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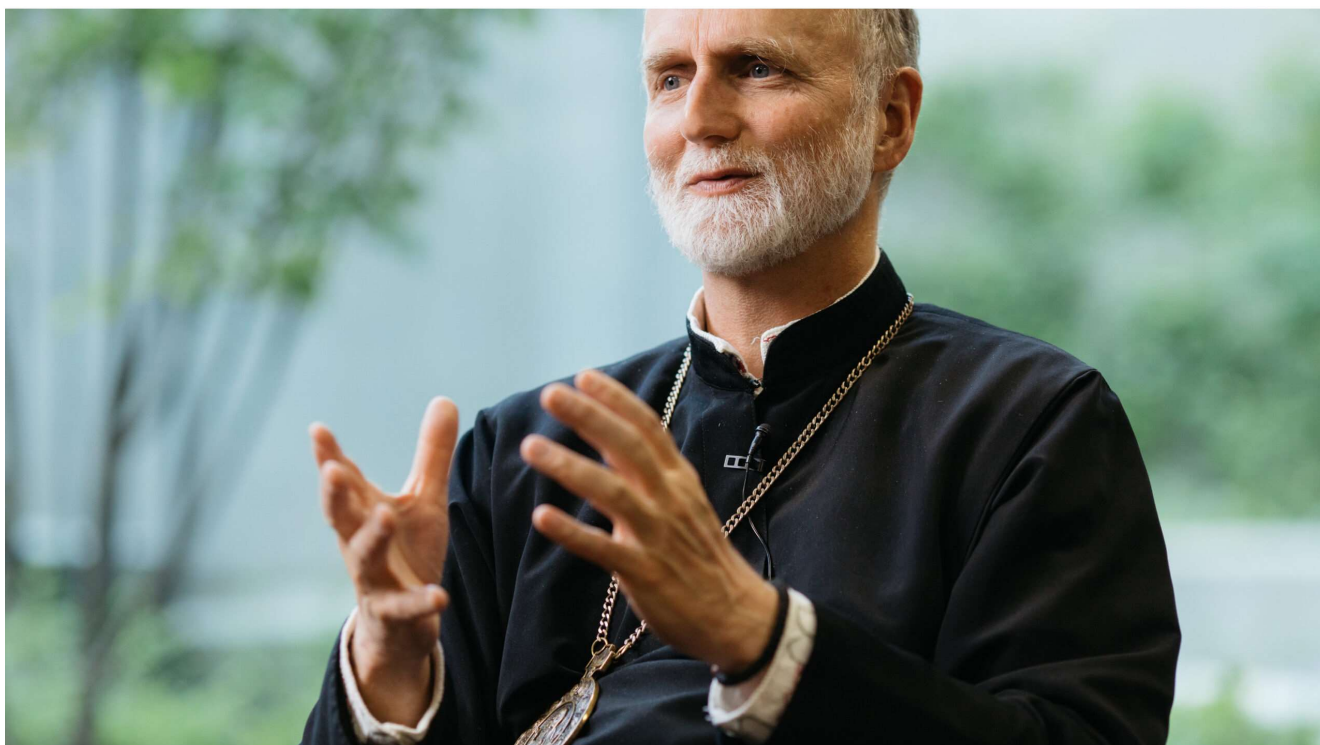
## Putin the Pilate

THURSDAY, 4 APRIL, 2024

As the American-born son of Ukrainian World War II refugees, I, like many others of that era, grew up listening to stories of the cruelty suffered by Ukrainians at the hands of the Soviet dictatorship. The stories were paschal, describing the passage bondage to freedom, from death to life. My family in America, after all, was alive.

Russia's desire for empire has not diminished in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and Ukraine, once again, finds itself in a life struggle with the Kremlin piloted by Russian President Vladimir Putin.

After growing up in America and getting my education, I moved to Ukraine in 1992 just as the country was emerging from under the boot of Soviet oppression. There, I was ordained as a priest and later helped establish the Ukrainian Catholic University before returning to the United States in 2019 to take up my current ministry. I return to my second home of Ukraine often, including eight times since February 2022.



*Borys Gudziak, Metropolitan-Archbishop of the Ukrainian Catholic Archeparchy of Philadelphia, president of the Ukrainian Catholic University.*

As a result of the full-scale Russian invasion, about one-third of Ukraine's population – 14 million people – has been uprooted, either as refugees or internally displaced. Approximately 2 million housing units, (10% of Ukraine's total) have been damaged or destroyed. Tens of thousands of children have been abducted. Millions of Ukrainians will suffer from PTSD. Thousands of civilians have been killed, and in two years more than 30,000 military personnel have lost limbs.

This war is a genocide. Putin has pompously pontificated – to everyone including Tucker Carlson – that Ukraine as a distinct territory, people, and nation never existed and never will exist. Listen to what Putin says and watch how he navigates. But also watch the Ukrainians.

They are a strong and resilient people, having endured, survived, and overcome centuries of oppression. They have left Egypt, the land of captivity, and will not return. Ukrainians will not buckle or give up; they will continue to fight for freedom, democracy, and life itself. Surrendering to the Russians is death.

Ukraine's resistance benefits all freedom-loving nations. Russia's re-aroused lust for empire is a global menace. Moscow imprisons and kills its own opposition politicians and journalists,

home and abroad. Putin decimated Chechens, Georgians, and Syrians. He will dispatch others, near and far, doing it all with a poker face.

There is no moral superiority of Western liberty and democracy in Putin's post-truth world. It's all a power game, a hybrid war, a Russian roulette, where the Kremlin, with our permission, holds the gun to our head. Who will flinch first? He snidely sneers to us: "What is your truth? Are you really willing to make a stand?"

The people of the Baltics along with Finns, Norwegians, Danes, Swedes, Poles, Romanians, Georgians, and other neighboring or former Communist bloc nations are wary while thankfully supporting Ukrainians. The welfare and integrity of the Western democratic world is at stake. By standing against Russian totalitarianism and imperial ambitions, Ukrainians are fighting for freedom – theirs and ours.



The Ukrainian people are enormously grateful to all who have supported them, but the work is far from done. The U.S. and other allies must not flinch or waver in their support, or all that has been provided and safeguarded to date may be lost. Americans have always been generous, both at home and abroad, and have extended a helping hand to those in need.

Now is such a time for Ukraine. Ukraine does not ask for foreign troops but only for the means to carry on a defense against the daily terrorism and a future of tyranny. Peace can come if

As a man of the cloth, it pains me to speak of struggles and war but there is a moral imperative for all of us here. The innocent deserve protection. The defenseless must be defended. Americans need to rise above partisan domestic politics and the politicization of freedom. Ukraine is bravely staving off Russian imperialism. If Ukraine gets the aid it needs, the U.S. and Europe do not have to experience Russian expansion again.

The short-sighted policy of the pre-World War II period that lulled many in the face of growing threats of Nazism and Fascism eventually led to a much higher price to be paid for our freedom in a world war. Congress should move quickly to endorse the needed assistance. This will bolster the resilience of Ukraine, undermine the genocidal aggressors, and show the world that the U.S. has not lost sight of its leadership responsibility nor its moral compass.

In a post-truth world in which so much is transactional, where almost everything can be bought and sold, Ukrainians are boldly asserting: “Not so fast. There is truth, and there are abject lies. There is good and there is absolute evil. For the difference between them, we are willing to risk our lives.”

During the past week, billions prayed and reflected on an ultimate, salvific sacrifice. Holy Week commemorates the Crucifixion, during which many stood idly by. Pontius Pilate’s question resounds: “What is truth?” For Putin, Pontius became a prologue.

For us, during Ukraine’s passion, it is a time not to stand by but to stand with. Our principled stance can lead to a victory of life, liberty, and truth – God’s truth.

*Archbishop Borys Gudziak is the Metropolitan Archbishop of Philadelphia of the Ukrainian Catholic Church and serves as head of the Ukrainian Catholic Church in the United States.*

Source: **Real Clear**



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