
The Pope's meeting with Ukrainian youth in Lisbon. Father Demush: “He apologised for not being able to do more” to stop the war

(from Lisbon) “A moment of sharing and prayer.” “The Pope listened and several times we burst into tears, several times we stopped because it was impossible to go on. The stories of those who had to flee, those who had to bury their families, those who were terrified. We cried, we prayed, but there were also beautiful moments that we shared with the Pope.” The small delegation of young people from Ukraine who met Pope Francis this morning at the Apostolic Nunciature in Lisbon arrived at the Igreja do Convento da Graça moved and with tears in their eyes. They were accompanied by Father Roman Demush,



deputy director of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church's Youth Ministry Office. On the altar of the church, they told the rest of the group (a total of 500 young Ukrainians are participating in the WYD) about their experience and Pope Francis' words to them.” Father Demush told SIR: “They are here in Lisbon to bear witness to our martyred homeland. We are witnesses of the suffering Christ and we are here to meet the risen Christ.” The young people who met Pope Francis this morning live in different parts of Ukraine. Most of them live in the eastern and southern regions, where the war is becoming more brutal by the day. “They have come to meet the Pope to tell him their stories, the stories of their families,” he said. **“The Pope apologised to the young people and said there was nothing more he could do,”** said Father Demush. “He can't do anything to resolve this situation. His words were sincere: not being able to do anything does not mean that the Pope is sitting idly by. He is doing so much and we are very grateful to him. First of all, for the preservation of memory, for his prayers, for the humanitarian aid provided by the Holy See.” The family of a priest of the Greek Catholic Church in Ukraine was present at the meeting at the Nunciature. Mrs. Iryna - Father Demush said - brought fragments of the rockets that fell in her parish and said that this is the Russian world that destroys churches, houses, lives. They are not just pieces of iron, they are the scars of thousands of people who died unjustly. The young people brought the Pope a loaf of bread and a small bag of wheat. “It was a communal meal,” said the priest, “and, as a sign of this meeting, we brought His Holiness a loaf of bread made with wheat and water from the Zarvanytsia Shrine. People in Ukraine are dying not only from Russian bombs and rockets, but also from hunger. We shared this bread with the Pope”. The meeting ended with the Lord's Prayer: “We prayed the Our Father in Ukrainian. The Pope in Italian, but the Pope knows our language and greeted us in Ukrainian, saying 'Praised be Jesus Christ', and this was indeed a sign of closeness that the Holy Father wants to express to us.” **Iryna Bilka gave Pope Francis a fragment of a bomb. “We found it in the town of Beryslav in the Kherson region, near the church where it fell,”** she said. “As we gave it to him, we relived with him all the suffering that this war has caused to our country. Our town was occupied and liberated by the Russians. We also gave the Pope a flag with the signatures of our soldiers. The Pope gave us a rosary and assured us of his continued support and prayers for our country.” **Anastasiya Osadeha** lives in Kramatorsk. “We gave the Pope a traditional Ukrainian loaf of bread and a small sack of wheat,” she says. “My town is located 40 kilometres from the front line. Rockets and bombs fall every day. So many people are dying in vain. The bombs destroy everything, including human lives. And this is becoming the norm. When I told the

Pope about our life, I felt that I could share with him what we are experiencing.”

M. Chiara Biagioni