

# Pastoral Message: March 13, 2022

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During our Bible study this week, someone had an interesting insight about this image from Genesis of the promise of Abraham that God tells Abraham to “look up and count the stars if you can,” and the promise that “so shall your descendants be.” The person pointed out that maybe this revelation came during the day time when one cannot see the stars, but holds out in faith that they are still there. Another person applied the word hope. We discussed the crisis of war in Ukraine, that we cannot lose hope, that the world needs it even when we cannot see it.

I have heard two stories in the last week of hope and courage in Ukraine. The first was a story that a friend of mine wrote about in his blog. A Ukrainian Orthodox priest with churches in Wheeling, WV, and Carnegie, PA, Father Jason Charron, the Pittsburgh Post Gazette reports, decided to leave his wife and children behind for a short period to go to Eastern Europe with the hope of adopting 5 orphans. When they got there, the 5 turned into 22. Father Jason said “we have to do this. These kids are in danger; you can only plan so far” and “if these kids get to Slovakia or you get them to Poland, or get them anywhere outside Ukraine they are going to be in better shape than they are right now.” Father Jason reported the little orphans “were just looking for a bed to sleep in at night and to have a meal, to be able to breathe without fear of bombs or missiles.”

The second story I read was of a group of Roman Catholic Oblates and a story of a Fr Pavlo Vyshnski who is a missionary parish priest serving at St Nicholas Catholic Church in the capital of Kyiv. Fr Pavlo, when asked if he would leave, said he will not abandon his post and those entrusted to his care. Fr Pavlo’s community will continue to provide for basic needs and people’s spiritual needs as well. He says “people are losing their parents, their children, their mums, their dads every day.” They continue to have Mass, Eucharistic Adoration, and Liturgy of the Hours, posting it on Facebook so people can watch it. Fr Pavlo reports that they have seen miracles such as bombs that did not explode, and people with extraordinary strength after not sleeping for 11 days. We may wonder if our prayers make a difference, and prayer is a mystery, but Fr Pavlo believes they do and asks that we continue to pray for him and his people.

These are two stories of courage, faith, and, ultimately, hope. Today at the Mount of Transfiguration we hear of Jesus and some of his closest companions going up a mountain. On the mountain top, Jesus is joined by Moses and Elijah. Moses could identify with Jesus’ call knowing what it was like to lead people out of slavery as could Elijah, the fiery prophet who stood up to the false gods to set people free and had to flee for his life. They supported Jesus on this mountain as he prepared to climb another mountain, the mountain of Calvary where he would suffer and die to set us free. I would suggest the Mountain of Transfiguration is a mountain where we get new perspective prayer for a new reality for our world. May we listen to the Lord and not be like Peter to become frozen on that mountain when there is so much suffering in the valley below. May we be inspired by Father Jason Charron and Fr Pavlo who have the courage to climb the mountain of Calvary with the fiery spirit of Elijah and the liberating spirit of Moses, to follow in Jesus’ footsteps to Jerusalem or eastern Europe or Kyiv to set people free. May we be inspired through our prayers and actions to do what we can to help.