

Pope warns of new ideologies as he beatifies Romania martyrs

02/06/2019 19:43 by admin

Pope Francis paid homage Sunday to Catholics who were persecuted, tortured and killed.

A boy waits during a heavy rainfall before Pope Francisâ€™ Mass at the Marian shrine, in Sumuleu Ciuc, Romania, Saturday, June 1, 2019. Francis began a three-day pilgrimage to Romania on Friday that in many ways is completing the 1999 trip by St. John Paul II that marked the first-ever papal visit to a majority Orthodox country. (Vadim Ghirda/AP)

BLAJ, Romania â€” Pope Francis paid homage Sunday to Catholics who were persecuted, tortured and killed during Romaniaâ€™s communist regime by beatifying seven bishop martyrs on his third and final day in the country.

Francis presided over the eastern rite liturgy in Blaj, a stronghold of the Greek-Catholic Church that was outlawed during communism. The seven bishops had been arrested and imprisoned between 1950 and 1970 for adhering to their faith.

Francis held them up as models for the Romanian faithful today, saying they â€œgave their lives to oppose an illiberal ideological system.â€•

â€œThese lands know well how greatly people suffer when an ideology or a regime takes over, setting itself up as a rule for the very life and faith of people, diminishing and even eliminating their ability to make decisions, their freedom and their room for creativity,â€• he said.

He warned that new ideologies were threatening Romanian families today â€” an apparent reference to gender issues, gay marriage and other secular trends that Francis has previously blasted as Western â€œideological colonizationâ€• over others.

â€œForms of ideological colonization that devalue the person, life, marriage and the family, and above all, with alienating proposals as atheistic as those of the past, harm our young people and children, leaving them without roots from which they can grow,â€• he said.

The chant-filled Mass followed the Byzantine rite of the Greek-Catholic church, which is loyal to Rome. The liturgy itself was celebrated by a Greek-Catholic bishop, but it marked the first time that Francis had presided over an eastern rite liturgy as pope, the Vatican said.

It was celebrated on the symbolic â€œField of Liberty,â€• a huge expanse east of Blaj that was the site of an important nationalist rally in 1848. A century later, communist leaders marking the anniversary at the field demanded that Greek-Catholics join the Orthodox church.

Pope Francis meets with members of the Roma community in the Barbu Lautaru district of Blaj, Romania June 2, 2019. Andreas Solaro/Pool via REUTERS

Many refused, and thousands of priests were incarcerated in communist prisons, including the seven being beatified

Sunday. The Catholic Church's property was seized. The refusal of the Orthodox church to return those Catholic assets remains a source of tension between the two today.

“This is a holy day for all Catholics,” said 50-year old Emanuela Canta, who arrived in the Blaj field early Sunday to get a spot. “I wish we could share the same kind of faith they (the martyrs) had. I wish God could strengthen us and our belief.”

Because the seven bishops were declared martyrs, who died out of hatred for the Catholic faith, the Vatican didn't need to confirm a miracle attributed to their intercession for them to be beatified; a miracle is needed for them to be made saints.

It was Francis' second visit to Transylvania, after he celebrated Mass on Saturday at the Sumuleu Ciuc shrine in the Carpathian mountains, the most important pilgrimage site in Romania dedicated to the Virgin Mary.

Francis is travelling across Romania to visit its far-flung Catholic communities. The unusually thorough single-country itinerary is making up for the fact that St. John Paul II was only allowed to visit the capital, Bucharest, in 1999 in the first papal visit to a majority Orthodox country since the Great Schism divided Christianity.

After Mass in Blaj, Francis will meet with people from the disadvantaged Roma minority before returning to the Vatican.

- TWP