

Thursday 10 March

Matthew 5: 43 - 48

43 "You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbour and hate your enemy.' All But!! tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, **for** if that you may be children of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.

This war in Ukraine has been raging now for two weeks with no real respite or end in sight. Many of the world powers have imposed sanctions on Russia and the oligarchs of Russia, and many international businesses have pulled out of Russia and yet still the war rages on.

Today we reflect on the many innocent and indoctrinated people of Russia. There are those who know the truth and have taken the risk of protesting against what their government is doing, thousands of whom have been arrested and imprisoned, while others have chosen rather to flee from Russia to Poland and neighbouring countries. Many who remain hear only what the Russian Government wants them to hear as any independent or foreign news agencies have stopped reporting after the new law was passed that anyone not reporting official government sanctioned news could face up to 15 years in jail. These ordinary Russians who only hear that this military operation into Ukraine is for the benefit of the Ukrainian people to rescue them from genocide and hear that leaders probably do not understand why so many other countries and businesses are punishing them for it. Many Russians have family in Ukraine and don't believe what is happening. We think of the many Russian mothers, wives, girlfriends and children who are waiting at home to hear news of the men that they love who are fighting in a conflict which should have been quick and easy and now is dragging on with far more casualties than expected. As much as we condemn Russia for the attack on Ukraine may we remember that it was not the ordinary citizens that attacked but President Putin and the Kremlin that gave the orders to many men who now are wondering whether they are really doing the right thing.

However, the ordinary Russian people are not exactly the enemies here. When Jesus speaks about loving and praying for enemies and those that persecute, again, it will translate more into praying for Putin and the Kremlin and those soldiers sending missiles into civilian areas. It's a lot harder to look on them with sympathy and even harder to think about loving them. Then again, God loves us and never gives up on us no matter how far we have from him.

Prayer

Lord we pray for the Russian people

Protect those who have been arrested for protesting this unjust war.

Shelter those who are fleeing their homes to avoid persecution.