



The Holy See

MESSAGE OF JOHN PAUL II TO THE HUNGARIAN NATION FOR THE MILLENNIUM OF ST. STEPHEN CORONATION

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ!

Beloved Hungarian People! *Te Deum laudamus, Te Dominum confitemur!* These joyful words from the *Te Deum* hymn are well suited to the solemn celebration of the first millennium of St Stephen's coronation. At this time of grace our thoughts turn to that key event which marks the birth of the Hungarian State. With grateful hearts we wish to praise God and thank him for the graces received by the people of Hungary in these 1,000 years of history. This history begins with a holy king, rather, with a "holy family": Stephen, with his wife, Bl. Gisela, and their son, St Emeric, are the first saintly Hungarian family. This seed would sprout and bring forth a host of noble figures who would distinguish *Pannonia Sacra*: one need only think of St Ladislaus, St Elizabeth and St Margaret! Then as we look at the tormented 20th century, how could we forget the great examples of the late Cardinal József Mindszenty, Bl. Vilmos Apor, Bishop and martyr, and Ven. László Batthyány-Strattmann? It is a history that has unfolded down the centuries with a fertility which it is your duty to increase and to enrich with new fruits in the various fields of human activity.

In the course of its glorious past, Hungary was also Christianity's bulwark against the invasion of the Tartars and Turks. Of course, such a broad span of time did not want for dark moments; it was not without the bitter experience of withdrawals and defeats, which we must critically examine in a way that will shed light on responsibilities and prompt us to turn, in the final analysis, to the mercy of God, who can draw good even from evil. However, the history of your homeland as a whole is full of splendid lights in both the religious and the civil sphere, arousing the admiration of all who undertake its study.² At the dawn of the millennium, the figure of King St Stephen stands out. He founded the State on the firm rock of Christian values, and for this reason wanted to receive the royal crown from the hands of my Predecessor, Pope Sylvester II. Thus the Hungarian nation was founded in deep unity with the Chair of Peter and bound by close ties to other European countries, which shared the same Christian culture. This culture was the vital sap flowing through the fibres of the developing plant, which assured its growth and vigour, and prepared the extraordinary flourishing that was to come. In Christianity the true, the just, the good and the beautiful are combined in marvellous harmony under the action of grace, which transforms and elevates all things. The world of work, study and research, the reality of law, the face of art with its multiple expressions, the sense of values, the thirst - often unconscious - for great and eternal things, with the need for the absolute which exists in every person, all come together in Jesus Christ who is the Way, the Truth and the Life. This is what Augustine pointed out when he said that man is made for God and therefore his heart is restless until it rests in him (cf. *Confessions*, I, 1). In this creative restlessness pulsates all that is most deeply

human: the sense of belonging to God, the search for truth, the insatiable need for goodness, the burning thirst for love, the hunger for freedom, the longing for the beautiful, the wonder of the new, the soft but commanding voice of conscience. It is this very restlessness which reveals the true dignity of man, who feels in the depths of his being that his destiny is inseparably linked to God's eternal destiny. Every attempt to obliterate or ignore this irrepressible need for God reduces and impoverishes man's essential nature: the believer who is aware of this must bear witness to it in society, in order to serve the authentic cause of man in this way as well.

3. Everyone knows that your most noble nation was taught at the maternal knee of Holy Church. Unfortunately, in the last two generations not everyone has had the opportunity to know Jesus Christ, our Saviour. This period of history was marked by trials and suffering. It is now up to you, Hungarian Christians, to bring Jesus' name and to proclaim his Good News to all your beloved compatriots, thus making our Saviour's face known to them. When St Stephen wrote his *Admonitions* for his son Emeric, was he speaking only to him? This is the question I asked you during my first pastoral visit to Hungary, during the unforgettable celebration in Heroes' Square on 20 August 1991. I remarked at the time: "Did he not write his *Admonitions* for all future generations of Hungarians, for all the heirs of his crown? Your holy king, dear brothers and sisters of the Hungarian nation, left you as an inheritance not only the royal crown which he received from Pope Sylvester II. He left you the spiritual testament, a heritage of fundamental and indestructible values: the true house built upon the rock". Furthermore, all that the holy king recalled to his son in that venerable text remains timely: "A country that has only one language and only one tradition is weak and failing. I therefore urge you to welcome foreigners kindly and to hold them in honour, so that they prefer to stay with you rather than elsewhere" (*Admonitions*, VI). How can we not admire the far-sightedness of this advice? It outlines the idea of the modern State, open to the needs of all and to the light of Christ's Gospel. 4. Fidelity to the Christian message today also prompts you, dear Hungarian brothers and sisters, to foster the values of mutual respect and solidarity, which have their indestructible foundation in the dignity of the human person. With hearts grateful to God, accept the gift of life and, with fearless courage, defend its sacred value from conception until its natural end. Be conscious of the centrality of the family for a well-ordered, flourishing society. Promote wise programmes, therefore, to protect its soundness and integrity. Only a nation that can count on stable, healthy families can survive and write a great history, as you did in the past. May Hungary's Catholics be committed to fostering sincere ecumenical relations with members of the other Christian denominations in order to be true Gospel witnesses. A thousand years ago, Christianity was not yet divided. Today an ever more pressing need is felt to restore full ecclesial unity among all believers in Christ. The divisions of recent centuries must be overcome in truth and in love, with impassioned and tireless commitment. In addition, encourage and support every programme intended to promote harmony and collaboration within the nation and with neighbouring countries. You suffered together during the long periods of hardship which afflicted you and other peoples; why should you not be able to live together in the future? Peace and concord will be a source of every good for you. Study your past and try to draw from your knowledge of the events of bygone centuries the rich lessons of history, a *magistra vitae* for your future as well.

5. *Salvum fac populum tuum, Domine, et benedic hereditati tuae!* With this invocation, which the *Te Deum* also puts on our lips, we turn to the Lord to implore his help in the new millennium now beginning. We ask for it through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the *Magna Domina Hungarorum*, whose veneration has had so great a role in the precious heritage of King St Stephen. He offered his crown to her as a pledge of his entrustment of the Hungarian people to her heavenly protection. How many images depicting this act are found in your churches! Following the holy king's example, may you also put your future under the mantle of the One to whom God entrusted his Only-begotten Son!

Today you will solemnly carry the Right Hand of St Stephen in procession through the streets of your capital, the hand with which he offered his crown to the Blessed Virgin Mary: may the holy hand of your ancient king always accompany and protect your life! With these thoughts I would like to be spiritually present at your solemn celebrations, extending a respectful greeting to the President of the Republic and to all the national authorities, to the Cardinal Archbishop, to all my Brother Bishops and their collaborators, to the distinguished delegations which have gathered in Budapest for this solemn occasion, and to all the noble Hungarian nation. In the year of the Great Jubilee of the Incarnation of God's Son and of the solemn millennium of your nation, I invoke upon you all the greatest blessings of God the Father rich in mercy, of God the Son, our only Redeemer, and of God the Holy Spirit, who renews all things. Glory and honour to him forever and ever! *From Castel Gandolfo, 16 August 2000, the twenty-second year of my Pontificate.* © Copyright 2000 - Libreria Editrice Vaticana

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