

Reverend Father, Reverend Rabbis, honored survivors, dear members of the Ukrainian and Jewish communities,

We have come together today to commemorate the tragic event which is referred to as Shoah whereby millions of Jewish people perished in the concentration camps of the Nazi regime in the 1940's.

In preparing to speak today, a question arose before me. On what basis do I undertake to speak of the Holocaust? And the answer to this question came to me from a discussion I had with our daughter, Tatiana. Tatiana was doing a psychiatric rotation at the Jewish General Hospital and she was treating some survivors of the Holocaust. An elderly lady turned to Tatiana and said: "Dr. Melnyk, you have been most sensitive to me. Surely you must be Jewish." And Tatiana replied: "No, I am not Jewish but my grandmother has spoken to me of the Great Famine the Holodomor - in Ukraine in 1933 where millions of people died because of an artificial man-made famine. It is this that makes a bond between you and me and makes me empathetic to what you have gone through and what you are suffering even now."

And it is from this viewpoint that I am speaking to you today. For every people there is that which is unique-and they and only they can speak about it; and there is that which is common, which is universal in human existence. It is from the perspective of this commonality that I address you. I speak to you as a Ukrainian, a member of a nation that has also suffered immeasurably in the horrific twentieth century, and this allows me to address some of my thoughts to you about the horrors that have befallen the Jewish people.

I have also turned to the prophets because in matters of great importance, it is always instructive to turn to those men who present man's status with a clear vision.

The prophets never taught that history and God are one in their outlook, or that whatever occurs in history faithfully reflects the wishes of God. History is where God is defied, where justice suffers defeats. There was a moment when God looked at the universe and said: It is good. There are many moments in history when God looks on and is forced to say: It is not good.

"The gods attend to great matters; they neglect the small ones," wrote the Roman writer Cicero. To the prophets, however, no subject is as worthy of consideration as

the plight of man. Indeed, God Himself is described as reflecting over the plight of man rather than contemplating eternal ideas. His mind is preoccupied with man, with concrete actualities of history. It is generally assumed that politics, warfare and economic activities are the subject matter of history. To the prophets, God's judgement of man's conduct is the main issue; everything else is marginal.

The prophets do not mince words - they speak with a bracing openness and forthrightness. They point out to us the ugliness of a world drunk with lust for power, infatuated with war, merciless and sad:

Isaiah writes (35:7,8): "The envoys of peace weep bitterly, The highways lie waste... Witnesses are despised, There is no regard for man." There is nothing that we forget so eagerly as the wickedness of man. The earth hold such terrifying secrets. The dead are buried and the crimes, forgotten. It seems as if the dead have no voice but God will disclose the secrets of the earth:

"And the earth will disclose the blood shed upon her, and shall no longer cover up her slain." Here we hear, although in a faint voice, the promise of Resurrection.

At the bottom of our woe, is the fact of man's inhumanity to man; of man's proclivity to violence. It is to the credit of the prophets that they were the first men in history to regard a nation's reliance upon force as evil.

One of the most painful considerations is the presence/absence of God in human tragedy. Seeing the seeming meaninglessness of some historical events we are forced into questioning whether God is there, whether God still loves us. And we should not be shy to ask these questions because if we even think about the meaning of the term Israel, - the one who struggles with God - we will soon see that it is in deed legitimate to address ourselves to God.

Evil, in a very deep sense, stands outside creation, it is apart from creation, something foreign to it. Did not God comment on creation in the book of Genesis and say that it was good? At its root, evil is irrational and it is therefore almost self-defeating to try to only apply rationality and reason to it. This does not mean that we abandon reason, but only that we realize that there are limits as to what reason can deal with.

The best response to evil is not reason, it is not an effort to somehow explain evil

but to address it from a different and more profound level. What helps us here is to see what it is that evil tries to achieve. The major objective of evil is to call into question God's existence, and if not His existence, then His love and care for us. If we give in to this, if we start to believe that God either does not exist or does not care about us, then we side with evil, we have declared evil victorious.

We answer evil by means other than reason, by means other than force. We answer evil through liturgy, through the praising of God. We answer evil through the practice of good, through music, through poetry, through everything that makes life richer and more meaningful. We answer through gatherings like today which keep the memory of those who perished and raise their existence, however brief or long it may have been on Earth, before God's presence in prayer.

Ah, some will say: these are just fine words. Give us a concrete example of evil being conquered by good, of good arising on the ashes of evil. And even here, we are not left without concrete evidence. For almost two thousand years the Israelites wandered over the surface of the earth without a place of their own, without a country that they could call their own. And what happened shortly after the Holocaust? The state of Israel arises finally giving the Jewish people a homeland. We, Ukrainians, can empathize with you because we, who were persecuted and dominated by the Russian state for over three hundred fifty years, also gained our country and freedom fifty eight years after the horrific Holodomor of 1933. Our two peoples are witnesses of the good that has come out of unspeakable tragedy. Does this not write in clear bold letters that God does care, that the death of the innocents does not go unnoticed but does bring good? Does it not call us to hope?

My talk would be remiss if I did not touch on the question of the denial of the occurrence of the Shoah. I would like to inform you that the President of Ukraine, Victor Yushenko, has submitted a bill before the Ukrainian Parliament in which it is stated that it would be a crime to deny the Holodomor or the Holocaust. I would, also, like to address some thoughts about an event that occurred recently in Iran where a conference was held denying the fact of the Shoah. Even here we find hope and encouragement. A Jewish philosopher, Levinas, writes that in the Talmud, there is an interesting statement regarding trials. If the verdict is unanimous that the person under trial is guilty, then the Talmud says: let him go. He is innocent. In a way, those who deny the Holocaust, those who deny unanimity to the recognition of the Holocaust as a fact, are actually, unintentionally, according to the Talmud, affirming

that the Holocaust did occur.

In closing my words to you, I would like to quote an excerpt from psalm 44:

“All this has come upon us,
Though we have not forgotten Thee,
Or been false to Thy covenant.
Our heart has not turned back,
Nor have our steps departed from Thy way...
For Thy sake we are being slain,,,
Why dost Thou hide Thy face?”

The pain is still there and it will not ever go away completely. But we must not give in to the temptation to allow evil to have the last word. Yes, we confirm with the prophets that much of history is a nightmare. But it is also an act of evil to accept the state of evil as either inevitable or final. Others may be satisfied with improvement; the prophets insist upon redemption. Together with the possibility of condemnation, they offer a promise. The heart of stone will be taken away and a heart of flesh will be given instead, writes Ezekiel (11:19). There is hope that man will change. There is hope in the Resurrection.

God is good. He loves us and cares for us. And those who have passed away because of man's inhumanity to man, may their memory live forever! **Вічная пам'ять!**
She zichronam youtzach lead!