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Putin Gives Highest Medal to 'Warrior Priest' Killed in Ukraine

By AFP

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Archpriest Mikhail Vasilyev. **Video still**

Russian President Vladimir Putin on Tuesday posthumously awarded the highest state decoration to pro-Kremlin archpriest Mikhail Vasilyev, who died in Ukraine over the weekend.

The archpriest had said women should have more children to ease the pain of sending their sons to the military operation in Ukraine.

He received the Hero of the Russian Federation medal on Tuesday for "the courage and heroism shown in the performance of his civic duty," according to a decree on the presidential website.

He was killed on Sunday morning "in the zone of the special military operation in Ukraine, while performing pastoral duties," the Orthodox Church said in a press release.

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Born in 1971, the cleric had been to "hotspots and peacekeeping operations" including in Kosovo, Bosnia, and Syria, according to the church's statement.

Russian state television correspondent Alexander Sladkov said the priest died during a missile strike "like a warrior priest, among paratroopers."

During a broadcast by Church-affiliated channel Spas, Vasilyev had been asked if he could understand a mother who sent her son out of Russia to avoid mobilization.

"If a lady follows God's precept 'be fruitful and multiply'... then of course she would not have just one child, but more," Vasilyev answered.

"And that means, she would not find it so painful and terrifying to part with him," Vasilyev continued.

His coffin will be flown to Moscow overnight, and a ceremony in his honor will be held in the Moscow Christ the Saviour cathedral on Wednesday.

The funeral will be held by Patriarch Kirill, also a vocal supporter of the Ukraine offensive.

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