



# The Holy See

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**GREETING OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS  
TO THE DELEGATION OF THE ALL UKRAINIAN COUNCIL  
OF CHURCHES AND RELIGIOUS ORGANIZATIONS**

*Room adjacent to Paul VI Audience Hall*

*Wednesday, 25 January 2023*

**[Multimedia]**

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## **Address prepared by the Holy Father**

Dear brothers, good morning!

I welcome you and thank Bishop Marcos for the words he addressed to me on your behalf. I give thanks to God that this meeting with you enables me somehow to have closer contact with the Ukrainian people, who have always been present in my prayers in these months. Indeed, you represent the Churches and religious organizations of Ukraine, including the Bible Society, which is interdenominational. And you participate in the life of the country, endeavouring to respond to social challenges with public interventions and various activities, which in recent times have necessarily been linked to the dramatic current situation.

I want to tell you that I am with you in your closeness to and support for families, children, the elderly, the sick and the most vulnerable people. I am with you in defending the rights of the faithful of every religious community, especially those who suffer injustices and persecution. I am with you in your commitment to assisting prisoners and those who are detained for political reasons. I encourage your efforts to re-establish respect, on the part of everyone, for the principles and norms of international law and fundamental human rights.

And I consider the fact that you decide and carry out all these initiatives *together*, as brothers, to be a grace of God. This is a concrete witness of peace in a country that suffers due to war. Your

action, carried out with tenacity and courage, effectively prepares for tomorrow, a tomorrow of peace, in which the economic and political interests that engender war will finally give way to the common good of peoples. I pray for this every day. I pray with you and for you, dear brothers, for your people, for the beloved Ukrainian people. May God bless them with the gift of peace!

### Impromptu greeting of the Holy Father

I would like to listen to you, but we are slaves to the limitations of time, because at five to nine I have to begin the General Audience. I would like to listen to each one of you, but looking at the number, we won't make it. So I ask you, please, to be brief, so that at five to nine I can be there. I am sorry. I would stay all morning with you, but we are slaves also to time.

What you hold in your hands is a text that brings together what has stirred in my heart in these months of war, seeing the images of this immense tragedy. I am close to you and I regularly receive envoys from President Zelensky. I am in dialogue with the representatives of the Ukrainian people and this enables me to feel I am with you, and to pray. I thank you for your unity: this, for me, is something great, like the children of a family — one here, another there, another over there — but when the mother is sick, they all come together. It is not so much about Jewish Ukraine, Christian Ukraine, Orthodox Ukraine, Catholic Ukraine, Islamic Ukraine..., no. It is about Ukraine, “mother” Ukraine, and all together! And this shows the fabric of your race. It is an example in the face of the superficiality seen in our culture today.

I had prepared an address, but time cuts us short, and so, if you are not offended, I will hand it to you for it to be distributed. I am close to you. When I was a child — he knows the story — I would serve at Mass with a priest, Father Stefano, who was there, and I learned to serve Mass in Ukrainian, when I was 11 years old. And from that moment, my fondness for Ukraine grew. It is an old fondness that has grown, and this brings me closer to you. Have no doubt, I pray for you! I carry you in my heart and ask God to have mercy on this courageous people. Thank you for this visit, thank you! I would like to greet you before leaving, one by one. Only, before we finish, I would ask you to pray, in silence, each in his own way, in your own way of praying, in silence but together for Mother Ukraine.

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*L'Osservatore Romano*, Weekly Edition in English, 27 January 2023