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Pope Francis exchanges gifts with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky during a private a

Pope Francis exchanges gifts with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky during a private audience at the Vatican in February 2020. (CNS photo/Gregorio Borgia, pool via Reuters)

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Pope Francis could meet Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky at the Vatican this weekend, a Vatican official said May 11.

Francis has repeatedly called for an end to Russia's war in Ukraine and expressed solidarity with the "martyred" Ukrainian people. Recently he revealed a secret peace "mission" was underway but provided no details.

Word of the possible May 13 meeting in Rome followed news, confirmed last week by Berlin police, that Zelensky was expected in Germany starting that evening. Italian media, citing unnamed sources, reported May 11 that Zelensky might be in Rome earlier that day to meet with Premier Giorgia Meloni and the pope.

A Vatican official said a pope-Zelensky audience May 13 "is a possibility." The official spoke on condition of anonymity because the visit was not confirmed.

On May 14, Zelensky and the people of Ukraine are set to receive the International Charlemagne Prize, awarded annually by the western German city of Aachen for contributions to European unity. European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen is scheduled to give the speech honoring Zelensky.

Francis met with Zelenssky before the war and last month met with the Ukrainian prime minister, who asked the pontiff's help in mediating the return of Ukrainian children taken to Russia after the Kremlin's invasion. Francis recently told reporters he thought the Vatican could help, given it's previous mediation in prisoner swaps.

On May 11, Francis bid farewell to the Russian ambassador to the Holy See, Alexander Avdeev, at the end of his seven-year tenure.

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