



Ukraine Crisis

At the Spring meeting of the Irish Episcopal Conference, held in Maynooth this week, the bishops have asked that the people of the Ukraine would be given a special place in our private and communal prayers.

Prayer for the People of Ukraine

*Loving God,
We pray for the people of Ukraine,
For all those suffering or afraid,
that you will be close to them and protect them.
We pray for world leaders,
for compassion, strength and wisdom to guide their choices.
We pray for the world; that in this moment of crisis,
we may reach out in solidarity
to our brothers and sisters in need.
May we walk in your ways
so that peace and justice
become a reality for the people of Ukraine
and for all the world.
Amen.*

Our Lady, Queen of Peace, pray for us!

Our Lady of Kyiv, pray for us!

Many parish communities have already established links with charitable projects to support refugees and those remaining in Ukraine. Recognising these urgent needs, the bishops are asking that a special collection be taken up at all Masses on the weekend of **Saturday 26th and Sunday 27 March**.

People are also invited to support the charitable initiatives of Aid to the Church in Need, the Jesuit Refugee Service, and Trócaire. It is a source of inspiration that people all over Ireland are responding with customary generosity to support humanitarian efforts in this crisis.

Welcoming a return to full Sunday Mass and full public worship

Over the past weeks there has been a welcome return to full public worship in our parishes, and the resumption of all aspects of Church and community life. At the heart of the life of our parish communities is the Sunday Mass. When we gather for the Eucharist on the Lord's Day, we do so to express our joy in the Risen Lord and to unite with our brothers and sisters in the

Church in thanksgiving and praise to God. This is a communal celebration which shapes us as a community of faith, life and charity.

In the preface of every Mass we pray that it is “indeed right and just, our duty and our salvation” to give thanks to the Lord, and the Sunday Eucharist is our greatest act of thanksgiving. During the Season of Lent, everyone is encouraged to return to Sunday and weekday Mass in our churches, welcoming each other back as we gather once more together. The bishops at their recent meeting stated that from **Easter Sunday, 17 April**, attendance at Sunday Mass will once again be deemed **an essential expression of faith** for all in our Church in Ireland. As always, those whose health is vulnerable or who are unwell will not be under any obligation to attend Mass, and should keep themselves safe and pray at home until they are better.

The emphasis in this call- to return to full Sunday worship, stresses that our Sunday community gathering is an essential part of our faith. Our faith is best expressed in the praying community gathered to give thanks and praise to God. All are warmly invited and welcome to attend.

In the coming days and weeks parishes will continue to gradually lift the restrictions and mitigations which were introduced during the pandemic. We must however remain sensitive and respectful (by way of responsible social distancing and optional wearing of face coverings) towards those who may still feel vulnerable or anxious. For example, it is good especially in these troubled times, to invite people at the ‘Sign of Peace’ to make a gesture or greeting of peace to the people around them, rather than the traditional handshake.

Altar servers may return but with care - best to be worked out in each parish situation.

Choirs may resume to singing together but this should be done having reviewed all risks.

Holy water may be returned to the holy water fonts.

As these days of restrictions draw to a close, we all remain grateful to all those who risked their lives and made sacrifices in hospitals and other settings to keep us safe during the pandemic. The bishops in their recent statement expressed their appreciation for the “commitment of priests who continued to minister the sacraments to the best of their ability, notwithstanding the risk this posed to their own life and health. In doing so, priests gave powerful witness to the faith.” My thanks to the Priests of Cashel and Emly for their generosity and commitment over the past two years. The bishops also thanked the many people in our parishes who worked so hard to maintain our worship and parish life in the safest way possible.

Signed:

+ *Kenny O'Reilly*

