

## INSPIRED WORD

May 31, 2017

### SCRIPTURE / SHARING

The scripture I had for this evening is **Psalm 143:8**: *Remind me each morning of your constant love, for I have put my trust in you. My prayers go up to you. Show me the way I should go.* I'm from the east coast and lighthouses will show you the way to go.

### PRAYER

The Blessed Sacrament is here and also the presence of Your Holy Spirit. We just welcome You; we welcome You, Lord.

### PRAYER

Holy Mary, our Mother and spouse of the Spirit, we offer this parish and all of her ministries into your beloved hands, that you would work through us as a community, that you would speak to us in our hearts and guide us in our discernment, that your word would go forth to the ends of the earth as your commission in the great commission, and bring your love to all people in all places, both here and abroad, in our homes and our workplaces, and out in the market place and even across the ocean. You walk with us each step of the way, Lord. Help us to trust You in total abandonment and total love.

### SHARING

Mary left her home and went out and brought Jesus to her cousin, Elizabeth. And here at this praise gathering many years ago, the Ukraine ministry was birthed. Father Paul, as you know, is the proponent of that and a great apostle. So I'd like to welcome him now to share with us.

### SHARING / TEACHING / EXHORTATION

How many know the history of this Ukraine ministry? Well, I was here one afternoon and I felt the call to come here early for a parish meeting and a strange looking priest with a suit came walking up and started talking to me in a strange language. I didn't know what it was; it wasn't English, it wasn't Latin. So about that time Marion F., a big, tall Polish guy walked in and so I asked him to ask Father what he wanted. He said, "Okay, he's from Ukraine and he wants this parish to become a sister parish to his parish in Sumy, Ukraine." I said, "Well, I can't make that decision by myself. I have to go to the prayer group, the leadership of the parish. Give me a couple of days." He was going to be in town for about a week. So he comes back. During that time, the prayer group prayed and the staff prayed about it. And I prayed about it. I didn't see any reason not to do so, so I went to Marion and had him ask the priest what that would mean to him for us to be a sister parish. What does that mean? Here's what he said, "Don't you know your bible?" He said, "Come and see." Who else said that? Jesus. To whom did He say that?

Remember that story? He's forming his disciples. They said, "Where do You live?" and He said, "Come and see." And so I said, "Okay, I'll come and see. What day do you want?" I said I wanted Holy Week because I grew up praying for the conversion of Russia and so I said, "I want Holy Week. I want to be there for Holy Thursday, Good Friday, Saturday and Sunday." He said, "Alright, you know our government has just been formed but the government will write to you a letter with these dates and invite you. So wait for the letter." Okay, so I waited - August, September, October, November, December - nothing. So all these good ideas, they just come and go, you know. And I had an emergency open heart surgery, and after that surgery in late January, I had a big stack of mail and here was a letter from the Ukraine government. "You may come alone on the dates that you requested." Okay, I asked my doc and he said I was in good shape and not to worry about it. So I packed my suitcase full of toilet paper and seeds because they needed seeds to start growing their own gardens. I got there with no problem flying and as I was flying into the airport, I had to fill out this declaration. This parish had given me \$12,000 to take on my body and I found all kinds of hiding places to hide money. And I didn't quite know what to do with that, how to get through the system. The system was brand new but it was still a communist market, right? Money doesn't change overnight. So I imagined it would be a guy watching this guy stamping declaration papers and if he couldn't read it, he'd be in trouble with this guy. A culture of fear. And so as we began to land, I did my declaration. Bumpy riding means bumpy writing; you can't read it. But it's truthful! So I had my collar in my pocket and I walked in and it was incredible. People flying in in silence; no one talking to any one, lined up waiting to get in different spots for people taking declarations. No one talking. Can you imagine that? Deadly quiet. Now again, that was their culture. They didn't know who they could trust. If you don't trust anybody, you don't talk, right? That's security. So I put my collar on just to confuse them more, to make more confusion. So I put it on and walked up and gave him the paper. He didn't read it; he just stamped it. So I walked through that part of the building in to the next part to get my suitcases and one was lost. It did return to me at my home. It was the one with the toilet paper and seeds. So by the time I got all the papers filled out, the ride that was to pick me up went home. So I walked out with my one suitcase and my carryon but there's nobody to meet me. So I went outdoors and walked around. Do I get back on the plane and go back to Munich? Or do I wind my way through the system? I know two words: (...) and (...). So I have to find somebody who speaks English and make an act of trust. So I went room to room and finally found some rooms that were just filthy. Finally this man said, "I speak English." I said, "Call this number for me, the Bishop's number." And he said, "You know, it costs you \$20.00." So I gave him a twenty and he calls the Bishop. I had to make sure I could trust him. So he told me I had to get to the church on the other side of Kiev where they were allowed to have public masses for the sake of international marketing on how good they were as communists. So I asked him how I get from here to there. He said he could get a car and that it would cost me \$60.00. So I gave him three more twenties. He keeps one for himself and gives two to the next guy who keeps one and gives the third one to somebody else. That's how you know you're in a system. And so I

get in this terribly old car, a Russian car, and we start driving. He stops every 15 to 20 minutes to go into a building and I thought, "Oh my gosh, they know how much money I have! I'm going home much sooner than I thought." I was laughing, I was really laughing, trying to have a good sense of humor. I had a good flight over and now it's me and Jimmy Hoffa. There I was. But he stopped and he stopped and he stopped. And we were by a little tributary, a river, and he stopped there and had a bit of a break but he had bladder problems. So he relieved himself and I was very relieved. We went down the street to a little church, a little house, and two priests were there. We didn't speak the same language but we made up our own language from a variety of languages that we knew. And they said mass, and a little white-haired couple came in the door for mass. There was about six of us, I think. And it was my turn to pray in my language so I prayed in my language and the couple popped up and looked at me. They were a Scottish couple who had both retired and were giving their lives trying to bring the church back to the Ukraine. And so that's my entrance. The next day, Holy Thursday, some people came from Sumy. Sumy is way, way up north. It was about a 4 to 5 hour drive, at least. So they came all the way down to Kiev, picked me up to go all the way back in time for the evening Holy Thursday service. The church had just been given back to the people, who were trying to fix it. It had been misused terribly. And they had Saran-wrapped windows and an old-time light bulb and about maybe 15 people, I suppose, there for mass. And just as we were driving into the parking lot, the pastor tells my interpreter, who spoke really good English, that I was saying the homily that night. So I said, "Well, okay, I'll need the interpreter." So we vest up for mass and she tells me that there's a KGB guy in the back watching us. He heard that an American was coming. He was watching everything we did. I said, "Give me some holy water." It was cold and snowy outside, you know. "Give me some holy water." So I soaked him. I prayed for him and his family and for him to get the heck out of there, which he did, and then we had mass. And I'm telling you, it was a (...) liturgy and as many of you have heard me say before, in that culture you kiss the very feet you wash. And when washing the feet, this gentleman comes in and takes off his boots and socks and his feet were filthy. He had no toes; they had been cut off because of frost bite. And he comes to me, so I poured water and toweled him, and I had to kiss his feet to join the culture. So the power of the Holy Spirit pushed me to kiss his feet, which I did. And after the mass, he asked me what I was doing here. "We were washing feet in Jesus' name." "Who's Jesus?" "He's the Son of God and the Son of Mary." "Who's Mary?" So I said, "What's your biggest fear?" He said, "My biggest fear is our children and whether they have Chernobyl-itis, radiation disease." I said, "I'll come back next year with a medical team and we'll find out." "No, you won't. Nobody comes back here." To make a long story short, I came back the next year with 10 people and he saw and he says, "Now I know and believe who your Jesus is." I share that story because it's my most moving story about evangelization. Don't forget that Christ lives in us to become visible through us 24/7, not just when you sing. The most human communication is not verbal. And that's why I've never learned Russian or Polish or Ukrainian. It's too hard for one thing. I mean, I couldn't do it. But the real reason is that I'm learning that I can read nonverbally and what an interpreter

is telling me is going on. And I've come to learn over the years to see, if I ask for the grace, to see the presence of Christ in every walking tabernacle. I say that really seriously. My mother taught me to stop, look and listen, right? And you learn it in your bones. Stop, look, and listen. Stop before you speak and look. What do you see of God in that person? What do you see in that person created in God's image and likeness? Sick people, old people, foreigners, friends. Who do you see in that person? And how do you communicate with that person? Make sense to you? And so I just came back two weeks ago from spending five weeks in the Ukraine. I'm going back in August. The organization that we founded is called CONU - Catholic Outreach to Northern Ukraine. And we're expanding its membership on the board, to be more effective, and listening to those folks who shared with us not only their needs but their gifts. If all we do is take material things as we can, that's what the communists did, right? Food, clothing, doctors, education, medicine. If that's all we do, we're missing something, aren't we? And so I sat with different bishops and I sat with lay people and I sat with pastors of parishes in Sumy and I shared this concept that I'm concerned about. And as I shared that, I saw them becoming more alive. So I said, "Okay, let's prepare ourselves to work toward being a team, a partnership of prayer and action. And share with us your God-stories." That means God within us and Who has gotten us through all kinds of stuff. He brought me to their country through an incredible process. It's a God-story. Not my ego, no. I was able to get through that culture the first day because of God's presence: the Spirit, the Father and the Son. And the people who are aware of that at any level are changing that part of the Ukraine where they live. The little town of Sumy, they have 300,000 people approximately, the national poverty level is about 78% in poverty. That little town has about 300,000 people; they've lost 20,000 and 10,000 came back from the war. The diocese covers the northern boundary, all the way from the north down to (...). It has several cities that are in the war zone in that diocese. Huge piece of land. So my concern is that we learn how to pray first, listen and discern, and then provide as best we can for each other as partners in the body of Christ. That means learning how to communicate. There are all kinds of new communication tools I'm aware of; I don't know which one is best. There's so much out there so I need help in finding out a good one we can use together, better than Skype, for face-to-face communication. Prayer pals talking to each other. I need a grant writer. Is anyone here a grant writer? Well, you might know somebody. These are just some of the things we need to be in relationship with them. Tonight I have nine or so pictures of the 400 that I took. I'm going to make them prayer pictures because for me they are a prayer. Look at this picture and what do we see in this particular picture? Can we see the activity of God in that person? Can we imagine it? After we have a time of reflection, we'll go back to singing, right? This joyful person is a victim of the war in the south Ukraine. He has only one limb, one arm. There's a whole room full of pictures like this and I saw that one and I couldn't believe he was so happy. He's joyful; he's hopeful; he's courageous. They are all gifts of God within him to choose life. So I pray that each of us here tonight, that every Christian who dares use the name Christian, can choose life that God gives us. In the name of the Father, Son and Spirit. Every city in Ukraine has taken a place in the city to have a place for

the recent victims, since 2014. Here we see husbands and sons, fathers, with a picture on the tombstone of a lost father. When I first saw that, I found myself asking the question: What am I dying for? For whom am I dying? Here we see a garage in Sumy, the city of the Annunciation. When I first went there 22 years ago, we started to be concerned about food for the poor and it evolved into a tremendous place for the homeless, the hungry. Twice a week, over a hundred people come twice a week, at 2:00 in the afternoon, to get coffee, soup and bread. Caritas is an organization that began about 20 years ago in Sumy and in Ukraine, working for meeting the needs of the poor. I wonder how many of us are really hungry in this nation of ours, not physically but spiritually hungry? This is Father (sp?), a Polish priest who's been there 10 years in the city. He loves the people. Amazing pastor, amazing priest. He prays with them before they come and receive. An artist one day approached Father and said, "We have a cave that we can remodel and take pictures of these people. Not for public embarrassment but they get to see each other." And I was there when they opened it up to show them. And they had a tremendous time there, all these fantastic, good, starving and homeless people. This is a 13x16 foot room in the first house of the church in (...), called Divine Mercy. For 10 years, this Father (sp?), you may remember him; he was here many years ago. He was appointed to build a church in the city, a former Russian resort city, and this is where he lived and he's been praying and working all these years to build a church. The city says he can't build because the Bishop will excommunicate him. The city council forbade the building of a new building but about a year and a half ago, they mellowed out and said he could remodel that building. And so he's remodeling it by adding on a church to it. This is the addition he added to the old building. Their first Easter in the new facility. It was opened well enough so that we could have our first Easter mass there on Easter evening. For many people around the world that evening, they are celebrating the death and resurrection of Christ, calling us in every land, in every family, in every neighborhood, to be His light for others, no matter how dark it seems. So which darkness needs His light within us? This is a new worship area – 47 people in there. They've gone from 13 to 47. This is a little city of (...) and it's a purely Ukrainian historical city, an ancient, ancient city. When I first went there 22 years ago, there were no babies to be found. Any baby who was alive was at an orphanage, it seemed like to me. Now you see children. Don't forget, it was the first nation to authorize and demand abortion. See, this little family is just beautiful. We had an Easter mass late Sunday morning and then we went to their village and they had a big, extended family there for Easter day. It was amazing. Isn't it precious? Now back to Sumy, this is a very touching picture for me because this lady is one of the elderly homeless. The city found an unused (...) building and touched it up a bit and now as you can see, there are many beds in one room. And after Easter, we took food to them, Easter food, and in that culture you say (...) and the receipt says (...), which means "Christ is risen" and "Indeed He's risen!" So I said (Christ is risen) and she kissed me. Her eyes were full of Easter Christ. You can see the faith of these people. These people have the faith; they're always in prayer but not in prayer that makes it an escape from the pain of reality but a prayer that makes them courageous. They go forward to embrace whatever difficulty comes. This is their

culture. One night with Father (sp?) I was trying to say how long do I have to try to find money for his church. I'm getting tired, you know. And we started talking about that and he said he couldn't give us a plan. Putin might come tomorrow morning and take them over. "I can't give you a plan. We don't know how much money will be worth day by day. I can't give you a plan. We don't know when we can find the right workers to do the right thing." And I said, "But, but, but..." And he said, "I'm not like you guys. I know in your country you can make plans. You might live in hope but Christ is our salvation." Not civility, not the plans. Does that give you a clue? That's the depth of faith that's there, expressed in a variety of ways which I'll go through. The fact that they are talking to each other expresses their capacity to trust God and to trust somebody else. Here is what I see, okay. Reconciliation. An old, old lady, I met her some time ago and she has passed on to everlasting life now. But when Stalin imposed starvation, starving them into submission, her neighbor turned her in for hiding food for her baby. So the KGB came to the house, found the food, took her away, and the baby died. All these years later, they're in an apartment building, a Brezhnev building, really ugly, and it's just a long, long building. And she found out that this man who killed her baby was down the hallway. What does she do? She goes down to meet him, forgives him and brings him food every day, praying for him to get to heaven. Is that faith? I met this younger woman; it was 22 years ago I met her. She had already been in the hospital 10 or 12 years with arthritis, crippling arthritis. Her fingers were twisted; she can't hold a phone very well. And whenever I see her, all these years, she always tells me how much joy she has in knowing what Christ will be doing with her nation, with our parish, because of her suffering. Is that faith? Hospitality is another gift of faith. When we first went there I took some people with me. When I went all by myself, it didn't matter. But they would stop eating so that when we got there or I got there, we could eat together. Faith. Father (sp?) has faith, staying in that position 10 years, living in a real high apartment building, meeting people, breaking down the barriers to share the Gospel, making friends day after day. He's committed to be hospitable in Christ's name. That is faith. He had people, all these years, fast one day a week for a new church building. And they did. They believe in the power of prayer. In fact, when you're with them, you're somewhat astounded to begin with. When you leave the house, you pray. When you get in the car, you pray. You get out of the car, you pray. You get into the house again, you pray. Their relationship with Christ, with God the Father, and the Holy Spirit, with different saints in their personal life, that's primary in their relationship. Ecumenism is another aspect of their faith. (...) When he's there, he has people coming in to sit down and eat with him. Nondenominational pastors, orthodox priests. Around the table, people asking, "What in the world is he up to?" He's out making friends, for Christ's sake. Literally! That's faith, living faith. And I'll tell you, one more piece about this; we had a prison mass during Holy Week in the cathedral. About 45 priests were there from different orders who work in that part of the Ukraine, all the priests came together with the lay people. And before the mass, a beautiful mass but it wasn't highly organized like we might do it in this country, I'm walking down the aisle for mass and someone hands me a handful of papers in English and they say #4. So I'm looking through it as I'm going down the

aisle and the Bishop holds the paper up for me as I pray it. It's family. After mass, we had a big meeting with the priests and he's sitting at the top with a younger bishop from the southern diocese. "I want to read you a letter from the pope. It's a message that I have to take to all of us here, that's part of our nation, it's part of our world, it's part of Ukraine." And so I'm watching and some priests are going... Does anyone here have a Slavic background? There's a good healthy passion that's there. And the priests are going (...) so I asked the interpreter. He said, "The Holy Father is commanding us that any orthodox coming into our church be given communion." You know, that's nothing new because we believe their sacraments are valid. But culturally, can you imagine that? And so someone says, "Bishop, they might be in sin." And he says, "Aren't we?" Then he says, "We'll do this together." We will do this together; we will do it. End of discussion. That's faith, living faith. Not so much doctrinal faith or legal faith but relational faith of Christ. Another aspect of faith: One of our parishioners in Ukraine was looking at the graves that I showed you in the picture. He started praying with wives and children who arrived. He said, "You know, I'm going to start contacting those ladies and do something with the families." So he starts calling them, and gathering them together, and now he's taking care of them twice a year just to give them a break. Just to give them some support. That's faith, living faith. He calls them the family of heroes. A pastor has a tremendous vision of faith. Right across from the church is this ancient, beautiful building. And he wants to remodel it to have it be a clinic for the homeless, where they can take showers, and get medical support. That's faith, living faith. Here's something funny. I was asked by the pastor one day to go with him to see invalid children. I said, "Invalid?" He says, "Yes, come with me," so I did. Oh, you mean invalid children. But this little parish three years ago had an outdoor food fest. I mean, they don't do it like we do here. But they took the money that they made and gave it to an institution that helps invalid kids. The second year, they didn't have enough room so the mayor calls them and says to use the city park. The people they take care of are, for the most part, not Catholic, but maybe they go to church. That's mission; that's really spirituality. There's the soup kitchen twice a week. These people gather together, a little older people, and they fix the soup, make the coffee, cut the bread, and then they go out and people come and they hand it out, every week, twice a week. So do you get the idea of faith? I'll reframe it but if you read in the gospel of John a few weeks ago (**John 16:7-8**): *I will send you a counselor. If I do not go away, he will not come. But if I do go, I will send him to you and when he comes he will convict the world of sin, of righteousness and of judgment.* What do you think John means by that? The Spirit of God in these people is convicting the world of sin, of righteousness and judgment. What does that mean to you? The Spirit of God in us wants us to do that, with the gifts and the fruits of the Spirit. Listen to that very carefully; I'll read it again. *I will convict the world of sin.* The only one sin that John is talking about is the dying of Christ the Savior. That's the sin of all sins. And these people are doing it, by their actions, by their words, by their forgiveness, etc. And the righteousness. What was the Jewish culture guilty of in its righteousness? Legalism. They couldn't get beyond the horizontal. These people are concerned about that. They're trying to help people with love and patience, kindness,

forgiveness. And finally, judgment. Like all pagan cultures, when they change political systems, they kill the leftovers, right? (...) tried to kill Jesus and didn't do it. It occurred to me one day, praying in that culture, oh my gosh, they thought they had killed Jesus but no, they didn't. The communists thought they killed the church; no, they didn't. So that's the power of the Spirit in us. It's also the power of the Spirit in them. That's God's Spirit. That little parish, in a city of nearly 300,000, impacting the city. That's amazing! The patience. Praying every day, fasting every day, different people, to get a church. So their faith is Christ taking care of them in God's own time, not on their calendar of time. So that just gives you a little tiny thumbnail of where I've been and where I'm going. (Open to questions: food, orthodox, music, schools, communism) I'm inviting you to be a prayerful people, to pray for these people. Pray that we can work together. And if you have any information about systems of communication or ideas of gifts you might share, let me know. If you have money, we'll take it. But just make sure that you give what Christ wants you to give, okay? So we're trying to help each other to help each other in the body of Christ. That's our mission. To help each other to help each other in the body of Christ.