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## **Francis greets Ukrainian children, orphans and refugees fleeing armed conflict, and celebrates the anniversary of St. John Paul II's birth**

Vatican City, 18 May 2016 – After today's catechesis the Pope greeted with special affection the Ukrainian children, orphaned or forced to flee from the armed conflict that continues in the north-east of the country. "By the intercession of Mary Most Holy, I renew my prayer that a lasting peace be reached, that may relieve the troubled population and offer a serene future to the new generations", he said.

"Today, the birthday of St. John Paul II, I cordially greet all the Polish present here today", he added. "I join spiritually with the president of the Republic of Poland, with the fighters and with those who participate in the Holy Mass in the Polish cemetery of Montecassino in memory of the fallen, as well as those gathered in Toruń for the consecration of the Shrine to the 'Blessed Virgin Mary, Star of the New Evangelisation and of St. John Paul II'. May these important events be for you an invitation to pray for peace, for the Church in Poland and for the prosperity of your homeland."

In Italian, the Holy Father welcomed the priests of the Russian Orthodox Church, guests of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, children from the oncology ward of the Bambino Gesù Paediatric Hospital and to the devotees of St. Francesco di Paola, founder of the Order of Minims and Patron of Calabria, the centenary of whose birth is commemorated this year.

He also greeted the French-speaking pilgrims from the Strasbourg seminary, the delegation from the Shrine of Notre-Dame de la Salette, and of Grand Saint Bernard. Among the Portuguese speaking pilgrims, he welcomed in particular the Franciscan Hospitaller Sisters of the Immaculate Conception and the parish groups of Porto Nacional and Póvoa de Varzim, expressing his hope that their pilgrimage to the tomb of the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul strengthen their "feeling and living in the Church, under the tender gaze of the Virgin Mary". Likewise, he greeted Slovakian parish groups and the teachers and pupils of the Catholic St. Francis of Assisi primary school of Vranow. Finally, he welcomed the German-speaking participants in the Jubilee pilgrimage of the diocese of Augsburg, altarboys from the diocese of Eichstätt, and the students and teachers of the theological faculty of Paderborn.

