



PASTORAL LETTER FROM THE BISHOP
appointed to be read
in all churches and chapels of the Diocese of Portsmouth
on 13th March 2022, the Second Sunday of Lent.

A MASSIVE SPIRITUAL CAMPAIGN

Dear Sisters and Brothers,

In autumn 1571, Europe faced an Armageddon. The Ottoman Turks, who had overrun the southern and eastern Mediterranean and latterly captured Cyprus, now threatened to invade continental Europe. Brutal and invincible, they had far greater firepower and twice the number of soldiers of the Holy League that opposed them.¹ If they had won, European civilisation, with its religious, social and cultural patrimony, would have been destroyed. It was a dire situation. In response, Pope St. Pius V initiated a massive spiritual campaign.² The churches of Italy were kept open day and night for prayer and sacraments; Christians were asked to undertake a deep, personal renewal and conversion of life, with prayer, self-denial and charity. Above all, everyone was encouraged to recite the Rosary, to invoke the help of the Blessed Virgin Mary.³ Then, on 7th October 1571, Western forces directly engaged the enemy. A great sea-battle took place at Lepanto, off the Greek coast, and against all the odds, the Ottomans were defeated.⁴ It was miraculous, and in thanksgiving to God, Pius V instituted a new feastday to be kept every year on 7th October, *Our Lady of Victories*, later known - to this day - as *Our Lady of the Rosary*.⁵

Over the last two weeks, the invasion of Ukraine suggests that we are at one of those pivotal moments in history: war in Europe. The sovereignty of Ukraine, its life, cities, culture and people, is being systematically crushed by an army with a greatly superior firepower.⁶ Daily on our screens we see lives shattered, homes devastated, violence and fighting, thousands dead and millions on the move, fleeing to safety. Alarmingly, nuclear weapons have been put on alert, and sanctions imposed that in time will surely impact upon us too. On the heels of the COVID pandemic comes a war that demonstrates once again the flimsy foundation of the freedom and comforts we enjoy, the volatility of international

relations and the fragility of life in this twenty-first century world. As Christians, as Catholics, we are driven to ask: What can we do?

Here's what we can do. For *now is the favourable time: this is the day of salvation.*⁷ This is the holy season of Lent and we began it on Ash Wednesday by praying this Collect at Mass: *Grant, O Lord, that we may begin with holy fasting this campaign of Christian service, so that, as we take up battle against spiritual evils, we may be armed with weapons of self-restraint.*⁸ Lent is an annual spiritual campaign, a time of renewal and conversion, a time to do battle against evil in ourselves and in others. It is a season when as disciples we make a renewed effort to enact the Kingdom of God and its values. The weapons we deploy are threefold: prayer, self-denial and charity (almsgiving). So this year, let's offer up, in union with Christ's self-sacrifice in the Mass, our Lenten works of prayer, self-denial and charity for the peoples of Ukraine and for peace.

Practically, we can help by donating to food and clothes banks. Indeed, it is wonderful to see this happening already in parishes and schools across the Diocese. We can donate to charities through Caritas and through CAFOD. We can also help by works of advocacy, expressing our solidarity through social media, writing to our MPs, to leaders and to embassies, calling for an end to the war. But as Catholics, above all we can mount what Pius V did, a massive spiritual campaign, offering up to God our Lenten works as a plea for help.

Let's go back to World War One. In 1917, when the Blessed Virgin reportedly appeared in Fatima, what was Her message? She called on everyone to take up spiritual weapons to re-establish peace in the world. She asked us every day to pray the Rosary, a most powerful prayer that unites us with Christ Her Son.⁹ And She invited us to undertake a deep, personal renewal in faith and conversion of our lives.¹⁰ God always hears our prayers, so let us bombard heaven with petitions for peace, offering up our Lenten penance. Might parishes celebrate an extra evening Mass for peace, with Confessions and a time of Adoration? Why not obtain a copy of the Second Eucharistic Prayer of Reconciliation and pray and reflect on it?¹¹ Why not recite after Mass the prayer to St. Michael the Archangel, Patron of Kiev?¹² Or say daily the Rosary? What about joining or organising a protest, rally or march? Schools might like to learn and to pray the *Our Father* in Ukrainian. And don't forget to commend to the Lord the Russian people, thrust into a war no-one would want.

So let's mount a massive spiritual campaign. Let's make this Lent not just about me, but about others. If you are tempted to slacken your penances or to give into temptations, recall our common purpose: to pray for peace. Let's make our fasting not just about the odd beer or snack, but something substantial to implore the Lord's help. And let's undertake works of almsgiving and advocacy that, by the power of the Holy Spirit, will change the course of human history.

Master, it is wonderful for us to be here exclaimed St. Peter in today's Gospel.¹³ On this Second Sunday of Lent, with Peter, James and John, we climb Mount Tabor to be with Jesus in prayer and wonder. In His transfiguration, we glimpse not only His inner identity as God the Son, but also His risen humanity, to which we too in Him are one day called. True, our lives on earth are short; our abiding home is in heaven. As the Letter to the Hebrews says, *in this life there is no eternal city for us .. we look for one in the life to come.*¹⁴ The Ukrainian crisis is

one of many conflicts in the world, all of which represent the bigger, cosmic battle between good and evil. But with the Lord nothing is impossible¹⁵ and as St. Thomas Aquinas once said, there are some things God wishes to give us only if we pray for them.¹⁶ That is why this Lent I want to invite you to join me in a massive spiritual campaign, with prayer and with a deep, personal renewal, pleading for the peoples of Ukraine, for an end to the war and for lasting peace. May Our Lady of Victories pray for us now. May She help us renew our lives and grow in holiness. May She win for us the gift of peace and bring us all one day to Christ Her Son, in that place of eternal peace for which our hearts long.

In Corde Iesu,
+Philip
Bishop of Portsmouth

¹ For a general overview of the Ottoman offensive in Europe, see F. Littell *Historical Atlas of Christianity* (New York, Continuum: 2001) 219-222.

² See R. De Mattei *Saint Pius V* (Manchester NH, Sophia Institute Press: 2021) 205-247. Interestingly, Mattei argues that the pontificate of Pope Pius V was the most pivotal pontificate of the last millennium.

³ See R. Bireley *The Refashioning of Catholicism 1450-1870* (Basingstoke, Macmillan Press: 1999): “In the course of the 15th century, the Rosary had emerged as a form of prayer popular because of the manner in which it combined vocal prayer with reflection on the mysteries or events of the life of Mary and Jesus” (109).

⁴ For a classical account of this battle, see J. B. Heffernan “Battle of Lepanto” in ed. W. J. McDonald et al *New Catholic Encyclopaedia Volume VIII* (New York, McGraw-Hill: 1967) 665-666

⁵ The name of the feast was changed to Our Lady of the Rosary by Pope Gregory XIII in 1573. Bireley notes how by attributing the victory at Lepanto to Our Lady and the Rosary, Pius V gave the recitation of the Rosary a great impetus: see *The Refashioning of Catholicism* 110.

⁶ Archbishop Sviatoslav Shevchuk of Kyiv-Halych, the major archbishop of the Byzantine Catholic Church, has been broadcasting on YouTube a daily message about the situation, seeking to encourage his faithful and to enlist our prayers and support: see for instance <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sDh836C2wmA> (March 2022)

⁷ 2 Corinthians 6: 2

⁸ *The Roman Missal. English Translation according to the Third Typical Edition* (London, CTS: 2010) 233

⁹ “The Rosary, though clearly Marian in character, is at heart a Christocentric prayer. In the sobriety of its elements, it has all the *depth of the Gospel message in its entirety*, of which it can be said to be a compendium. It is an echo of the prayer of Mary, her perennial *Magnificat* for the work of the redemptive Incarnation which began in her virginal womb. With the Rosary, the Christian people *sits at the school of Mary* and is led to contemplate the beauty on the face of Christ and to experience the depths of his love. Through the Rosary, the faithful receive abundant grace, as though from the very hands of the Mother of the Redeemer” St. John Paul II *Rosarium Virginis Mariae* (London, CTS: 2002) 1

¹⁰ Pope Francis has said: “Following the example of St John Paul II, a great devotee of Our Lady of Fatima, let us listen attentively to the Mother of God and ask for peace for the world.” See ‘Why Fatima is Important,’ *World Apostolate of Fatima England and Wales*: <https://worldfatima->

englandwales.org.uk/why-fatima-is-important/ (March 2022). Cf. S. Lanzetta: *Fatima: At the Heart of the Church* (Lanzetta: ISBN: 13: 978-1719243797), especially 63-116

¹¹ *The Roman Missal* 798f. You can also find it here:

<https://theeucharist.wordpress.com/index/appendix-of-eucharistic-prayers/eucharistic-prayer-of-reconciliation-ii/> (March 2022)

¹² “HOLY Michael, the Archangel, defend us in the day of battle. Be our safeguard against the wickedness and snares of the devil. May God rebuke him, we humbly pray; And do thou, O Prince of the Heavenly Host, by the power of God, thrust down to hell Satan and all wicked spirits who wander through the world for the ruin of souls. Amen.” Devotion to St. Michael the Archangel has shaped the people of Kyiv for centuries and is expressed in a prominent statue in Independence Square. Moreover, one of the most distinctive buildings in Kyiv is the ‘Golden-Domed’ Monastery of St. Michael, built in 1108. St. Michael, patron of soldiers, was chosen at the time to honour military victories during the 12th century. Cf. P. Koslovski ‘Why is a statue of St. Michael in Independence Square in Kyiv?’ *Aleteia* (8th March 2022): <https://aleteia.org/2022/03/01/why-is-a-statue-of-st-michael-in-independence-square-in-kyiv> (March 2022).

¹³ Luke 9: 28-36

¹⁴ Hebrews 13: 14

¹⁵ “You, O Lord, are my lamp, my God, who lightens my darkness. With you, I can break through any barrier; with my God, I can scale any wall” (Ps. 17: 29-30) Cf. Luke 1: 37 and Jeremiah 32: 17

¹⁶ See Aquinas *Summa Theologica* II.II. Q83 art 2. For English translation, see Fathers of the English Dominican Province *St. Thomas Aquinas Summa Theologica. Volume Three of Complete English Edition in Five Volumes* (Allen TX, Christian Classics: 1981) 1532-1533. St. Thomas argues that we ought to pray for things because there are some things that God wills to give, but through the causation of our prayers. In other words, God may provide a particular thing only if we pray for it, because He wills that it be caused by our prayers.