

2024 Christmas Greeting
"God is with us; know this, you nations!" (*Tropar-Isaiah 8:9-10*)
Most Rev. Bryan Bayda, CSsR

If I asked you to choose one thing in the entire universe that best expresses who God is, what would you answer? The Christ Child of course! Similarly, when we consider all that was created by God, the most complex and unique creature is the human being.

The indescribable mystery of “who God is” is reflected in abilities entrusted to us such as Free Will, freedom to humbly love, to sacrifice or show mercy in the context of a community as a human being. The mutual respect between three persons, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit is manifest in every single human being belonging to the human race. In scripture we learn that human beings are “created in the image and likeness of God” (*Gen. 1, 27*), always in the context of a community, always interdependent and respecting the other person.

However, this also sets the stage for the most horrific tragedy in all creation. Free Will expressed without respect and consideration for another person is fundamentally sinful greed. Greed follows no rules and is a blatant disregard for others. Greed is expressed with disrespect for the dignity of every person created. God has a dignity that is expressed as Human Dignity in people, yet so many people don’t understand this “*image and likeness*”. This misguided expression of free will is selfishness which is the same as death.

The Holy Father, Pope Francis, signed a declaration this past year referred to as ***Dignitas Infinita*** (*Infinite Dignity*). The declaration reminds us that every human person is imbued with an immeasurable worth and dignity, rooted in the image of God that is present in all people (*Dignitas Infinita §11*). Consequently, that is why Pope Francis says that the value of each human life does not depend on power, usefulness, or social status, but is rooted in being created by God, who knows each of us by name (*Dignitas Infinita, §12*).

When we reflect on genocides such as the *Holodomor* that took place in Ukraine, we understand that this atrocity was an assault on our very humanity. Over the last decade, Ukraine faced a brutal enemy who sought to destroy that same sacred worth through violence and terror, just as it was done during the *Holodomor*. Then as now, Russia is destroying food factories, bakeries and burning harvests. Infrastructures that provide heat and power for Ukrainians are also being destroyed. Like the *Holodomor* we understand this current war is another ruthless attempt at genocide as well as a global threat to human dignity and democracy. We can visualize the scores of children kidnapped or killed in such places as Irpin, Bucha and Mariupol, similar to the massacre of children under the age of two by Herod at the time of Jesus’ birth (*Mt 2:16-18*). These crimes are clearly genocide.

Yet in the midst of this destructive sinful choice made by many people, there is an incredible resilience of human dignity. Jesus, as Divine, was born among us as a human being. **Our hope for eternity is His divine and human natures.** That is why amid unimaginable suffering, Ukrainians have held on to and continue to hold on to their faith, their dignity, and their God-given worth. This indestructible spirit is the seed that survives the frost of famine and death. It is this same Holy Spirit that lives on in us as we face today’s challenges. Our churches and hospitals are destroyed and we rebuild them. Thousands die, yet God gives us children born into Ukrainian families. Despite the pain and suffering of loss, paradoxically a deep knowledge and joy that God has not abandoned us is evident. Everywhere a Ukrainian heart beats, the flame of life burns brightly. Every Ukrainian, here or in eternity, echoes the words of the prophet Isaiah: “*God is with us; know this, ye nations*” (*Tropar-Isaiah 8:9-10*).

Let us reaffirm the truth about life and its dignity! Every word of truth you speak is a triumph over lies, light over darkness, good over evil, and most importantly a triumph over death. The Prophet Isaiah is echoed in your words when you proclaim, “*God is with us; know this, ye nations!*” (*Tropar-Isaiah 8:9-10*). God is eternally present in all places and truly with us here and now.

Christ is Born! Glorify Him! Glory to Ukraine! Glory to the heroes!

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