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**Attack on Chernihiv. The parish priest: “All we can do now is to wipe away the tears”**



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parish priest of the Catholic parish of Chernihiv run by the Oblates of Mary Immaculate, told SIR what happened on the morning of 17 April when three Russian Iskander missiles hit an area in the centre of the city, destroying an eight-storey building and damaging those nearby. "We were celebrating Holy Mass when we heard a terrible explosion - he said - we went outside and saw a huge fire in the sky. A nearby area of the city had been hit by the missiles, not far from our parish." There was an immediate search and rescue operation at the scene, amidst the wreckage of the building shattered by the missile. There were many casualties." The toll is tragic. According to the National Emergency Service, 18 people were killed and 77 injured. "Sadly, among the victims," the prelate said, "there were also two children." This was not the first time the Russians had attacked the city. It happened last August, when a Russian missile killed six people.

"But this time it was different, there were many dead and wounded.

**The parish opened its doors shortly after the attack.** "There is a shelter located underneath the church," says Father Sergiy. "It was used also as a kindergarten during this time of war. Many mothers with small children were sheltered there. They were scared and looking for safe places to be with their children." Although the search and rescue operations are over, the situation in the city has not returned to normal. Many people have been injured and, above all, many are left without a home, not just those who lived in the targeted building, but also those in the surrounding houses, which were badly damaged. The attack on the city of Chernihiv is just one of many daily attacks reported across Ukraine, leaving the local residents in a state of despair. "People are feeling hopeless," said the priest. "For two years now, they have been struggling with the suffering of war, every day. Some have moved abroad. Others are in the process of making that decision. Most are considering going to Poland, a neighbouring country that we see as a friendly country. Not only have mothers lost their children. There are grandmothers who mourn the death of the grandchildren they raised." "There is a grandmother in my parish who lost two grandchildren, aged 30 and 37. They were soldiers. They died on the battlefield."



. "Ukraine was not a rich country before, but since the war broke out, poverty has grown and deteriorated still. There are no jobs, the women are alone, the men are at the front. Inevitably, everything has become more difficult." The Oblate parish decided to respond to the new needs. They offer hot meals every Tuesday and Thursday. Sixty to seventy people use the parish premises. "Life in a time of war is a hard ordeal," adds Father Sergiy. "Everyone here has a deceased family member. Before the war, people used to go for walks in the parks. Now they go to the cemeteries to mourn at the graves of their husbands, sons, brothers, to talk to them, to seek consolation. As Christians, we would like to say that life is stronger than death. But under these conditions it's a challenge. All we can do is to cry with them, to be with them, to console them." The priest then turned to the Italian people, and in particular to the Church in Italy. "First of all, I would like to thank you for your prayers. May God help our people. And then I would like to invite the Italian people to come and visit us." "Those who have the courage to do so, please come and see for yourselves what is happening. It's the only way to experience the war firsthand. People are starting to feel lonely. Please come and tell us that you have not forgotten about us", he said.

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