

# WORLD & NATION

## Pope honors persecuted Romanian Catholics

By Cindy Wooden  
Catholic News Service

BUCHAREST, Romania — Kneeling in front of a tiny Eastern-rite Catholic chapel in a cemetery in Bucharest, Pope John Paul II honored the sacrifices of Romania's once outlawed Eastern Catholic Church.

Accompanied only by the song of birds in the overgrown cemetery May 8, the pope prayed silently for 10 minutes, occasionally looking up at the pictures of seven Romanian bishops who died in prison or under house arrest during the country's four decades of harsh communist rule.

"Over the tombs of the few known martyrs and over the many whose mortal remains did not even receive the honor of a Christian burial, I prayed for all of you," the pope told Eastern Catholics later during a Divine Liturgy in Bucharest's Latin-rite cathedral.

The Byzantine liturgy had to be held in the cathedral because the tiny cemetery chapel is the only building in the capital belonging to Eastern Catholics, and it was too small to accommodate all the Eastern bishops, priests, nuns and faithful who traveled from the region of Transylvania.

Among those who made the journey was ailing 86-year-old Cardinal Alexandru Todea, the former archbishop of Fagaras-Alba Iulia who spent 16 years in prison and another 27 years under house arrest. The cardinal sat in a wheelchair near the pope's throne during the liturgy. The cardinal had tears running down his cheeks after Pope John Paul embraced him and kissed him on the forehead at the end of the liturgy. The Romanian communist government banned the Eastern Catholic Church in 1948, forcing its members to worship secretly or join the Orthodox Church. It regained liberty in 1990 after the fall of communism.

"Your chains, the chains of your people are the glory and the pride of the church," the pope said at the liturgy. "They tried to silence your freedom, to suffocate it, but they did not succeed. You remained free interiorly, even if in chains.

"I am here today to pay homage to you, sons and daughters of the Greek Catholic Church who for three centuries have witnessed, sometimes with unheard of sac-



Reuters/CNS  
**Pope John Paul II prays at the Catholic cemetery in Bucharest May 8 in memory of seven Romanian bishops who died in prison or under house arrest during communist rule in Romania. The pope was on a historic three-day visit to mainly Orthodox Romania.**

rifices, to your faith in unity" with the bishop of Rome.

Pope John Paul said his thoughts were directed to Transylvania, the region where Romania's Catholic population is concentrated.

"I spiritually kiss that ground of martyrdom," he said.

In negotiations with the Romanian government and the Romanian Orthodox Church, the Vatican agreed to limit the three-day papal trip to Bucharest, although the bishops of Transylvania had invited the pope to visit there as well.

Bishop John Michael Botean, head of the Romanian Catholic diocese in Canton, Ohio, said, "Even (President Fidel) Castro couldn't do in Cuba what is being done here" — restricting the pope to just one city.

"It is very painful" for the nation's Eastern Catholics, and they have let the Vatican know of their disappointment "gently and devoutly," the bishop told reporters at the Bucharest cemetery.

The fact that the pope agreed to visit Romania even though his visit was restricted "is a gesture of his willingness to go the extra mile" in order to make his first visit to a predominantly Orthodox country, Bishop Botean said.

The U.S. bishop also praised Romanian Orthodox Patriarch Teoctist for being the first patriarch in a predominantly Orthodox country to invite the pope. He said the patriarch is making the kind of progress in ecumenism that Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople would like to make, but cannot because of pressure from other Orthodox patriarchs, particularly Russian Orthodox Patriarch Alexei II of Moscow.

"Alexei holds the cards in the Orthodox world," Bishop Botean said.

Bodea Horatiu Mihai, 21, one of 25 first-year students from the Eastern Catholic seminary in Cluj who attended the papal liturgy, said he and his classmates "were very disappointed" the pope could not come to them, "but I'm glad we have the chance to be here.

"The Greek Catholic Church has lots of problems, and the pope can help resolve them. In time we hope to see the results," said the seminarian.

Although his grandmother was baptized an Eastern Catholic, he and his parents were raised Orthodox because their churches were closed. The family returned to Catholicism a year ago, he said.

"We think the Greek Catholic Church is better," he said. "The priests are more serious and the relationships among the Greek Catholics are nicer."

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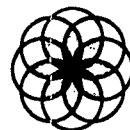
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