

PRAYER AT THE LIGHTING OF THE CANDLE OF PEACE, HOPE & JUSTICE

CMM - 6 March, 2022

“I can't accept that after all the wars we have had in the world, we are still solving our problems by killing each other.” Ekatarina Averchenko

For around three decades, the United Nations faithfully supported South Africa's struggle for liberation, voting again and again to denounce the violent sin of apartheid in our land. We owe them so much.

On Ash Wednesday that same United Nations invited us to denounce a brutal attack by a world power on its smaller neighbour, Ukraine. “A massive majority of the 193 UN member nations voted to demand Russian withdrawal. Five voted against it, and 35 sat on the fence. South Africa was one of them.

Ash Wednesday always marks the beginning of the Christian season of penitence, when we spend 40 days acknowledging the sins that we are aware of, but more importantly, praying for insight into those we are either blindly unaware of or stubbornly unwilling to confess.

Ash Wednesday was a day of shame for the South African nation, but not the only shame we need to confess...

Let us pray:

God of the nations, we are ashamed that those who claim to lead us are willing to watch the suffering of a whole people at the hands of a more powerful neighbour, and for the sake of political expediency, to deny the truth, cravenly keeping silence and pretending not to see. Help us, in spite of them, not to do so.

We pray today for the people of Ukraine, especially the helpless and defenceless among them, as they suffer this onslaught. We pray for the people of Russia, so cynically misled, and for the leaders of these two nations, thanking you for the inspiration of the first and praying that you will frustrate the ambitions of the second. We pray for an end to the violence of this war, for sense to prevail, and for peaceful coexistence to be achieved before it is too late for us all.

We confess that we too, are often selective in our outrage and in who receives our compassion: we are ashamed that the names of other peoples and places, some of whom have suffered war so much longer and more horribly, do not appeal so strongly to our consciences: Yemen, Syria, Palestine, Myanmar, Iraq, Ethiopia, Mozambique ... and others. Help us see more clearly our hidden prejudices and biases and remind us that all these wars are in fact one war, fought between siblings in the one family of one Divine parent.

Mindful that no war brings true peace, and of the fears of the world community that this latest conflict could become a world-wide conflagration, we pray that their turning to economic tools rather than joining the violence will bear fruit, and that out of this tragedy may yet come a new and better way.

In the name of Jesus, the Prince of Peace, we pray. Amen.

2022 03 06 Peter Storey