

HOLY SEE PRESS OFFICE  
OFICINA DE PRENSA DE LA SANTA SEDE



BUREAU DE PRESSE DU SAINT-SIEGE  
PRESSEAMT DES HEILIGEN STUHLS

# **BOLLETTINO**

SALA STAMPA DELLA SANTA SEDE

N. 190505d

Sunday 05.05.2019

**Apostolic Trip of Pope Francis to Bulgaria and North Macedonia (5 to 7 May 2019) – Prayer before the Throne of Saints Cyril and Methodius and Recitation of the Regina Coeli in Saint Alexander Nevsky Square**

**Prayer before the throne of Saints Cyril and Methodius**

**Recitation of the *Regina Coeli* in Saint Alexander Nevsky Square**

**Prayer before the throne of Saints Cyril and Methodius**

At 12.15 (11.15 in Rome) the Holy Father Francis entered the Patriarchal Cathedral of Saint Alexander Nevsky, accompanied by the Metropolitan Antonij. After pausing briefly before an image of Saints Cyril and Methodius in the middle of the nave, the Pope went to the altar dedicated to the Saints, where he paused in silent prayer.

Then, before leaving the Cathedral, the Holy Father signed the Book of Honour. He subsequently left the Cathedral in order to recite the *Regina Coeli* prayer in the adjacent square:

**Recitation of the *Regina Coeli* in Saint Alexander Nevsky Square**

At 13.00 (midday in Rome), the Holy Father Francis ascended the podium set up outside the Cathedral of Saint Alexander Nevsky, where the icon of Nessesbar is located. The Pope prayed in silence in front of the effigy, while the choir sang a Marian song. He then led the recitation of the *Regina Coeli* in the square in front of the Cathedral of St. Alexander Nevsky, in the presence of around three thousand faithful.

At the end he greeted the representatives of various religious confessions present in Bulgaria. He subsequently transferred by car to the apostolic nunciature, of Sofia where he was received by the nuns and some

collaborators of the papal representation.

The following are the words of the Holy Father in introducing the Marian prayer:

### Recitation of the *Regina Coeli* in Saint Alexander Nevsky Square

#### Before the *Regina Coeli*

Dear Brothers and Sisters, Christ is risen!

With these words, Christians – Orthodox and Catholic – here in Bulgaria have from ancient times greeted one another in the Easter season: *Christos vozkrese!* These words express great joy for the triumph of Jesus Christ over evil, over death. They are an affirmation and a testimony of the very heart of our faith: Christ is alive! He is our hope, and in a wonderful way he brings youth to our world. Everything he touches becomes young, new, full of life. The very first words, then, that I would like to say to each of you are these: Christ is alive, and he wants you to be alive! He is in you, he is with you and he never abandons you. He walks with you. However far you may wander, he is always there, the Risen One. He continually calls you, he waits for you to return to him and start over again. He is never afraid to start over again: he always gives us his hand for us to begin again, to get up and start over again. When you feel you are growing old out of sorrow, – sadness ages us – resentment or fear, doubt or failure, he will always be there to restore your strength and your hope (cf. *Christus Vivit*, 1-2). He lives, he wants you to live and he walks with you.

This faith in Christ, risen from the dead, has been proclaimed for two thousand years in every part of the world, thanks to the generous missionary effort of so many believers, called to give themselves completely and selflessly to the spread of the Gospel. In the history of the Church, also here in Bulgaria, there have been many pastors outstanding for the holiness of their lives. Among them, I readily recall my predecessor, whom you call “the Bulgarian saint”, Pope John XXIII, a holy pastor whose memory is particularly honoured in this land, where he lived from 1925 to 1934. Here he learned to esteem the traditions of the Eastern Church and built friendly relationships with the other religious confessions. His diplomatic and pastoral experience in Bulgaria left so deep a mark on his pastor’s heart that he was led to promote in the Church the prospect of ecumenical dialogue, which received a notable impulse in the Second Vatican Council, which he himself wished to convene. In a certain sense, we can thank this land for the sage and inspired intuition of “good Pope John”.

In pursuing this ecumenical journey, I will shortly have the joy of greeting the representatives of various religious confessions of Bulgaria, which, while an Orthodox country, is a crossroads where various religious expressions encounter one another and engage in dialogue. The very welcome presence in this meeting of representatives of these different communities is a sign of the desire of all to pursue the increasingly necessary journey towards “the culture of dialogue as a path; mutual cooperation as the code of conduct; reciprocal understanding as the method and standard” (*Document on Human Fraternity*, Abu Dhabi, 4 February 2019).

We find ourselves near the ancient church of Saint Sofia, and next to the Patriarchal Church of Saint Aleksander Nevsky, where just now I prayed in memory of Saints Cyril and Methodius, the evangelizers of the Slavic peoples. As evidence of my esteem and affection for this venerable Orthodox Church of Bulgaria, I have had the joy of greeting and embracing my brother, His Holiness Patriarch Neofit and the Metropolitans of the Holy Synod.

Let us now turn to the Blessed Virgin Mary, Queen of heaven and earth, asking her to intercede before the Risen Lord, that he may grant this beloved land the necessary impulse always to be *a land of encounter*. A land in which, transcending all cultural religious and ethnic differences, you can continue to acknowledge and esteem each other as children of the one heavenly Father. We make our plea with the song of the ancient prayer, *Regina Caeli*. We make that prayer here, in Sofia, before the icon of Our Lady of Nessebar, whose name means

“Gate of Heaven”, so dear to my predecessor Saint John XXIII, who began to venerate her here in Bulgaria, and carried her with him to the day of his death.

[Song of *Regina Caeli*]

*Regina Caeli, laetare! Alleluia!...*

*Prayer*

[Blessing]

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