News



Major Archbishop Sviatoslav Shevchuk, patriarchal head of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, processes into the sanctuary at the Ukrainian Catholic National Shrine of the Holy Family in Washington, during a Feb. 18, 2025, prayer service for peace in Ukraine amid Russia's full-scale invasion. (OSV News/Gina Christian)

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Hope in Christ and that God's truth will prevail amid Russia's war on Ukraine was the message that Major Archbishop Sviatoslav Shevchuk, the patriarchal head of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, shared time and again during his Feb. 15-21 Jubilee Year pastoral visit to the United States.

"God is near. We stand because millions of people around the world, people like you, pray for us and support us," said the archbishop, speaking during a Feb. 16 prayer service at the Cathedral Basilica of Sts. Peter and Paul in Philadelphia. "They believe that goodness and truth have their own divine power and evil, lies and death will never have a final word."

The major archbishop's multifaceted pastoral visit — which saw him in almost round-the-clock events in Philadelphia and Washington — aimed to "bring healing and hope to our community," according to the Ukrainian Catholic Archeparchy of Philadelphia.

While the universal Catholic Church is observing a Jubilee Year dedicated to hope, Ukraine is marking the third anniversary of Russia's full-scale invasion just as the Trump administration has suspended foreign assistance, made demands that Ukraine cede its mineral rights to cover costs of previous aid, and bypassed Ukraine to engage in direct ceasefire talks with Russia.

The major archbishop's visit to the U.S. also coincided with President Donald Trump accusing Ukraine of "starting" the war and calling Ukraine's democratically-elected President Volodymyr Zelenskyy a "dictator " — even though Ukraine's constitution prohibits holding an election during times of martial law.

Shevchuk's visit began with a Feb. 15-16 spiritual renewal program hosted by the archeparchy at its Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception in Philadelphia. The two-day gathering drew hundreds for prayer, reflections, speakers, fellowship and catechesis, as well as a Divine Liturgy presided over by Shevchuk and joined by other Ukrainian Greek Catholic bishops. Their Latin Church counterpart, Archbishop

Nelson Pérez of Philadelphia, hosted them for a Feb. 16 prayer service at the city's Cathedral Basilica of Sts. Peter and Paul.

Speaking at the prayer service, Shevchuk — who leads the Archeparchy of Kyiv-Halych, Ukraine — described the full-scale invasion to date as "three years of death and destruction, struggle and suffering, tears and sweat; three harsh winters, three scorching summers," with "power outages and blackouts, strikes on civilians, attacks on infrastructure."

"Our people, our cities, our land bear deep wounds," he said. "Each time I return from my travels, I witness with sorrow that something else has gone: another building ... another scar on the body of my beloved Ukraine."

The major archbishop then traveled to Washington for the second part of his pastoral visit, where he delivered a Feb. 18 lecture at The Catholic University of America and led a prayer service for peace at the nearby Ukrainian Catholic National Shrine of the Holy Family.

On Feb. 20, he inaugurated the St. Gabriel's Institute, a partnership between the Lviv-based Ukrainian Catholic University and the UGCC to promote church diplomacy, with 11 students now completing an internship at the UGCC's St. Josaphat Seminary in Washington.

Later that same day, he gave a talk at the Hudson Institute — a Washington-based think tank focusing on security and economic policy — on a just peace in Ukraine, with particular emphasis on Russia's religious persecution in occupied areas, and Moscow's abuse of Orthodox Christianity to promote aggression against Ukraine.

Throughout his pastoral visit — in a sit-down interview with OSV News, in his homilies and in his talks — Shevchuk underscored the need for a just peace in Ukraine that addressed the root causes of Russia's aggression.

That aggression — which has been declared a genocide in two joint reports from the New Lines Institute and the Raoul Wallenberg Centre for Human Rights — continues attacks launched in 2014, a point that Shevchuk stressed throughout his visit.

"Every Ukrainian longs for peace, for nights without air raid sirens, for mornings without explosions, for days without casualties, and nights without fear," he said, speaking in Philadelphia. "But a ceasefire is not peace. … A truce that leaves people

suffering under occupation is a cruel mockery. Without justice, peace is impossible."

He also emphasized that Russia's invasion — marked by mass killings of civilians, the forcible transfer of more than 19,500 Ukrainian children, sexual violence and the execution of Ukrainian prisoners of war — continues 20th-century Russian aggression against Ukraine. He also recalled the Soviet persecution of the UGCC, with the visible structures of the church "liquidated" and faithful forced to practice in secret until 1989.

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"History has shown that every time Russia occupies Ukraine, our church faces persecution and attempts at eradication," he said.

"Today is no exception," he said, pointing out that the Ukrainian Catholic Church "has been declared illegal in the territories of Eastern Ukraine that are temporarily occupied by Russia."

Shevchuk, who grew up in the underground UGCC, said his church's security services had informed him he was among those on a "kill list" discovered in the invasion's early days.

"I am still on that list," he added. "And yet, by God's grace, after three years, I stand here with you. ... And Ukraine is still standing. Ukraine is still fighting. Ukraine is still praying."

Visibly moved at a number of points in his visit, Shevchuk said that "solidarity keeps us standing."

"Your support empowers me to wipe away the tears of widows and orphans who have lost their loving mothers — to find the right words for our wounded soldiers and to console those whose homes and lives have been shattered," he said. "We draw our strength from you, your prayers, your generosity, your presence. ... I am deeply grateful for your love, your compassion and your charity."

During his lecture at The Catholic University of America, he said that "in Ukraine, hope has different faces."

"Living in Kyiv ... I observe the birth of a new culture, a culture of profound sacrifice and ultimate generosity, a culture of hope, which is deeply rooted in the Gospel — even though people professing it sometimes would call themselves agnostics, and don't have a clear notion of God," he said.

The concrete experience of rebuilding after each Russian attack attests to such hope, he said.

"You can imagine an electrician who, each day after the drone attacks, has to reconnect the cables in order to give us light," he said. "They know that maybe tomorrow, with a new rocket attack, their work will be destroyed. But each day, they are reconnecting those cables."

Similarly, "doctors, nurses, who each day are supposed to heal the wounds of children, civilians ... do know that tomorrow somebody else will be injured," he said. "But generously, each day, they are saving human lives."

Young generations of Ukrainians "have the courage to create new families, to bring into this world their kids."

Ultimately, he said, the "immense sacrifice" of Ukrainians to defend not only their sovereignty but human dignity itself is sustained, explicitly or unconsciously, by an awareness of the divine.

"We can resist guilt and hatred, and we have hope precisely because we do believe in God," he explained in his homily at Philadelphia's Cathedral Basilica of Sts. Peter and Paul. "We believe that it is he who executes justice for the oppressed, gives food to the hungry. The Lord sets the prisoners free, protects the strangers, upholds the orphans and the widowed. We know that God is with us."

This story appears in the **War in Ukraine** feature series. View the full series.