



BADIA PRIMAZIALE SANT'ANSELMO
Curia dell'Abate Primate

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ, Saint Benedict, and Saint Scholastica,

Greetings of peace in this Lenten Season of grace. We are living through a unique period in the history of the Church and the world. As soon as we have seemed to come close to the end of this Covid pandemic, we find our deep concerns and prayers turned to the people of the Ukraine, with a special concern for our Benedictines that are there.

To bring our Benedictine communities up to date on the situation of Benedictines in Ukraine, we will have this short letter, to be followed by a more extensive letter after Easter. When the Russian invasion of the Ukraine first began a number of weeks ago, I contacted Abbot Maksymilian Nawara, President of the Annunciation Congregation, who lives in a community in the Ukraine, asking how we might be able to be of help to them at this critical moment. His comment to me was to wait for some time to see how things would develop. Since that time, we see that the situation there has only continued to escalate. This has certainly touched the lives of the Benedictines that are there, the one community of men, and the three communities of Benedictine women. I would next like to share with you the letter that I most recently received from Abbot Maksymilian, giving you some insight from someone in the midst of the situation.

Dear Abbot Primate,

Since the beginning of the war, the situation has tragically changed in both our Benedictine communities in Ukraine.

The sisters were bravely in Zhytomyr until Saturday, 5 March. On Friday, 4 March, the day was particularly difficult and crucial for them. After a few nights with limited sleep and continuous evacuations to a bomb shelter, the older sisters weakened considerably and they no longer had the physical strength to constantly evacuate. On Friday night, Russians bombed the school in the vicinity of the monastery. This made the sisters decide to move to L'viv. After a dozen or so hours of driving, they safely reached the convent in L'viv.

There are three brothers and eighteen sisters in L'viv already. They work hard welcoming more than 100 refugees from the Eastern part of the Ukraine every day. Most people stay overnight and go on to Poland. Brothers and Sisters give them food and basic care. Their fatigue increases with each passing day. I do not know how long they will be able to do it, but so far they are very brave.

Here in Poland, we are in constant contact with the monastery in L'viv. We organize both financial and material assistance. We also help to find places for refugees coming from Ukraine, especially those who pass through the monastery in L'viv. We all hope the horror of war will end soon.

United in prayer,

Abbot Maksymilian Nawara, O.S.B.

In another communication, Abbot Maksymilian told me that it was wisest to direct any donations through *Caritas Internationalis*. This Catholic organization is working diligently and generously with the people in the Ukraine. Here at Sant'Anselmo, we are taking up donations from both the Collegio and the Ateneo, and directing these funds to *Caritas Internationalis* in the name of Sant'Anselmo. One of our Ukrainian students, a Benedictine nun, has returned just before the Russian invasion to her native country to be with her community and to prepare herself for the events that were to come. As is possible, she will be preparing herself for the defense of her thesis, while she presently works with her own sisters. Two other students, natives of Slovakia, have traveled to the border to help set up camps for refugees. Each day we hear of various attempts at negotiations to have a ceasefire and to enforce a no-fly zone as the President of the Ukraine, Volodymyr Zelenskyy, has asked. I know that here in Rome, the Vatican has reached out with the Pope making direct contact with the Orthodox Patriarch of the Russian Church, and Card. Parolin relating with different officials in the Ukraine to put an end to this present devastating situation. We can pray with a great fervor and much sacrifice in this special Season of Lent.

It is my hope to provide a longer Circular Letter at Easter, bringing all of us up to date on the various happenings within the Confederation, the Ateneo Sant'Anselmo, and our Collegio and its various programs. Until then, we pray for the end of the war in Ukraine. We pray for all who are suffering, especially our own Benedictine brothers and sisters. May these final weeks of the Lenten Season be a time of grace and blessings for all of us, leading to a glorious celebration of the great Easter Mystery.

Sincerely in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Abbot Primate Gregory". The script is cursive and fluid, with the first letters of "Abbot", "Primate", and "Gregory" being capitalized and prominent.

Abbot Primate Gregory Polan, O.S.B.