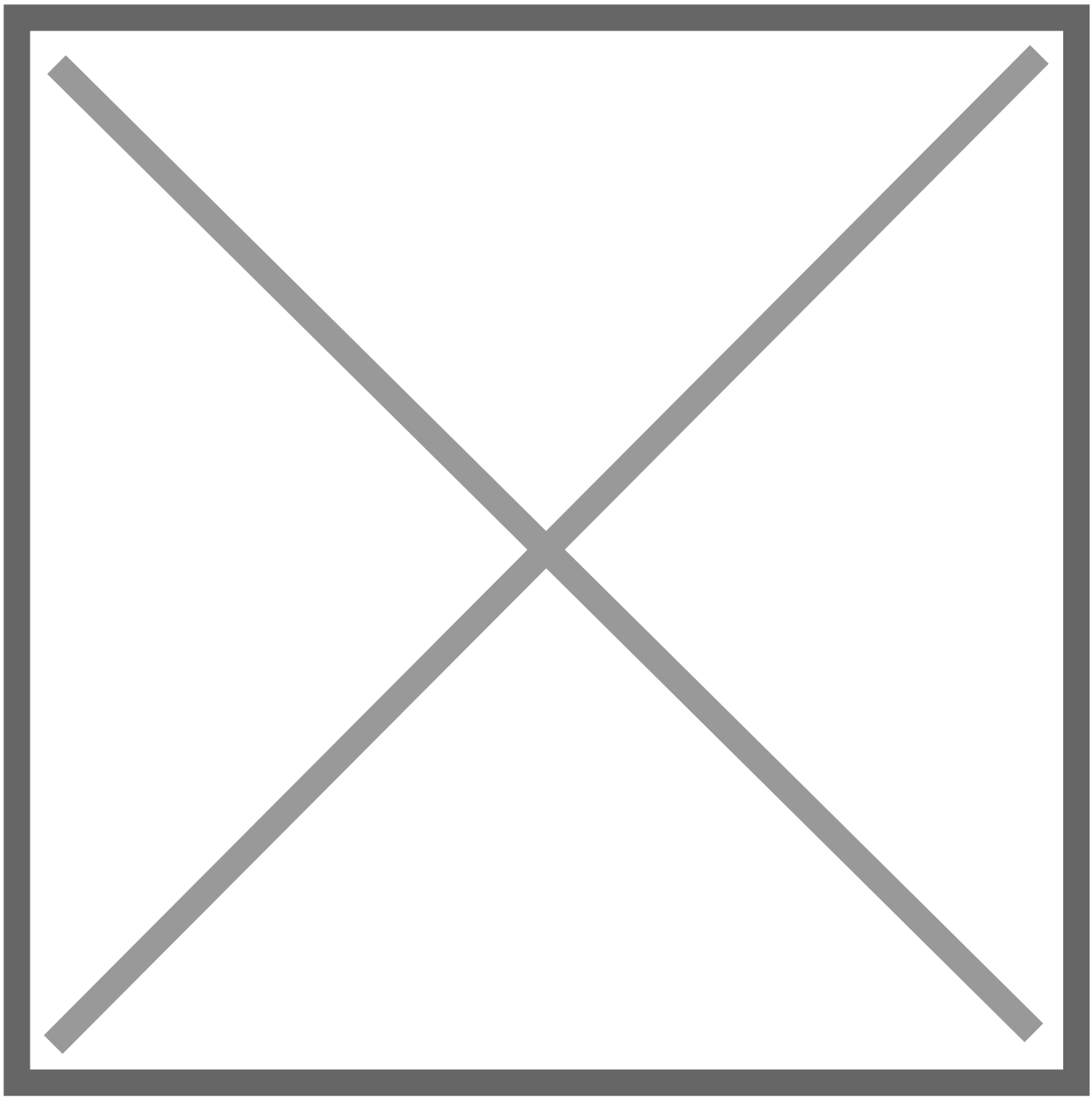
News



U.S. President Donald Trump and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy shakes hands during a news conference after their lunch meeting at Trump's Mar-a-Lago club in Palm Beach, Fla., Dec. 28, 2025. Trump said he believes both Zelenskyy and Russian President Vladimir Putin truly want peace, as he welcomed the "brave" Ukrainian leader for talks at his Florida resort. (OSV News/Reuters/Jonathan Ernst)



Jonathan Luxmoore

View Author Profile



OSV News

View Author Profile

Join the Conversation

Send your thoughts to *Letters to the Editor*. Learn more

Odessa, Ukraine — December 29, 2025

Share on BlueskyShare on FacebookShare on TwitterEmail to a friendPrint

The Catholic bishop ministering in Ukraine's only surviving Black Sea port has urged Americans to continue upholding truth and justice, following new talks between Presidents Donald Trump and Volodymyr Zelenskyy in Florida.

"I remember how we listened to the Voice of America radio station when I was a child under Soviet rule, and always knew it presented the truth, standing up for human rights and suffering people," said Bishop Stanislav Szyrokoradiuk of Odesa-Simferopol.

"To hear this same voice today defending the evildoer and demanding we reward him for his crimes is deeply shocking and hurtful. Yet we know this isn't the true voice of Americans," the bishop said, pointing out that people "who've taken power" in the U.S. aren't "interested in truth and justice."

The bishop spoke following Zelenskyy's Dec. 28 meeting with Trump, during which a U.S.-brokered 20-point peace plan was discussed for ending Russia's bloody four-

year invasion.

In an OSV News interview, Szyrokoradiuk said he still had confidence in ordinary Americans, and was "deeply grateful" for the help and solidarity shown to Ukrainians in their struggle for survival.

However, he added that he had only "faint hopes" for the latest peace talks and distrusted U.S. negotiators who believed evil should be "softened rather than sanctioned."

"Wickedness should be punished — to ensure its perpetrators no longer steal and kill," Szyrokoradiuk told OSV News.

"How can we trust people to defend us and uphold our rights when they're clearly pursuing quite different interests of their own and are ready to do business with criminals? In the end, we can only pray for their conversion."

Speaking in the evening of Dec. 28, Trump said he believed the "making" of a "deal" to end the war were in sight, along with security guarantees for Ukraine, adding that he would talk to Russia's Vladimir Putin following his negotiations with Zelenskyy.

However, "very thorny issues" remained, the U.S. president said, including a ceasefire and the ceding of territory in Ukraine's eastern Donbas region to Moscow.

In his interview, Szyrokoradiuk said Russian attacks on Odesa, Ukraine's third largest city, had left much of its port area in ruins, and many of its one million inhabitants without water, electricity, light and heating.

He added that food deliveries had also been destroyed in recent missile and drone strikes, including 60 tons of cooking oil, but said local Catholic parishes, including Odesa's 19th-century Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary Cathedral, had their own generators and batteries, enabling local life to continue.

"Thank God we haven't been hit yet by freezing temperatures, something we still have to cope with," the bishop told OSV News.

"Although at least three of our churches have been smashed, people are still coming

to Mass in large numbers," he said, adding: "we pray constantly for peace."

Advertisement

Moscow continued pounding Ukraine's cities over Christmas in an apparent bid to weaken Kyiv's negotiating position, and claimed to have captured two frontline towns, although this was not confirmed by Ukrainian commanders.

In a Dec. 28 Sunday homily, the patriarchal head of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, Major Archbishop Sviatoslav Shevchuk, said he hoped "modern creators of history" would "stand on the right side, protecting human life from modern-day Herods," and called for prayers that "those making fateful decisions will be inspired by the Holy Spirit not to start wars, but to stop them."

Meanwhile, the head of Ukraine's independent Orthodox church, Metropolitan Epiphany (Dumenko) also compared Russia's rulers to the biblical King Herod, who had used "ostentatious, external religiosity" to conceal a "rejection of God's truth."

Preaching Dec. 28, he said divine retribution was "inevitable" for those who continued abducting Ukrainian children and raping Ukrainian women, as well as for Russia's Orthodox Patriarch Kirill, who had "blessed war, crimes and murders" from church pulpits.

In his interview, Szyrokoradiuk said he had despatched an "Open Letter to the American People" Dec. 22, deploring the "intense pressure" exerted by U.S. government representatives on Zelenskyy "to force him to agree for a reward for the Russian aggressor," and recalling how he had "always felt support from America" while persecuted for his faith under Soviet rule.

He added that the letter had been read to U.S. legislators by Mercy Kaptur, the longest-serving Congresswoman — from Ohio, and a Catholic of Ukrainian-Polish descent, and said he had since received "many messages" from fellow-bishops and Ukrainian Catholics echoing his "cry of the spirit" and "heartfelt pain."

"The Russians are attacking Odesa to block Ukraine's access to the sea — but they are seeking to destroy the whole of our country, and we must be allowed to defend ourselves," the bishop told OSV News.

"Unity and solidarity in holding back the aggressor isn't just a matter for Ukraine, but for everyone who hopes to prevent the building of a new Soviet-style evil empire."

The pope told journalists Dec. 23 he had felt "great sadness" that Moscow had "apparently refused" his request for a Christmas truce, and urged negotiating parties during his Christmas Day homily to "find courage to engage in sincere, direct and respectful dialogue."

Vatican News reported Dec. 27 the pontiff had dispatched three truckloads of humanitarian aid to Ukrainian regions worst affected by Russian attacks.

Szyrokoradiuk said he believed Leo XIV understood Ukraine's plight "much better" than his predecessor, Pope Francis, adding that he counted on the U.S.-born pontiff to continue encouraging Western Catholics to offer "appropriate support and prayers."

This story appears in the **War in Ukraine** feature series. View the full series.
A version of this story appeared in the **Jan. 16-29, 2026** print issue under the headline: Ukrainian bishop appeals to American people for justice.