**Kyiv-Zhytomyr Diocese, Ukraine
XVIII Sunday of Ordinary Time, A**

Dear brothers and sisters,

Today's second reading of St. Paul’s epistle to the Corinthians (Rom 8: 35, 37-39) may be perceived differently by Catholics in different parts of the world. Some may not be touched at all and others may listen to his words with heartache: “Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Despair or oppression or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?” Individual’s responses will depend on whether or not religious persecution exists in their country. However, all Christians should be comforted by these words repeating after St. Paul’s words that none of these disasters "can separate us from the love of God".

 In Ukraine now and also of course in the United States thankfully there is no religious persecution of Catholics by the government. However, when the Communists came to power in 1919, Christian and believers in other religions were ruthlessly persecuted. Many were shot; others were exiled to Siberia or Kazakhstan, where many died from cold or starvation. The churches were either completely destroyed or, used for other things such as granaries or libraries.

In the early 1990s, the state renounced its hostility to the Church and after such a long period of religious persecution, Ukrainians were again able to practice their faith without fear. How appropriate, therefore, are the words of the prophet Isaiah in today's first reading (Is 55: 1-3a): “All of you are thirsty, go to the water. Go, buy and consume. Go, buy wine and milk without money, without payment!” The "wine" and "milk" mentioned are God's grace, which we Christians truly receive for free through the holy sacraments, especially through the sacrament of confession and the Eucharist. Jesus himself is the answer to our spiritual hunger. So that years of persecution could not make us forget the God that people longed for.

In 1991, the Apostolic See restored the non-existent dioceses and newly appointed bishops and priests began to gather people and revive parishes. After such a long period of persecution - three decades- it is hard to believe that the Roman Catholic Church in Ukraine now consists of 7 dioceses, with 15 bishops, hundreds of priests and nuns and about 1,200,000 Catholics.

However, not everything is as rosy as it seems. We desperately need accommodation for the curia in our Kyiv-Zhytomyr diocese but the state is not prepared to return to us most of our churches and parish houses. As a result, the diocesan administration staff are currently working in several rooms inside and outside the parish church of St. Alexander in Kyiv but they too are in desperate need of premises for the parish pastorate. In addition, the two bishops have to live in private apartments nearby. We have spent a lot of time trying to get our houses back, but have now concluded that it is impossible.

 These challenges have motivated us to act. We are located in the capital of Ukraine and have a great responsibility to represent the Catholic Church at interreligious and political events. However, without adequate facilities it is very difficult for us to work. Consequently, it is clear that we urgently need new premises in Kyiv. Fortunately, we have recently been able to purchase a suitable plot of land in an excellent location. We also have permission to go ahead with the project and now urgently need funds to help build this much-needed curia.

 I believe it is no coincidence that today we hear a passage from the Gospel about the multiplication of five loaves and two fishes and the encouragement of Jesus to: "give them something to eat". I do appreciate that now is a difficult time to ask for help to meet the great needs of our Church in Kyiv. However, knowing that the virtue of generosity is inherent in all Christians, even small donations will become part of the great work of God, which we hope to fulfil.

 We also ask for your intercessions and prayers in this matter and should like to thank each one of you for your generosity in considering to help us; it means a great deal.

**Alexander Yazlovetskiy**

Auxiliary Bishop of the Kyiv-Zhytomyr Diocese