



**Homily of Cardinal Leonardo Sandri, Prefect of the Congregation for the Eastern Churches, during the Pontifical Divine Liturgy on the occasion of the Golden Jubilee of the Metropolitan Archeparchy of Pittsburgh, Ruthenian Cathedral of Pittsburgh, Sunday 23 June 2019 A.D.**

Your Grace, Archbishop William, Metropolitan of the Byzantine Ruthenian Church in the US,  
Your Grace, Archbishop Fulop, Metropolitan of the Byzantine Church in Hungary,  
Your Excellencies,  
Reverend Monsignor Walter Erbi, Counselor of the Apostolic Nunciature in Washington DC,  
Reverend Fathers, Religious Brothers, Sisters and Seminarians,  
Sisters and brothers in the Lord!

1. Happy birthday! This simple expression that families use when celebrating the gift of life is said with great intensity when marking important dates, such as fifty years. And the gift of faith introduces us into a family, the Church, whose particular face for the Ruthenian faithful in the United States, and especially those of Pittsburgh, takes the shape of the Metropolitan Archeparchy in which we gather this Sunday, the day of the Risen Lord, the Living One.

2. Our thoughts and our prayers go first of all to the Holy Father, Pope Francis, who asked me to bring you his greeting and his blessing: he too is the son of immigrants who set out, leaving their home and boarding a ship to cross the ocean. So did many of your families from different areas of east-central Europe, seeking better times and work in the United States, especially in the arduous and exhausting experience of the mines. The journey was not easy for them and upon arrival they had to face the harsh immigration laws. In addition, there was part of the Latin Church that did not show them full understanding: we know how the 1929 decree *Cum data fuerit*, allowing only celibate priests to pastor the faithful, gave rise to numerous difficulties and sorrowful divisions. We are here, however, to give thanks, because, as in every family, the growth and maturity of children always gives new awareness to the members of the household. What was then begun with Pope Leo XIII and supported by Pope Benedict XV, after the great event of the Second Vatican Council, culminated for you with the erection of the Eparchy of Parma and the elevation of the Metropolitan Archeparchy of Pittsburgh, whose fiftieth anniversary we are now celebrating. As has been mentioned, precisely when the faithful in Europe were suffering, with many martyred and imprisoned, Saint Paul VI did not abandon their brothers and sisters in the United States, strengthening that presence through the institution of the Ruthenian circumscriptions. We come then to 2014, when Pope Francis regularized and allowed full and better pastoral assistance to the Eastern Catholic faithful according to their own discipline even outside the traditional territories. Let us give thanks, because even the difficult moments, lived within the Church, faced in profound fidelity to the Lord, generate fruits of maturity and awareness, which are gifts that in time abound for the benefit of all, as does every grace that comes from heaven. Let us therefore always remain open and available to the action of the Spirit within our hearts and our communities. Let us clasp ourselves in prayer around the rock of Peter and his Successors, so that they may always indicate Christ, the Way, Truth and Life, helping us to live with joy and pride our belonging to the Catholic Church, each bearing their own gift and depositing it before the Lord, as did the Magi, who came from the East, who found themselves kneeling before the Child of Bethlehem, declaring their knowledge and human understanding to be limited and indicating instead the Saviour who makes Himself small and takes the form of a servant as the ultimate and definitive Revelation of God. Thus, we too abandon the pitfall and the temptation of becoming a law to ourselves, as individuals and as a community, as Saint Paul says in the reading from chapter two of his Letter to the Romans.

3. The memory of the journey that led to the establishment of the Ruthenian Hierarchy in the United States, as we can say of all the other Eastern Catholic Churches over the decades, also helps us to make another consideration. It was in fact born of the desire that none of the faithful

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should lack pastoral assistance and the closeness of the Church: each of them was not primarily a foreigner or an immigrant, but a child to be sought and loved. The very existence of the first communities, now become Eparchies and Archeparchies, was born from the deepest identity of the Church, which is being the proximity and closeness of God to the existence of every man, village by village, territory by territory, in the depths of the earth for the men in the mine as in the heights of the first skyscrapers which then began to be built by the contribution of many workers from abroad. God in Christ is called, and He truly is, Emmanuel, the God-with-us! The Church is proximity and closeness as was the Master of Galilee, the God-Man, the Son of God who came among us and was incarnate by the power of the Holy Spirit in the womb of the Virgin Mary. Through Jesus, the closeness of God became mission, as He walked the streets of Palestine announcing that the Kingdom of God is in our midst. In order to be close, we too must become missionaries: without this unity of intention, no Christian community would have been born, much less the Eastern Catholic ones then or today, here and elsewhere in diaspora. God calls us by name not only to be with him, but so that we can then become missionaries, like the fishermen of the Gospel.

4. The Byzantine Ruthenian Church of the United States therefore remains a question and a task for us: we cultivate the memory and rediscover the roots, in the renewed freedom found in Europe as well as in the freedom always enjoyed in the United States, but no less threatened by the winds that impose ideological visions on life and on respect for human dignity. Let us think of the collaboration that can exist between the Churches which on either side other of the Atlantic hold the same tradition. During these days, I was deeply impressed when listening to a Bishop, who with emotion emphasized that dozens of vocations to special religious and priestly consecration are born today from communities oppressed for decades by atheist regimes, a sign that Christ cannot be torn from the heart of man. Rediscovering the origins also means thinking about the places where your faithful live today: they once arrived in the United States to work in the mines, but now perhaps many of them are following the internal economic currents that flow southwards, to Texas, Florida or other states. To continue to live the vocation and identity of the Byzantine Ruthenian Church in the United States means then to continue to think about how to show God's proximity and closeness to your children today, it means to continue to be missionaries. And for our witness before the world and among other Christian denominations to be meaningful, we must cultivate all the steps necessary to live communion, while respecting the different origins and traditions, and the respective belonging to different Patriarchal, Major Archiepiscopal or Metropolitan sui iuris Churches. The Byzantine family in the United States is large: in addition to the Ruthenians, there are the Melkites, the Ukrainians, the Romanians. I visited today the Byzantine Seminary here in Pittsburgh and I saw that is attended by students from different Eparchies, not only Ruthenians. Next February, the Eastern Bishops of the United States will come to Rome on an ad limina visit: it would be a lovely gift if those I mentioned could present the setting for a joint revision of the liturgical translations in English, so that from many voices the praise of God may arise in the communion of a single language.

5. Today our praise is joined by the Mother of God, the Holy Apostles, Martyrs and Confessors of the Faith: our choir sings the holiness of God, while God's blessing descends on man. We are the sign of God's blessing with our lives. Let us live the full stature of our vocation, in joy and gladness! Amen