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Francis expresses his profound gratitude for the faithfulness and courage of the Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church

Vatican City, 7 March 2016 – The Holy Father has sent a message to His Beatitude Sviatoslav Shevchuk, major archbishop of Kyiv-Halic, Ukraine, conveyed last Saturday by Archbishop Paul Richard Gallagher, secretary for Relations with States.

The message begins with an extract from Psalm 36: "How priceless is your unfailing love, O God! People take refuge in the shadow of your wings", which serves as a point of reference for the Pope to affirm that "as believers we shelter under the protective 'wings' of the Lord, as we are bearers of divine grace, but like clay vases". In some conditions, "our human condition is made even more fragile as a result of difficult historical situations, which mark the life of the People of God, of the Community that Jesus Christ our Lord acquired with His Blood".

Francis goes on to mention that in these days the Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church commemorates the tragic events of March 1946, when in the age of Stalinism and during a famine that ravaged the region the pseudo-synod of Leopoldis (Lviv), declared the Greek-Catholic Church outlawed. "Seventy years ago, the ideological and political context, along with ideas contrary to the very existence of your Church, led to the organisation of a pseudo-synod in Lviv, causing decades of suffering for pastors and faithful".

"In recalling these events, we bow our head with profound gratitude to those who, even at the price of tribulations and even martyrdom, have over time given witness to faith, lived with devotion in their own Church and in indefectible union with Peter's Successor. At the same time, with eyes enlightened by faith, let us look to the Lord Jesus Christ, once more placing every hope of ours in him and not in human justice. He is the true source of our trust for the present and for the future, as we are certain that we are called to proclaim the Gospel also in the midst of any suffering or difficulty".

"Who is going to harm you if you are eager to do good? But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed. ... But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect", continues the Pope, in the words of St. Peter, expressing his profound appreciation for the trust shown by this Church and

encouraging her members to be "tireless witnesses of this hope that renders more luminous our existence and that of our brothers and sisters around us". He also renews his solidarity with the pastors and faithful for all they have done in this difficult time, marked by the hardships of war, to alleviate the suffering of the population and to seek the path of peace for the beloved Ukrainian land".

"Our courage and our joy is in the Lord. It is to Him I turn, through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary and the martyrs of your Church, so that divine consolation illuminate the faces of your communities in Ukraine and in other parts of the world", writes the Holy Father at the end of his message, sending to all members of the Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church a special apostolic blessing as a sign of his constant affection and remembrance".
