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## **Khor Virap, at the foot of Mount Ararat, the last stop of the Pope's trip to Armenia**

Vatican City, 26 June 2016 – The monastery of Khor Virap (deep well) was the final leg of Pope Francis' apostolic trip in Armenia. It is one of the most sacred places for the Armenian Church, located near the Turkish border, at the foot of Mount Ararat.

It was originally a fortified citadel where St. Gregory the Illuminator was imprisoned in a deep well for thirteen years at the behest of King Tiridates II, who persecuted Christians. Tiridates, who suffered from a serious illness, was cured by the intercession of St. Gregory and converted to Christianity with all his family, proclaiming Armenia a Christian nation in 301. In the fifth century a monastery was built in the place of St. Gregory's prison, and a confraternity was founded. From the twelfth to the thirteenth century the monastery was the home of a renowned seminary and a study centre where eminent figures in the religious and cultural life of the Church were educated. The church built above St. Gregory's well – 6.5 metres below ground level – continues to be an important destination for pilgrimages. Devastated by a violent earthquake in 1679, the monastery has been gradually rebuilt with various additions such as the bell tower (mid-nineteenth century).

Khor Virap is under the jurisdiction of the Mother See of Etchmiadzin. St. John Paul II visited the monastery in 2011, also at the end of a three-day trip to Armenia.

Shortly after 5 p.m., local time (3 p.m. in Rome), the Superior of the monastery received the Pope and the Catholicos, who after entering in procession ascended two short flights of stairs to reach the room of the Well of St. Gregory, where they lit a candle which they then took to the adjacent chapel where His Holiness Karekin prayed in Armenian and the Holy Father in Italian. The Pope went on to impart his blessing and, along with the Catholicos, proceeded to the terrace of the monastery where they released two doves in the direction of Mount Ararat.

They travelled by car from Khor Virap to Yerevan airport where they were greeted by the president of the Republic, and after greetings from the delegations, the Holy Father embarked on his return flight to Rome, arriving in Ciampino airport at around 8.40 p.m.

