some 50 priests from all over the region in attendance. Many of the Pilgrims assisted at the Mass from the Piazza in front of the church as there was no place for them all in



the actual church. It was a very special celebration with lovely hymns. Everything was an invitation to prayer and recollection. Mons. Vitalii, Bishop of Kiev, Berdichev's diocese, presided.

The whole atmosphere was close-knit and friendly and Mass had been prepared with great reverence and care. I had been told that I was to preach. I praised the Faith and perseverance of believers in Ukraine and I recalled their singing of the Alleluia at the last Easter celebration and the impression their resilient Faith had made on me then. I thanked them for

their witness and the sheer joy of their trust. I told them about a Sister Emanuela, a Carmelite nun from the Regina Carmeli convent in Rome, who had died during the past year. She had been approved for a transfer to Kiev in the 90s but was unable to come there due to fibroidmiasma which had her confined to bed for 22 years. She was always smiling and prayed continually for the people of Ukraine and Russia. Her grandmother was Russian from Siberia. I also spoke about so many similar people that struggle and support the world from their unseen places of prayer.

After Communion we celebrated an emotionally filled ritual both for me personally and for everybody present. At the Shrine of the Infant of Prague in Arenzano, Italy, I had been presented with a statue of the Child Jesus and asked to bring it to the Virgin of Berdichev and offer it to the people of Ukraine. The title of the Infant is KING OF PEACE and I presented it to the whole congregation that responded with huge applause. I then proceeded to the expected Act of Consecration of the whole Carmelite Order to Our Lady of Carmel, placing the entire Carmelite family in her hands.



"MOTHER OF GOD OF BERDICHEV, HOLY MARY OF MOUNT CARMEL, OUR MOTHER AND SISTER, QUEEN OF PEACE, WITH A SINGLE HEART AND SOUL, WE WANT TO OFFER YOU IN HOMAGE OF OUR LIVING AND CONSCIOUS GRATITUDE, IN THIS HOUR OF DIFFICULTY AND OF HOPE, OF SUFFERING AND OF TRUST, WE COME BEFORE YOU WITH THE CRIES AND SUPPLICATIONS OF ALL YOUR SONS

AND DAUGHTERS.

VIRGIN OF CONTEMPLATION AND OF SILENCE,
HOLY MARY LISTENING AT THE PRESENT MOMENT,
MOTHER OF HOPE WHO ANSWERS ALWAYS,
BREATH OF LIFE IN DIFFICULTY, SAFE HAND IN
DISASTER AND DESOLATION, THE PATH THAT
ALWAYS LEADS TO JESUS, THE SHORE OF HOPE,
AND THE MANTLE THAT PROTECTS IN EVERY
DANGER...

I (WE) CONSECRATE ALL OF CARMEL TO YOU,
ALL HER SONS AND DAUGHTERS THROUGHOUT
THE WORLD, FRIARS, NUNS AND LAY MEMBERS,
FAMILIES AND FRIENDS, WE ARE YOURS AND
FLY FOR REFUGE IN YOUR HEART, SO THAT YOU
MAY BE TOTALLY OUR MOTHER, FRIEND AND
COMPANION, THAT WE MAY BE BORN ANEW, FOR
A NEW CHURCH IN YOUR IMMACULATE HEART,
A FAITHFUL CHURCH, DISCIPLE OF YOUR SON. I
ENTRUST TO YOU ALL THE PEOPLE OF UKRAINE,
WHO TRUST IN YOU, FROM YOUR HOME HERE IN
BERDICHEV, AND ALL THE PILGRIMS WHO HAVE
COME TODAY TO CELEBRATE YOUR FEAST

WE ARE YOURS AND ABANDON OURSELVES IN
YOUR HANDS AND TRUST IN YOU

HOLY MOTHER OF GOD OF BERDICHEV,
MOTHER AND BEAUTY OF CARMEL.

PRAY FOR US.”



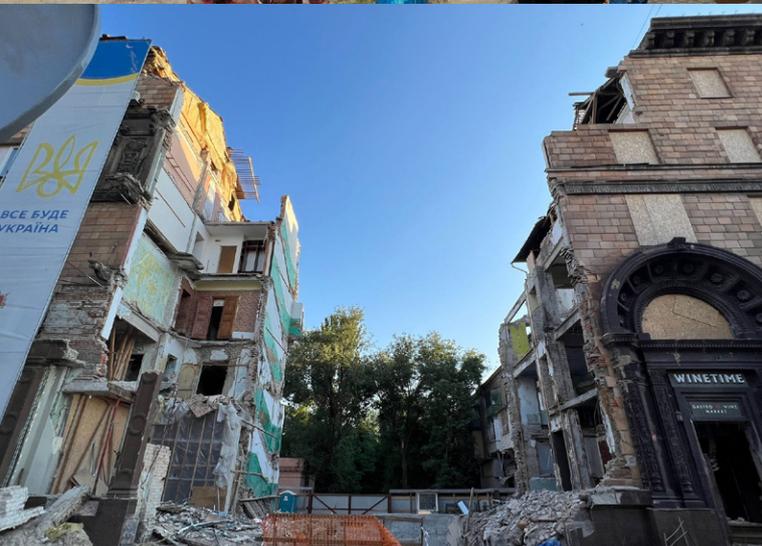
A vibrant moment, full of emotion.

After our Mass we took part in one of Berdichev's traditions where the Consul for Poland in Ukraine invites all the Bishops and foreign Ambassadors to a special reception. The custom is that every guest gives a speech and expresses his sentiments about the current situation in Ukraine! I spoke of my pride in the fact that the Virgin of Carmel is Patron of Ukraine Catholics and that my Brothers help to guide and support the people. I also spoke of the two armies of Carmelites, our brothers, in front-line assistance, confessing and preaching and of our second army, our sisters, praying in silent contemplation and in the unseen but efficacious offering of their lives. It was a very gratifying privilege to be able to share in this traditional meal. I was seated between the Croatian ambassador, a staunch Christian, and the Bishop of Kiev, with Thadeusz acting as our interpreter.

During the night we attended a vigil for a short while. The Pilgrims pray all through the night until 6 in the morning.

This Saturday has been an intense day, full of emotions. I give thanks for being here at this precise moment in history. I keep repeating to everyone that all Carmel

is united in celebrating with the Ukrainian people and with all people at war or in difficult circumstances of poverty or being deprived of freedom. May Mary enfold all of us in her mantle and keep us in her embrace of Hope and of New Life. In that way She will keep us always close to Life and the Fount of Salvation.



Sunday 16 July

We start the day with the gift of being HERE. I do not believe that we could be in a better place to celebrate the Feast of Carmel today. The sensation of all Carmel being united around our Mother and Sister fills me with special joy. She summons us and unites us under her mantle.

From early morning music is being played from all the squares near the monastery and in the piazza in front of the Sanctuary itself. Pilgrims arrive from different places. Last year everybody remembers that the feast had to be celebrated in the protected bunker under the church because there had been several days of bombing beforehand around Berdichev and the authorities had forbidden any kind of open air gatherings. This years the Pilgrims are not as numerous as they had been before the war but there is still a joyful and festive air about with the sounds of war at a somewhat further remove.

At 9.30 a.m. we have an informal meeting



and breakfast with the Bishops in the monastery. Different Bishops continue to arrive as well as the Nuncio (Lithuanian), Mons Visvaldas Kulbokas, the President of the JMJ Lisbon Foundation 2023, the Portuguese Bishop Americo Aguiar (one of those recently nominated as a new Cardinal by Pope Francis), the Archbishop of Lviv who had been secretary of Pope John Paul II for some years, as well as other Ukrainian and Polish Bishops and some Provincials and other priests.

The Church square is packed with people, all saluting each other with great excitement and joy. There are 14 Bishops and about 40 priests at the solemn celebration with a magnificent choir. The young 49 year old Nuncio presides.

There is a fitting sense of prayer and communion all through the Mass. At both the beginning and conclusion various representatives of the Bishops speak as well as the Mayor, the Polish Ambassador to Ukraine, the Bishop of Kiev and Frs. Vitaly and Benedict, the OCD Prior and Delegate respectively. At the end, I thank them for the honour it is for us to be guardians of this National Shrine of the Mother of all Ukrainians. I also add that we are celebrating the 150th anniversary of the birth of St. Therese of Lisieux, who was a missionary with her prayer and sacrifices. I refer to the two essential dimensions of Carmel: visible and active engagement but also contemplation, hidden, but so efficacious and no less valuable. Lucia of Fatima was also a Carmelite I remind them. I conclude by thanking everyone for this memorable celebration, including those who could not be present.

Our lunch was at a spot near a river in front of Berdichev, a river so broad that it seems like a lake. Bishops and authorities all took part. Everybody joins in exhilarating chat. Mons. Mieczyslaw Mokrzycki who had been secretary for Pope John Paul II in his last 9 years, 1996-2005, and for the first 3 years for Benedict XVI, was particularly interesting. We depart for Kiev at 18.45 arriving there at 21.40. A lot has to be prepared for our journey tomorrow to the South East of the country. We have 2 vehicles: one is full of food and other medical appliances for the military ambulances.

Conversation with the community in Kiev continues until midnight. Marek,

Benedict, Jan, the two volunteers who will accompany us, Thadeusz, Pawel and a servant are all involved. We discuss the war situation as well as our plans for the journey tomorrow. We are going to visit the nearest zone to the war front to consign our medical supplies.

The brothers recall how difficult relations had been between the Ukrainians and Poles in earlier times. They talk about a hushed-up genocide of 80 years ago, in 1943, in Volinia where more than 100,000 people died. A strong and dangerous nationalist element still remains.

They tell me about those displaced by the war. In certain areas of Ukraine there are many who have not great facility to escape from the country. They refer to corruption that is rife and to a lot of people who are profiting from the war.

Benedict outlines tomorrow's plan. In Zaporizhia we will meet the Medics, the Bishop, celebrate the Eucharist and visit the city.

It has been a very intense day with so much to be grateful for – so much life, commitment, devotion and solidarity. I am exhausted but so grateful to my brothers and the simple people who struggle and work for others.



Monday 17 July

We commence our day at 6.30. Benedict says it has been the first night that he did not hear warning sirens since the war began.

At 7.00 we leave our parish in Kiev headed for Zaporizhia in the southeast, a 7 hour journey away. We will approach the conflict zone in what will be another full and intense day. We recite Morning Prayer and the Angelus and confide ourselves to Mary, who we feel is truly our Mother and Refuge.

We travel in 2 vehicles, a car and a truck that is full of food and medical equipment for the ambulances that deal with wounded soldiers and medical teams in some hospital.

We speak with the medics and the bishop to learn more about how the war is progressing in their experience. We make various stops on our journey and meet up with a military convoy that is a few kilometres long.

After roughly 550 Kilometres we reach Zaporizhia. The auxiliary Polish Bishop, Jan Sobilo, welcomes us to the Bishop's residence. He is very kind and caring. We celebrate Mass with about 40 people and Vitaly presides.

We meet up with a medical team that look after the wounded on the front-line. They tell us that every day young soldiers die and they recover those they can. The equipment we have brought them is invaluable. We were

able to bring them equipment to perform electrocardiograms as well as some food. They are so grateful. These are volunteer medics and doctors from Kiev and Eastern areas of the country. The Bishop's residence also organizes medical supplies and food for the people.

Before the war this city had a population of one million. Now it is 300,000. But this drastically reduced number also includes many others who have arrived from Mariupol, Melitopol etc. 80% of the zone is occupied by Russians and only 20%, (where we are now), is under Ukraine. The Bishop brings us on a walk through the city. He has been here for 30 years and is well versed in the reality of the situation.

We visit the river which hardly holds any water now, The dam at Dnieper, in Nuova Kachowka, was destroyed by the Russians just a month ago, 6 June 2023, and many people were killed.

The Russians have occupied the atomic station of Zaporizhia in Enerhodar. A massive ecological disaster could occur. It is the largest nuclear centre in all of Europe - 4 times the size of Chernobyl. They say that the war will continue in this 20% of territory not yet occupied by Russia. It is only a question of time. They have threatened to contaminate the rivers with thousands of barrels of radioactive residue. That could cause an incredible ecological disaster reaching as far as the Black Sea, Putin has promised that this territory will either belong to Russia or to nobody.

There are 11 hospitals here. All are filled to capacity with young wounded soldiers from the war. They are already having to discharge some of these poor wounded soldiers due to lack of space.

We continue a conversation with the Bishop and a young lady volunteer, Olena, from Nuova Kachowka whose family have already fled to Lviv in the East. She is a journalist but is chiefly engaged in organizing medical assistance for the hospitals and the front-line.

It is frightening to hear how calmly they tell us that, sooner or later, the war will extend to this area. One day or another, anytime. And they beseech me to pray and supplicate.

From our conversations with the Bishop and all those present it becomes abundantly clear how poorly the situation is internationally



informed and understood and how vital the role of the USA is in the entire conflict. Another surprising fact was how often the general public and young people (of Ukraine) are lacking in interest or engagement in the conflict, while others are being killed in battle on the front-lines. They tell us too, that it is quite difficult to find chaplains to assist the troops who need a spiritual presence. Many chaplains have been killed too. I come back to bring scapulars and rosaries that soldiers have requested. A 90 year old friar, Santiago, has made many of these by hand and I am delivering them today. Our Carmelite sister in Haifa, Nazareth and Piacenza and elsewhere have all prepared rosaries and scapulars. All of Carmel is present here with its prayer and its heart, asking for Peace for all God's people.

Tomorrow, 18, we advance to the area nearest the front-line where we will deliver the remainder of the medical supplies.



Tuesday 18 July

We begin our day with a Concelebrated Mass in the Pro-cathedral at 8 in the morning. There are about 60 in the congregation, but only 10 men. The vast majority of the males are involved in the war.

After the Mass a large crowd is around the Bishop's house and its surroundings, waiting for food. 4 days each week about 1,500 people come to collect bread and tinned food from the Albertine Brothers and others who help in similar distributions from the Bishop's house.

At 9.30, accompanied by the Bishop and Olena, we set off towards the war zone. On the journey Olena shows us the material to be used and gives us a crash course in making tourniquets should we be wounded. She warns us that one must be prepared for all eventualities every day in Zaporizhia. Missiles are being launched continuously. This morning, as the Bishop elevated the chalice, sirens went off and it was the same during the night. We heard these alarms numerous times during these days.

In 2012 the population of the Kharkiv-Zaporizhia diocese was 20 million, 1% of this being Catholic. The population today is roughly 10 million. The diocese would include all the following cities: Donetsk (better known to us as Danbas), Dnipropetrovsk, Lugansk, Poltava, Sumi and Oblast of Zaporiyia.





We arrive at a city near the battle front but I have been asked not to name it in this diary. We meet various ambulances travelling in the opposite direction to ourselves. We also pass a number of military checkpoints where we have to present our documents of identification.

We reach the hospital at 11 a.m. A surgical doctor explains that this is one of a number of locations where the wounded are transported. They have to keep changing these locations because both hospitals and ambulances are also under attack. They have some vehicles that can travel where there are no normal roads or passages. The doctor tells us that there is no light here (both metaphorically and in reality). You have no light at the front. "Here there isn't any civilization". He tells us about their living conditions in trenches or burrows where they hide and take a shower with one litre of water. He shows us living quarters with basic bunks and other buildings that house up to 10 wounded men. We greet a few of these. One nurse asks me for a blessing. When I ask her how many injured persons she treats per day she replies that she is forbidden to share such data.

At 11.20 the sirens sound again. The show us the ambulances that are used to recover the wounded.

An especially joyful moment is when we are able to hand over all the medical and health appliances that we have brought with us. The doctors are so grateful for the supplies of defibrillators, electrocardiogram apparatus, heart monitors and respirators... we get a heartfelt hug from the director of surgical operations. We were also able to offer them sanitary clothing and bandages and folding stretchers to recover the wounded etc...It was possible to buy all these medical features with the money that you sent from all over the

world to the account set up in the General House for the war in Ukraine. The doctor thanks me so sincerely and asks me to extend that gratitude to all those who donated to the fund.

As we leave the hospital precincts we have a final glimpse of wounded soldiers with crutches and bandages in the garden. The doctor did add one frightening remark: perhaps this war will waken people up. Let us hope that it does.

Our original intention had been to advance to a position much closer to the front lines and just a few kilometres from the actual battleground. However, we were dissuaded by the risk. We were reminded that the Pope's almoner, Cardinal Konrad Krajewski, had come from the Vatican the previous October to study the situation and offer assistance and had been shot at, fortunately without any serious consequences.

We decided to return to Zaporizhia where we lunched and started back for Kiev at 14.30. We bade farewell to Mons. Jan and Olena. We really enjoyed their company and they had received us with such affection. The Bishop also said goodbye with great gratitude and cordiality. He is a Bishop who is appreciated so much by his people.

Our return journey is long with very poor roads and will take about 7 hours so we do not expect to arrive before midnight. At one stage it rained cats and dogs. Later on the sky cleared and we had beautiful scenery during the evening. We recited Vespers as we travelled and arrived in Kiev at 22.30.

We chatted for a while with Marek and Benedict who told us about the amount of people who come to the parish to talk and to beg for food and medicine, including some Orthodox believers as well. Initially the government supplemented those who assisted the homeless and evacuees, but when this official aid dried



up, some families stopped helping those in such need. There are people who really suffer from hunger. The Parish Fathers saw how those that came to their doors would eat as though they had not eaten for a full week.

Marek and Benedict also shared how they had gone to the front lines to hear Confessions and help the soldiers but, after being shot at, had to leave without being able to see the soldiers at all. Our two Brothers are so relaxed during our fraternal conversation at the end of such an eventful day and are so grateful that the Provincial and General are spending time with them.

Marek tells us that he had entrusted the Parish and Kiev to Saint Joseph and that great saint has saved them.

I now entrust to the prayers of all who read these pages the lives of everyone we have encountered on this journey. I include all who are suffering and all who have initiated this war, the families, children and the most vulnerable, those who excuse, profit from or share in its corruption. I pray also for all those who ignore or look the other way while the media pays no attention to what is happening.

At the end of this day I realise that I have met so many good people who struggle and get involved, who pray and entreat unceasingly. I am filled with joy and pride in our brothers who are accompanying and encouraging those

in need, knowing that we must all help and support each other. I remember that the most decisive battles are fought here where we are, at the heart of our own families and communities, in our own localities and at our work, very often hidden conflicts caused by our own unconscious egoism, lack of humanity, our lack of love for others. I only pray that God awakens us and enlightens us so that we don't delude ourselves and remain asleep, that all these pandemics, earthquakes and wars will help us to pay attention to what is essential and not give in to the easier options, imprisoned in our own selves. May God help us realise that the wounded flesh of any of our neighbours is the wounded flesh of Christ that cries out for healing, bandaging and care, while you too are wounded and frightened about what may happen.

I finish up this day well past midnight with these reflections. Tomorrow we will visit Kiev, with somethings already organized and others unexpected. With an embrace and blessing from Kiev.

As I conclude these lines, a Ukrainian journalist informs me that at midnight and again at 2 in the morning the city of Zaporizhia, which we just left yesterday after spending a day and a half there, was heavily bombarded. We will find out later what has happened.



I arrive at the church at the side of our monastery and come across a lady praying aloud, joined her. Others gradually arrive as the time for Mass approaches.

Mass begins at 8 with a congregation of 8. Among these is Weronika, the responsible person for OCDS in Kiev and indeed, for all of Ukraine. In a short video from the garden of our monastery in Ukraine, we are able to send a greeting to the Secular Carmelites of the whole world.

Another very special guest at that Mass today was Mother Maria, Prioress of the Carmelite nuns of Kiev. She and her community have spent the last 18 months as displaced persons in a locality, given them by the Jesuits, Czestochowa. She has come to see the state of her monastery here, with a view to a possible return to Kiev.

We have breakfast with our 2 guests. Mother Mary tells us about her life here before the war and of the present situation. Neighbours help them a lot. She says God's goodness is never absent and people are so good. The community has no pension or benefits. They live from day to day without any money in the bank.

At 11 we go with Mother Maria to her convent. We examine the building, the chapel and the garden. Everything is in good order. A Polish very responsible handyman, called Robert, has looked after the property during the past 18 months. He had actually worked there since 2004. Officially he is an art restorer and looked after practically everything in the monastery. The building had been hit by 2 missiles but they had not caused any outbreak of fire.

We leave Kiev at 14.10 and arrive at Berdichev for 16.00. We will join our community for Evening Prayer and for a final festive celebration.

Rafal brings me for a walk to the bridge that crosses the river. This is a beautiful spot from where our Shrine is divided. During the World War, 1939 to 1945, our Monastery and Church were occupied by the Russians.

An interesting fact is that in the XIX century 80% of the population in Berdichev was Jewish. Then in the years 1940 to 45, I am told that some 19,000 Jews were eliminated in the space of 2 days in the city and its



surroundings. There are around 1,000 burial sites adjacent to our monastery. History is a teacher, they say, but human beings never learn...at times it even seems that we go from bad to worse with an utter lack of consciousness.

In the bunker, under our Church, there is the possibility of a safe refuge for everybody. Since the beginning of the war, any time the sirens warn or when it is cold in the houses due to lack of heating, those who wish can flee from the city down here. It is used too, especially for the children. In the school, which was our monastery, they give classes to about 700 children. As soon as the sirens sound, they flee under the church. They bought projectors for cinema shows, they provide coffee and heating and have wifi facilities so that people can stay connected with each other. They also have a supply of mattresses for those who wish to sleep if necessary. At the moment, however, even when the sirens go off, hardly anybody comes down to the bunker.

At 8 o'clock we gather in the Church to say the Rosary together. They do this every day, on line, and have a huge audience. It is a very moving moment. We pray for Peace in Ukraine and in the world. They are mostly young people who attend. The Friars are at the front in their habits and white mantles, kneeling all the time. At the end of the devotions, I thank all the young people who look after Rafal and accompany him. About 70 of them will be going off to the mountains for a few days, to get away from everything here. Recently some young people who never came to church were invited by the other youngsters and they too started coming. A few years ago, Fr. Rafal Myszkowski was invited to organise and offer to the little ones and adolescents a place for meeting together and discussing things, as well as for catechesis. Some of

the children tell me that their parents are at the front. One is waiting for his father to return before he himself gets married.

Our day concludes with supper on the roof of the monastery, behind the fortified enclosure.

We had a chance to talk about everything that has been happening these past few days in the East, in Zaporizhia and in the hospital with the wounded.

Thursday 20 July

We leave Berdichev at 5.30 a.m., at sunrise. Today our visit to Ukraine comes to an end.

Before reaching the border with Poland, we visit Lviv. It is one of the focal points for frequent enemy attacks. Normally there are 70,000 inhabitants in Lviv, but now, since the outset of the war, there are more than 1 million. So many evacuees and refugees have escaped from the East to this part of the country.

We pay a visit to the Monastery of St. Michael, a Monastery of Greek-Catholic monks. The Superior, Alipij, a very genial monk, welcomes us and explains everything about his home to us. Today, being the Feast of the Prophet Elias, he shows us into a beautiful chapel which is full of icons referring to the life of the Prophet. This place was a Monastery and Church of Carmelites during the first half of the XVII century. It also has frescoes depicting the life of St. Teresa and other Carmelite saints. The Greek-Catholic monks are now the guardians.

Taras Antoszewski, an expert in the art and history of Lviv, conducts us on a guided tour of the city. Lviv is full of ancient buildings, churches and monuments. Because of its beauty, it has been called "Little Paris of the East".

Taras tells us that the war will continue for a long time still. He speaks about politics. During these days a lot of missiles have reached Kiev, Odessa, Zaporizhia, Lviv, etc. Everyone that we speak to has their own personal interpretation of the war and the politics of the country...We pass by the side of St. George's Park, which had been a garrison of the KGB. With this visit and a meal in a typical restaurant of the region, we conclude our days in Ukraine.

At 16.30 we pass the border towards Poland. We stop at Przemysl for a technical break and



to greet our Brothers and celebrate Mass in our beautiful Carmelite Church.

So many impressions remain from these days. The gratitude of all our Brothers there for our visit was so moving. The joy they experienced at their General and Provincial being with them and encouraging them and, through these Superiors, the whole Carmelite Order and so many others who sent messages of affinity and support, was tangible. Other things that made a lasting impression were the prayers of the ordinary people in their churches, as a silent but effective army, the help of so many people with food and medicines, the numerous volunteers and the invaluable work of the Church, accompanying, supporting, blessing. We could never forget the wounded soldiers that we visited in the hospital near the front lines, the coming and going of people in the cities as though everything were normal while all the while their men-fold and younger men and even women were at war, fighting and dying. We will continue to see the interminable fields of sunflowers (one of Ukraine's symbols) all over the country. Could we ever forget the fecundity



and richness of this land, so wounded and yet so full of life, and, precisely because of this, such a target of bitter dispute.

I beseech the Mother of Berdichev, Virgin of the Scapular, to look after her daughters and sons of Ukraine and of the whole world, these people here for whom there is not even a glimpse of their war ending. I ask Her that the hoped-for peace will not just be the silencing of bombs and missiles, but a whole change of conscience in the united construction of another kind of society with different values. May she inspire in us a new wisdom that is so sadly lacking at this moment in our history, so that we will view war in any people or country as 'ours' and each wounded or dead person as our daughter



or son, not merely another number. I pray for all the silent wars seething inside so many people and in so many families who are conscious of and rebel against so much economic interest, politics, ideological and dehumanizing manipulation. May our lives not be reduced to mere words and discourses, like my present chronicle which I conclude here and thank you for reading, but instead may we put ourselves at risk while we consider granting a voice and dignity to everybody else, who are my sisters and brothers without exception, my family.

May God bless you, enlighten us and show us the way.

Fr Miguel Calle
Cracovia, 21 July 2023





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