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General Audience

This morning's General Audience took place in Saint Peter's Square. The Holy Father dedicated his catechesis to his recent apostolic trip in Romania. The Bible reading was from the *Letter to the Hebrews* (12: 1-2a).

After summarising his catechesis in several languages, the Holy Father addressed special greetings to the groups of faithful present. The General Audience concluded with the recitation of the *Pater Noster* and the apostolic blessing.

Catechesis of the Holy Father

Dear brothers and sisters, good morning!

Last week I made an apostolic trip to Romania, invited by the President and the Prime Minister. I wish to renew my thanks, which I extend to the other civil and ecclesiastical authorities and to all those who collaborated in the realization of this visit. Above all, I thank God Who enabled Peter's Successor to return to that country, twenty years after the visit of Saint John Paul II.

In summary, as the motto of the trip announced, I urged that we "*walk together*". And my joy was being able to do so not from afar, or from above, but walking myself in the midst of the Romanian people, as a pilgrim in their land.

The various encounters highlighted the value and the need to walk together both *as Christians*, at the level of faith and charity, and *as citizens*, at the level of civil commitment.

As Christians, we have the grace of living a season of fraternal relations among the different Churches. In Romania the majority of faithful belong to the Orthodox Church, currently led by the Patriarch Daniel, to whom I send my fraternal and grateful thoughts. The Catholic community, both "Greek" and "Latin", is living and active.

The union among all Christians, although incomplete, is based on the single Baptism and is sealed by the blood and the suffering experienced together in the dark times of the persecution, in particular during the last century under the atheist regime. There is also another Lutheran community which professes its faith in Jesus Christ, and it has good relations with the Orthodox and Catholics.

With the Patriarch and the Holy Synod of the Romanian Orthodox Church we had a very cordial meeting, in which I reiterated the desire of the Catholic Church to walk together in reconciled memory, to towards a fuller unity, that the Romanian people invoked prophetically during the visit of Saint John Paul II. This important ecumenical dimension of the journey culminated in the solemn recitation of the Lord's Prayer inside the new, imposing Orthodox cathedral of Bucharest. This was a moment of strong symbolic value, because the Lord's Prayer is the quintessential Christian prayer, the common heritage of all the baptized. No one can say "my Father" and "your Father"; no: "Our Father", the common heritage of all the baptized. We have shown that unity does not take away legitimate diversity. May the Holy Spirit lead us to live ever more as children of God and brothers together

As a Catholic Community we celebrated three Eucharistic liturgies. The first was in the Cathedral of Bucharest, 31 May, feast of the Visitation of the Virgin Mary, an icon of the Church on a journey of faith and charity. The second Eucharist was in the Shrine of Sumuleu Ciuc, which receives many pilgrims. There, the Holy Mother of God brings together the faithful people in a variety of languages, cultures and traditions. And the third celebration was the divine liturgy in Blaj, centre of the Greek-Catholic Church in Romania, with the beatification of seven Greek-Catholic bishops, witnesses to the freedom and mercy that come from the Gospel. One of these new Blesseds, Bishop Iuliu Hossu, wrote during his imprisonment: "God sent us into this darkness of suffering to forgive and to pray for the conversion of all". Thinking of the terrible tortures to which they were subjected, these words are a testimony of mercy.

The meeting with young people and families was particularly intense and festive. It was held in Iași, an ancient city and important cultural centre, a crossroads between the West and the East. A place that invites you to *open up roads* on which to *walk together*, in the richness of diversity, in a freedom that does not cut the roots but which draws upon them in a creative way. This meeting also had a Marian character and ended with the entrusting of young people and families to the Holy Mother of God.

The last phase of the journey was the visit to the Roma community of Blaj. In that city there are many Roma, and for this reason I wanted to greet them and renew my appeal against all discrimination and for the respect of people of all ethnicities, languages and religions.

Dear brothers and sisters, let us thank God for this apostolic trip, and let us ask Him, by the intercession of the Virgin Mary, to bear abundant fruits for Romania and for the Church in those lands.

Greetings in English

I greet the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors taking part in today's Audience, especially those from England, Scotland, Malta, China, Japan, Malaysia, Korea, Canada and the United States of America. I offer a special greeting to the members of the United Nations Women's Guild of Rome together with my prayerful good wishes for their fiftieth anniversary. As we prepare to celebrate the Solemnity of Pentecost, I invoke upon all of you and your families a rich outpouring of the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

After the greetings, the Pope recalled that this coming Saturday 8 June will be the fifth anniversary of the

meeting in the Vatican between the presidents of Israel and Palestine, with him and with the Patriarch Bartholomew. “At 13.00 hours”, he said, “we are invited to dedicate a minute to peace – of prayer, for believers; of reflection, for those who do not believe – all together, for a more fraternal world. Thank you to International Catholic Action, which is promoting this initiative”.
