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Audience with the participants in the Pilgrimage of the Eparchy of Mukachevo of Byzantine Rite, Ukraine

This morning, before the general audience, the Holy Father Francis received in audience, at the Altar of the Cathedra of the Vatican Basilica, the participants in the pilgrimage of the eparchy of Mukachevo of Byzantine Rite, Ukraine, on the occasion of the thirtieth anniversary of the emergence of the eparchy of Mukachevo from hiding.

The following are the Pope's words of greeting to those present:

Greeting of the Holy Father

Dear brother bishops, dear priests, men and women religious, dear brothers and sisters.

You have come to Rome to celebrate together with the Successor of Peter the thirtieth anniversary of the emergence of the eparchy of Mukachevo from hiding.

I am happy to welcome you to the tomb of Saint Peter, and together with you I wish to thank the infinitely good Lord who with His powerful hand freed your Church from the long oppression of the Soviet regime.

The Church of Mukachevo is the mother of many martyrs, who with their own blood confirmed their fidelity to Christ, to the Catholic Church and to the Bishop of Rome.

In particular, let us remember the Blessed Martyr Bishop Teodor Romža, who in the darkest moments of your history was able to guide God's people with evangelical wisdom and courage; a tireless man, following the example of Christ the Good Shepherd, to the point of giving his life for his flock.

I also wish to remember your ancestors, grandparents and grandmothers, fathers and mothers, who in the

intimacy of their homes, and often under the watchful eye of the hostile regime, risking their freedom and their lives, transmitted the teaching of the truth of Christ and offered to future generations, of whom you are representatives, an eloquent witness of firm faith, of living faith, of Catholic faith.

I thank you from my heart, dear brothers and sisters, for your fidelity to Jesus Christ, and I invite each of you, “everywhere, at this very moment, to a renewed personal encounter with Jesus Christ, or at least an openness to letting Him encounter [you]; I ask all of you to do this unfailingly every day. No one should think that this invitation is not meant for him or her, since no-one is excluded from the joy brought by the Lord” (Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii gaudium*, 3).

On this solemn occasion I pray the Lord to protect the eparchy of Mukachevo from the pitfalls of evil and to bestow every prosperity upon it.

As we approach the Christmas holidays, entrusting your pastors and all of you, dear faithful, to the protection of the Blessed Virgin of Mukachevo, I wish you a Holy Christmas: may the Son of God be born in your hearts!

Convey my cordial greetings to all your loved ones, especially to children and to the sick and suffering. And please, do not forget to pray for me. God bless you all!
