



The Holy See

***APOSTOLIC LETTER OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THE CATHOLIC PEOPLE OF HUNGARY
FOR THE CONCLUSION OF THE "HUNGARIAN MILLENNIUM"***

*To Our Venerable Brother Cardinal Laszlo Paskai
Archbishop of Esztergom-Budapest Primate of Hungary*

1. *My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour (Lk 1,46)*. On the forthcoming Solemnity of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary, her canticle of praise to God will be sung with special devotion in the basilica of Esztergom-Budapest, when the Hungarian people commemorate the glorious event of the Baptism of their ancestors, by the work of St Stephen a thousand years ago. This commemoration will certainly induce people to give thanks for the countless benefits received during this millennium through the intercession of Our Lady, the great Lady of the Hungarians. On that very day, I too, present in spirit with the clergy and the faithful gathered in the basilica of Esztergom-Budapest, will join the Blessed Virgin's canticle: *My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour*.

2. The "Hungarian Millennium" becomes an even more illustrious event because you are celebrating it on the solemn anniversary commemorating the death of St Stephen in the royal city of Esztergom, where long ago arrived the crown given to him by my venerable Predecessor Sylvester II. It is now kept on view in the splendid basilica, in the very place where the coronation took place, where, with deep gratitude, the President, the Prime Minister of the Republic, representatives of the Government and the Public Council will gather, together with the magistrates of Esztergom, a multitude of the faithful and many public leaders of the Hungarian State.

For Hungarians, this ancient crown is the symbol of their national identity, of their history and of the thousand-year-old culture of their kingdom and, adorned with the title of "Sacred Crown", it is venerated as a relic by the people. May this deep spiritual meaning help the members of the present generation to build a future filled with significant values on the foundations of the Christian

institutions of yore.

3. To the great advantage of the Hungarian people, divine Providence disposed that a thousand years ago a man of extraordinary prudence, endowed with exceptional ability and great wisdom, would receive from Pope Sylvester the crown with which he was crowned during the Solemnity of Christmas in the year 1000. It was not long before the Hungarian State became independent and was added to the number of European kingdoms.

Stephen did not accept the crown as an honour, but a service; he therefore, always and in all circumstances, sought the good of the community entrusted to him, both by organizing and defending the kingdom and by promulgating new decrees, as well as by fostering the development of the two cultures, the human and the divine.

King Stephen was untainted by the allure of his advantages and successes and, having overcome the enticements of his time, he found a living source from which he drew the strength to guide his people with faithful service. A writer has summed up this spiritual source concisely and with insight: *In always presenting himself as though he were before the tribunal of Christ, whom he contemplated with the eyes of his heart and a face such as to command respect, he showed that he had Christ on his lips and carried him in his heart and in all his actions* ("The Greater Legend of St Stephen", chap. 20, *Writers of Hungarian history at the time of the commanders and of the kings of the Árpáadian Family*, printed and edited by E. Szentpétery, I-II, Budapest 1937, 1938, 11 392).

4. In the course of these 1,000 years, King Stephen has always appeared as a shining example of family life. Only one of his children, Emeric, reached adolescence; St Stephen paid great attention to his education and was careful to see that he was enriched by the knowledge required at the time. He was concerned with his formation, which he entrusted to distinguished teachers - including St Gerard, the future Bishop of Szeged-Csanad - and wanted a book to be prepared for his use, which would contain his reflections and rules for life. In this way he trained his son for life so as to make him worthy, both in knowledge and in conduct, to govern the kingdom. However, since he died while he was still young he was unable to succeed his father.

King Stephen's family is truly outstanding for its holiness. Honoured by his blessed wife, Gisela, and his holy son, Emeric, he was able to spread such virtue in the subsequent generations as to give rise to the just claim that the house of Árpád has given the Church countless saints and blessed. These splendid lights of Christianity continue to spur us on to take the right path, following the signs of Christ. Ten centuries later, they are still a warning to our generation that the virtues of family life must be deeply esteemed and that the mission of educating children must not be neglected. I therefore appropriately repeat what I said to people of the world of culture and science on the occasion of my Pastoral Visit to Hungary: "One of the most important factors of culture is education. But this consists in transmitting to future generations a concise summary of

the scientific and technological conquests achieved.... However, an equal and even greater effort must be made in the field of educational formation.... A reductive conception of man inevitably can cause serious harm to human formation" (John Paul II, *Address to people of culture and science*, 17 August 1991, n. 6; *L'Osservatore Romano* English edition, 1991, p. 3).

5. Let us recall this marvellous man's particular approach to governing the State, which enabled him to deal successfully with the very serious commitments related to the organization of the kingdom.

Historians writing on his life mention that Stephen was constantly dedicated to prayer and that he always found the time to pray, despite being overwhelmed by the many affairs of government. His soul appears in the *Libellus de institutione morum ad Emericum ducem* (*A Manual on Moral Formation for the Duke Emeric*), written for his son, Emeric: "The observance of prayer is the greatest conquest of true salvation.... Continuous prayer is purification and the remission of sins.

Then, my son, every time you go to God's house, do so in such a way as to adore God with Solomon, son of the king, and you yourself, as king, should always say: "Send, O Lord, Wisdom down from your glorious throne, that she may be with me and work with me, and that I may learn what is pleasing to you at all times" (St Stephen, *Libellus de institutione morum ad Emericum ducem*, chap. 9: *Writers of the History of Hungary*, n. 1, 11 626; cf. Wis 9,9-11).

I would especially like to stress this feature, that is, that at the beginning of the new millennium I attribute great importance to cultivating a spirit of prayer, as I wrote in my recent Apostolic Letter: "This training in holiness calls for a Christian life distinguished above all in the *art of prayer*.... We have to learn to pray... . Especially in the face of the many trials to which today's world subjects faith, they would be not only mediocre Christians (that is, *ordinary Christians*) but "Christians at risk'. They would run the insidious risk of seeing their faith progressively undermined, and would perhaps end up succumbing to the allure of 'substitutes', accepting alternative religious proposals and even indulging in far-fetched superstitions" (*Novo Millennio ineunte*, nn. 32-34; AAS 93 [2001]).

6. St Stephen is portrayed holding the sacred crown in his hands whilst dedicating the kingdom and his people to the "great Lady of the Hungarians". To this day, the Hungarian people adhere so strongly to this act of dedication that Marian devotion has become a national characteristic. I therefore remember with joy that 10 years ago, during my Pastoral Visit to Hungary, after the Mass celebrated in Budapest in Heroes' Square, I renewed this offering of your homeland to the "Great Lady of the Hungarians" together with the entire Hungarian people; it is fitting that in coming to the conclusion of the "Hungarian Millennium" you now renew the same offering with the same prayer.

May the protection of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Great Lady of the Hungarians, which your people have so often experienced in their history, guide your ecclesiastical and civil leaders and

your country in this millennium on the way to development, progress, Christian virtues, solidarity and peace! On this renowned feast of your people, I gladly impart my Apostolic Blessing to you all.

From Castel Gandolfo, 25 July 2001, the 23rd year of my Pontificate.

JOHN PAUL II

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