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Audience with pilgrims from the Greek Catholic Church of Slovakia

At 11.30 this morning, in the Paul VI Hall, the Holy Father Francis received in audience the pilgrims of the Slovak Greek-Catholic Church, on their pilgrimage to Rome for the 200th anniversary of the erection of the Eparchy of Prešov:

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Address of the Holy Father

Dear brothers and sisters,

Welcome, and thank you for your warm affection!

St John Paul II, speaking in Prešov in 1995, borrowed a beautiful image from the surrounding nature to describe the identity and mission of the Greek-Catholic communities: “In the transparent waters the majestic grandeur of the peaks is reflected: this landscape [...] speaks to us of the beauty and goodness of the Creator. From the southern slopes of the Tatra mountains to the plains of Zemplín, for centuries the communities of the Eastern rite have lived side by side with the Latin rite brothers and sisters, who are also called to represent, like small “plesá” lakes, God’s transparent and luminous generosity. It is the Lord Himself Who enriches His Church with the variety of forms and traditions” (*Address to Catholics of Byzantine rite*, 2 July 1995, 6).

The Greek Catholic Church in Slovakia can be considered an expression of the beauty of the variety of the forms of ecclesial life, of that variety which “in no way harms its unity; rather it manifests it” (Vatican Ecumenical Council II, Decree *Orientalium Ecclesiarum*, 2).

Today you are here with the Pope to celebrate the 200th anniversary of the erection of the Prešov Eparchy, born from the dismemberment of your maternal Eparchy of Mukačevo, currently in Ukrainian territory. Your Eparchy developed and became, in turn, the mother of a new ecclesial family, generating other eparchies, one of them in Canada, and became the headquarters of the Metropolia *sui iuris* ten years ago.

Today I am able to greet you all, starting with your Metropolitan Bishop Ján Babjak – who goes to the woods to pick mushrooms and brings them to me – accompanied by the bishops, Msgr. Chatur of Košice, Msgr. Rusnák of Bratislava and the new bishop in Canada, Msgr. Pacák. Dear brothers, continue your work as guides and fathers of the people of God who have been entrusted to you. Follow the shining example of the blessed martyr bishops Peter Pavol Gojdič and Vasíl Hopko. Spread goodness, peace, generosity and meekness, with profound humility and simplicity, always remaining pastors in accordance with the heart of God Who is the Father, and following in the footsteps of Christ Who came not to be served but to serve.

In this way I am sure that the priests, your first collaborators, will follow you with ever greater joy and enthusiasm, willing to offer the ecclesial service that is required of them. Dear priests, I greet you all with warm cordiality, celibate and married, with your families, as well as man and women religious. I thank you for your work in the midst of the holy faithful people of God. The families of priests live a particular mission today, when the very ideal of the family is questioned if not explicitly attacked: you offer a testimony of healthy and exemplary life. You too can draw from the examples present in the history of your Church during the decades of persecution in the second half of the last century, in deportations and deprivations of all kinds. I know that Bishop Babjak has collected and published many of their stories. Today it is up to your generation to show the same loyalty, perhaps not in the face of direct and violent persecution, but in the presence of difficulties and dangers of another kind. Today priests, as well as the seminarians – whom I also greet – are tempted by two opposing tendencies: by secularism, which leads them to worldliness, or by growing rigid in obsolete and even non-evangelical ways of understanding their ecclesial role, ways that lead to a sterile clericalism.

An exemplary religious life, both male and female, as well as belonging to some of the new ecclesial movements, are part of a strong and healthy ecclesial fabric. Today I wish to propose again the example of Blessed Metod Dominik Trčka, martyr for the faith.

Dear pilgrims from Slovakia!

In your joyful presence here, together with your Pastors, I see the enthusiastic and devoted face of a Church steadfast in faith, aware of her dignity and proud of her ecclesial identity. In this way you are worthy sons and daughters of the evangelization carried out, in full fidelity to the Apostolic See, by the patron saints of Europe Cyril and Methodius. The continent of Europe, in the East as in the West, needs to rediscover its roots and vocation; and from Christian roots only solid trees can grow, bearing the fruits of full respect for the dignity of man, in every condition and in every phase of life.

I encourage you to keep your Byzantine tradition, which I have learned to know and love since I was young: rediscover it and live it fully – as the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council taught – paying close attention to the paths of evangelization and catechesis in which, even before pastors, the protagonists are the parents and the grandparents from whom many have learned the first prayers and the Christian meaning of life. Thank you to the fathers, mothers, grandparents and all the educators present here for your indispensable testimony!

Dear brothers and sisters, I will shortly ask you for special remembrance, when you celebrate the Divine Liturgy in the Basilica of Saint Mary Major, a temple so precious for the memory of Saints Cyril and Methodius and therefore for your history. May the Holy Mother of God, to whom we look with the hope and love of sons and daughters, defend by her intercession the Church in this time of trial and watch over the work of the Synod on young people, which we have just begun. I thank you and I bless all of you, your loved ones and the entire Greek Catholic Community in Slovakia.
