

10/10/2024

Ukraine...

“Lord, we pray that your grace may always precede and follow us, that we may continually be given to good works; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.”

That wonderful prayer is our “collect” for this coming Sunday. The “collect” does what its name suggests. It is (often) a collection of the major themes from the lessons for that Sunday and sums them up in one beautiful and concise prayer.

This collect speaks to me as I think about Ukraine. Probably like you, I’ve continued to follow events there. And much of what fills the headlines also fills my prayers. Sadly, much of what we read about Ukraine and how things are going (in their struggle to defend their country, and their liberty, from invasion from a totalitarian regime), probably breaks your hearts (as it does mine). I’ve also yearned to find ways to be useful, to do *something*, to help the Ukrainian people. This is the part of that prayer above, “that we may *continually* be given to *good works*,” that so inspires me.

It was encouraged recently, when I came upon a wonderful [article from the BBC](#). They were reporting about a church in a town about 65 miles north of London, called Towcester. The parish, St. Lawrence, is a Church of England congregation. They were sending another refurbished ambulance to Ukraine. This was not their first or second, but their fifth ambulance that they were donating. It was filled also with other medical and humanitarian supplies. They bring these ambulances there, all the way to Lviv in the western part of Ukraine, and from there they are put into service on the frontline and other places where needed.

I don’t know about you, but I find this type of ministry so very moving. It seems the community were themselves motivated by a number of Ukrainian families that had evacuated to England. Hearing their stories, of how they lost everything and came with little more than the clothes on their backs, motivated their English neighbors to action. You can read more about it [here](#). What a difference this ministry has made. How many lives do you reckon have been saved now that five more ambulances are working in Ukraine, to get the sick and wounded to where they need to go?

Whether you support providing armaments to Ukraine or not, surely no one could be

against providing such humanitarian assistance. The community surrounding the church has helped to fill the most recent ambulance with blankets and warm clothes to help families to make it through likely another cold winter, as Russian missiles destroy critical infrastructure, denying Ukrainians both heat and electricity.

Not long ago, on Ukrainian Independence Day, I flew our Ukrainian flag on our flagpole. I was accused, half-jokingly, of making a political statement. What I hoped to say by my action was that we believe God's desire for all his children, no matter where they are, is for them to worship the Lord in freedom. We believe our great liberating God always opposes oppressors. And that Russia's effort to obliterate a nation and nascent democracy, to systematically erase Ukrainian identity, in a campaign of murder, rape, and conquest is **WRONG!**

That may well be political, but it is also derived from my understanding of scripture and who I understand God to be.

But would anyone object to us outfitting an ambulance and sending it to Ukraine? I think not. Regrettably, it isn't practical *probably* for us to do that. We are just too far away. But we could support and encourage the good people of St. Lawrence's, with our prayers and other support.

We are active in our own context, doing ministry that is as meaningful right here, for those who are within our reach. And to my mind, this is what we Episcopalians do best. It is what first drew me to this tradition. We practice what we preach. We put our prayers into action. It is what the Church does in the world when she comprehends her mission. We roll up our sleeves and get to work doing acts of mercy and compassion, doing the ministry of Jesus.

In our own context, we knew, for example, that there were many people who struggled with English and could use some help. So, several of our people have volunteered to do just that. I learned recently that we have eight instructors now in our vibrant ESL program and we are in search of even more. That the student to teacher ratio, which is good, could be even better, to the end that the students' grasp of English would be attained even sooner.

And I must say that you've inspired me with this ministry, with your selfless giving of your time and talent, with your willingness to help a neighbor to learn English and to more easily navigate our culture.

Of course, this is but one of the many ministries that we offer at St. Clement's, and all of them are a result of our listening to the needs of our neighbors. And not just listening but responding in love and in action. It is just what we do at St. Clement's! And we have done some ministry for Ukraine, though indirectly. We helped to support a Ukrainian school in recent years that was organized in Dana Point to help children, who fled the war, to retain their culture and language.

On November 24th, at 9am, our parishioner, Bonnie Carlson, will present a forum on her humanitarian mission to Poland and Ukraine, which she did this summer. I hope you'll be able to attend. Bonnie has told me of this experience. I was inspired, and I'm sure you will be as well.

As always, I welcome your feedback: frpatrick@scbythesea.org

Yours in Christ,
Fr. Patrick