



The Holy See

***LETTER OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO CARDINAL PÉTER ERDO
ARCHBISHOP OF ESZTERGOM-BUDAPEST
AND PRIMATE OF HUNGARY
ON THE OCCASION OF THE EIGHTH CENTENARY
OF THE BIRTH OF ST ELIZABETH OF HUNGARY***

*To my Venerable Brother
Cardinal Péter Erdo
Archbishop of Esztergom-Budapest
Primate of Hungary,
President of the Council of European Bishops' Conferences*

I learned with deep pleasure that special festivities are planned for the eighth centenary of the birth of St Elizabeth of Thuringia or of Hungary, being celebrated this year. On this happy occasion, I ask you to convey to the faithful of Hungary and of the whole of Europe my spiritual participation in the scheduled celebrations: they will be an appropriate opportunity to present to the entire People of God, and of Europe in particular, the splendid testimony of this Saint, whose fame has crossed the boundaries of her own Homeland involving a great many people throughout the Continent, including non-Christians.

Elizabeth, a "European" Saint, was born into a social context of recent evangelization. Andrew and Gertrude, parents of this authentic pearl of the new Christian Hungary, were careful to instil in her an awareness of her own dignity as God's adoptive daughter.

Elizabeth made her own the programme of Jesus Christ, Son of God, who in becoming man "emptied himself, taking the form of a servant" (Phil 2: 7). Thanks to the help of her excellent teachers, she trod in the footsteps of St Francis of Assisi and set Christ, the one Redeemer of humanity, as her personal and ultimate goal and model in life.

Called to be the wife of the Landgrave of Thuringia, she never ceased to devote herself to the care

of the poor, in whom she recognized the likeness of the divine Master. She was able to combine her gifts as an exemplary wife and mother with the exercise of the Gospel virtues that she had learned at the school of the Saint of Assisi. She proved to be a true daughter of the Church, who bore a concrete, visible and meaningful witness to Christ's love.

Innumerable people down the ages followed her example, viewing her as a model who mirrored the Christian virtues, lived radically in marriage, in the family and also in widowhood.

Political figures have been inspired by her, drawing from her the incentive to work for reconciliation among nations.

The International Year of Elizabeth, which began in Rome last 17 November, is arousing new interest and a better understanding of the spirituality of this daughter of Pannonia, who still today reminds her fellow citizens and the inhabitants of the European Continent of the importance of the imperishable values of the Gospel.

Your Eminence, I express my fervent hope that a deeper knowledge of the personality and work of Elizabeth of Thuringia will help people to rediscover with ever livelier awareness the Christian roots of Hungary and of Europe itself, impelling their leaders to develop the dialogue between the Church and civil society in harmony and respect in order to build a world which is truly free and shows solidarity.

May the International Year of Elizabeth be an especially favourable opportunity to highlight for Hungarians, Germans and all Europeans the Christian heritage they have received from their ancestors, so that they may continue to draw from these roots the necessary nourishment for abundant fruitfulness in the new millennium which recently began.

As I invoke upon all the constant protection of Mary, *Magna Domina Hungarorum*, of St Stephen and of St Elizabeth, I impart a special Apostolic Blessing to you, Your Eminence, to the Bishops, clergy, Religious and all the faithful, as a pledge of abundant heavenly favours.

From the Vatican, 27 May 2007

BENEDICTUS PP. XVI

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