February 2026

NEWSLETTER

An Anniversary Without Celebration

February returns with an uncomfortable marker. Four years have passed since the launch of a large-scale military invasion of Ukraine, a clear violation of sovereignty and failure of diplomacy—an act of aggression that overturned assumptions many believed no longer applied in Europe. Anniversaries usually mark progress or reconciliation. This one does not. It reminds us how fragile the post world-war order is, and how easily the world slips back into familiar patterns of violence.

See - Judge - Act

"Individuals and communities must see, judge, and act: see the situation clearly; judge it according to principles; and act to change it."

~ Pope John XVIII ~
Mater et Magistra

The moral clarity of this moment should not be in dispute. The Catechism of the Catholic Church states plainly that "*war of aggression is intrinsically immoral.*" Yet four years on, the abnormal has become routine. Violence no longer shocks; it scrolls past. Civilian deaths are reduced to statistics. What once demanded outrage now barely interrupts the day, and in that normalisation lies a serious danger.

The Performance of Peace

Much is said about peace. Diplomatic meetings are held, statements released, summits convened. Too often, these efforts feel hollow—gestures aimed at visibility rather than resolution. The language of peace is spoken while the machinery of war continues its grind. At times, diplomacy appears less an attempt to end suffering than a stage for political self-promotion.

The Second Vatican Council offered a sharper definition, reminding us that "*peace is not merely the absence of war… but an enterprise of justice.*" Without justice—without accountability, restraint, and real sacrifice—peace becomes performance. It reassures distant observers while those most affected remain unheard.

History's Uncomfortable Echo

This erosion of stability does not occur in isolation. Across Europe, another troubling trend is unfolding: the steady rise of far-right movements, driven by fear, grievance, and disillusionment. They promise certainty in uncertain times, offer simple answers to complex problems, and define identity through exclusion. History shows where this combination of nationalism, militarism, and social fracture leads.

Europe has walked this road before. In the years before the First World War, and again in the interwar period, narratives of decline and humiliation fuelled extremism and aggressive nationalism. Militarisation was framed as necessity; restraint dismissed as weakness. The result was catastrophe, its consequences still etched into Europe's cities and memory.

The late journalist Robert Fisk captured this recurring failure in *The Great War for Civilisation*, warning that "*the only lesson we learn from history is that we do not learn from history.*" It was a conclusion drawn not from theory, but from decades spent reporting on the ruins left behind.

Pope Francis has voiced the same concern, cautioning that "*closed and intolerant forms of nationalism… give rise to new forms of selfishness and intolerance.*" When fear becomes political currency, dignity is among the first casualties.

When Fear Becomes Policy

Today, these patterns are resurfacing. Borders are contested, minorities scapegoated, and democratic institutions weakened from within. The language of "strength" once again eclipses cooperation, and violence—physical or political—is increasingly treated as normal. The war in Ukraine has not only redrawn battle lines; it has accelerated these trends, emboldening those who see conflict not as tragedy, but as opportunity.

At the centre of this is a familiar cycle: fear leads to militarisation; militarisation demands enemies; enemies are stripped of humanity; violence follows; exhaustion sets in. Evil rarely arrives all at once. It advances gradually—explained, justified, tolerated—until it feels inevitable.

The Danger of Looking Away

Ukraine stands as a stark illustration of this reality. What began as a calculated act of force, framed by power, security claims, and historical grievance, has become a grinding war of attrition, measured in destroyed cities, displaced families, and lives permanently altered. As the years pass, attention drifts. New crises compete for limited concern, and unresolved suffering fades into the background.

Pope Francis once warned that "*the globalization of indifference has taken from us the ability to weep.*" When indifference takes hold, injustice grows—not because it is unseen, but because it is no longer felt.

Hope Without Illusion

This leads to the hardest question: how does one sustain hope in such a world? How does one speak honestly about the future to the next generation without false reassurance?

Hope is not the claim that everything will turn out well. Christian hope has never been naïve optimism. It is moral resistance—a refusal to accept cruelty as normal or violence as inevitable. As Pope Benedict XVI wrote, "*the one who has hope lives differently.*" Hope does not deny darkness; it refuses to be shaped by it.

Breaking the Cycle

Four years on, the war in Ukraine is no longer new. But it is not over, and neither are its lessons. If humanity is caught in a cycle of evil, the first step toward breaking it is recognition—not only of violence abroad, but of the forces growing closer to home that history and faith have already warned us about.

February does not call for celebration. It calls for reflection, and for the courage to care, even as the world seems determined to repeat its darkest chapters.

Prayer Intention

Every month of the year the Pope encourages us to pray as one family, the family of God, the Church, with a common intention. You can follow the monthly intentions in this website.

This month, our prayer intention invites us to pray *for children living with incurable illnesses*. To witness a child's suffering is already heart-wrenching; to know that there is so little one can do to change that reality is something even harder to bear. Many parents carry this burden in silence.

Throughout the year in Malta, people show remarkable solidarity through fundraising efforts that help ensure the best possible care and support for children and families facing these situations. This generosity is good and deserves recognition. As a society, however, we must continue to work so that the services available to families in such circumstances continue to grow, and so that no one ever feels they are facing such a tragedy alone.

Yet there are limits to what we can do through human means alone. As Christians, while we work, support, and advocate, we also place our hope in the Lord. With humility, love, and empathy, we are called to pray ceaselessly for all those enduring suffering and uncertainty, entrusting them to God's care.

Prayer of the month

"Let us pray that children suffering from incurable diseases and their families receive the necessary medical care and support, never losing strength and hope."

ZHN Deep Dives

This month's deep dive looks at Pope John XXIII's encyclical *Pacem in Terris*. Although published in 1963, its scope remains as relevant today as it was then—if not more so. We are living in a world where mistrust has grown and patient, multilateral diplomacy has been replaced by unilateral assertions of power. A way of acting whose outcome history has shown us all too clearly —everyone loses, and everyone suffers.

In this encyclical, the Pope addresses the urgent global need for universal peace founded on truth, justice, charity, and liberty. The text affirms that lasting stability requires strict adherence to a divinely established order, one that recognises the inherent dignity and inalienable rights of every human person.

Head to our website 'zhnmalta.org' to listen in.

ZHN Open Forum

We are proud to announce that every last Tuesday of the month at 7.30pm we are holding an open forum. In these sessions we use the **See-Judge-Act** method to debate a current topic. If you are interested in the subject of social justice especially as it applies to the world of work, and you would like to join, drop us an email on zghazaghhaddiemansara@gmail.com

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