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Apostolic Journey of Pope Francis in Hungary (28 to 30 April 2023) – Official Welcome, Welcome Ceremony, Courtesy visit to the President of the Republic and Meeting with the Authorities

Official Welcome at Budapest International Airport

Welcome Ceremony, Courtesy visit to the President of the Republic and Meeting with the Prime Minister at Sándor Palace

Meeting with the Authorities, Civil Society and the Diplomatic Corps in Sándor Palace

Official Welcome at Budapest International Airport

Upon his arrival at *Ferenc Liszt* International Airport, Budapest, the Holy Father Francis was welcomed by the Deputy Prime Minister of the Republic of Hungary, His Excellency Mr. Zsolt Semjén. Two children in traditional dress offered him bread and salt.

Then, after the presentation of the local delegations, the Pope and the Deputy Prime Minister proceeded to the VIP Lounge of the Airport for a brief meeting.

Afterwards, Pope Francis drove to the Sándor Palace for the welcome ceremony, the courtesy visit to the President of the Republic and the meeting with the Prime Minister.

Welcome Ceremony, Courtesy visit to the President of the Republic and Meeting with the Prime Minister at Sándor Palace

At 11.15, the Holy Father arrived at Sándor Palace where the official welcome ceremony took place.

Upon arrival, the Pope was welcomed by the President of the Republic of Hungary, Her Excellency Ms. Katalin Novák, in the square in front of the Palace.

After the presentation of the respective delegations, the honouring of the flags, the playing of the hymns and the Guard of Honour, the Pope and the President went to the Empire Hall for the official photograph and the signing of the Book of Honour. They then proceeded to the Blue Room, where, after the exchange of gifts, the private meeting and presentation of the family took place.

At the same time, in the adjacent room, a meeting took place between the Cardinal Secretary of State and the Prime Minister, in the presence of the Substitute of the Secretariat of State, the Secretary for Relations with States and International Organizations, the Apostolic Nuncio and the Nunciature Counsellor.

At the end of the courtesy visit, the President accompanied the Pope to the Maria Theresa Hall where a brief private meeting took place with the Prime Minister of the Republic of Hungary, His Excellency Mr. Viktor Orbán, and his family members.

The Pope then went to the Hall of the former Carmelite Monastery for a meeting with the Authorities, Civil Society and the Diplomatic Corps.

Meeting with the Authorities, Civil Society and the Diplomatic Corps in Sándor Palace

At 12.50, in the Hall of the former Carmelite Monastery at Sándor Palace, the Holy Father Francis met with political and religious leaders, representatives of civil society and culture and members of the Diplomatic Corps.

After the speech of the President of the Republic of Hungary, Her Excellency Ms. Katalin Novák, the Pope delivered his address.

At the end of the meeting with the authorities, accompanied by the President and the Prime Minister, the Holy Father went to the terrace behind the former Carmelite Convent, from which one can view the city of Budapest below.

Then Pope Francis transferred by car to the Apostolic Nunciature where, on his arrival, he was welcomed by the staff of the Pontifical Representation.

The following is the address delivered by the Pope during the meeting with the authorities, civil society and the Diplomatic Corps:

Address of the Holy Father

Madam President of the Republic,

Mr Prime Minister,

Distinguished Members of Government and the Diplomatic Corps,

Illustrious Authorities and Representatives of Civil Society,

Ladies and Gentlemen!

I greet you all most cordially and I thank Madam President for her welcome and her kind and profound words. Politics was born of the city, the *polis*, and the practical desire to live together in unity, ensuring rights and respecting obligations. Few cities help us realize this as does Budapest, for it is not only a noble and lively metropolis, but also a theatre of great historical events. Having witnessed momentous events in the past, it is called to take a leading role in the present and in the future. Here, as one of your great poets wrote, “we are tenderly embraced by the Danube, which is our past, our present and our future” (A. JÓZSEF, *The Danube*). I would now like to share a few thoughts with you, taking as my starting point Budapest itself: a *city of history*, a *city of bridges* and a *city of saints*.

1. *A city of history*. This capital has ancient origins, as evidenced by its remains from Celtic and Roman times. Its splendour, however, is linked to the modern period, when it was the capital of the Austro-Hungarian Empire in those decades of peace known as the *belle époque*, extending from the years of its establishment to the outbreak of the First World War. Born in peacetime, it has also experienced brutal conflicts: not only the invasions of ages past, but in more recent times, acts of violence and oppression perpetrated by the Nazi and Communist dictatorships. How can we forget the events of 1956? And during the Second World War, tens of thousands of its inhabitants were deported, with the remaining population of Jewish origin enclosed in the ghetto and subjected to mass murders. Yet those days were also marked by the heroism of many of the “righteous” – I think of the Nuncio Angelo Rotta, for example – and later by the great resilience and commitment shown in the work of rebuilding. As a result, Budapest today is one of the European cities with the largest Jewish population, the heart of a country that acknowledges the value of freedom and, having paid so great a toll to the dictatorships, is conscious of its mission to preserve the treasure of democracy and the dream of peace.

This year you are solemnly commemorating the founding of Budapest 150 years ago, in 1873, through the union of the three cities, Buda and Óbuda to the west of the Danube and Pest on the opposite bank. The birth of this great capital in the heart of the continent invites us to reflect on the process of unification undertaken by Europe, in which Hungary plays a vital role. In the post-war period, Europe, together with the United Nations, embodied the noble hope that, by working together for a closer bond between nations, further conflicts could be avoided. Unfortunately, this was not the case. In the world in which we presently live, however, that passionate quest of a politics of community and the strengthening of multilateral relations seems a wistful memory from a distant past. We seem to be witnessing the sorry sunset of that choral dream of peace, as the soloists of war now take over. More and more, enthusiasm for building a peaceful and stable community of nations seems to be cooling, as zones of influence are marked out, differences accentuated, nationalism is on the rise and ever harsher judgments and language are used in confronting others. On the international level, it even seems that politics serves more to stir up emotions rather than to resolve problems, as the maturity attained after the horrors of the war gives way to regression towards a kind of adolescent belligerence. Peace will never come as the result of the pursuit of individual strategic interests, but only from policies capable of looking to the bigger picture, to the development of everyone: policies that are attentive to individuals, to the poor and to the future, and not merely to power, profit and present prospects.

At this historical juncture, Europe is crucial, for thanks to its history, it represents *the memory of humanity*; in this sense, it is called to take up its proper role, which is to unite those far apart, to welcome other peoples and to refuse to consider anyone an eternal enemy. It is vital, then, *to recover the European spirit*: the excitement and vision of its founders, who were statesmen able to look beyond their own times, beyond national boundaries and immediate needs, and to generate forms of diplomacy capable of pursuing unity, not aggravating divisions. I think of De Gasperi, who at a roundtable with Schuman and Adenauer, stated: “It is for its own benefit, not as a way of setting itself against others, that we foresee a united Europe... We are working for unity, not for division” (*Intervention in the European Round Table*, Rome, 13 October 1953). And again, of Schuman’s conviction that: “The contribution that a structured and vital Europe can make to civilization is indispensable for the preservation of peaceful relations”, since – in his memorable words – “world peace cannot be ensured except by *creative efforts*, proportionate to the dangers threatening it” (*Schuman Declaration*, 9 May 1950). At the present time, those dangers are many indeed; but I ask myself, thinking not least of war-torn Ukraine, where are creative efforts for peace?

2. Budapest is a *city of bridges*. Seen from above, “the pearl of the Danube” shows its uniqueness in the bridges that unite its several parts, fitting its shape to that of the great river. This harmony with the natural environment leads me to note the praiseworthy concern for ecology shown by the nation. Those bridges, which link diverse realities, also make us think of the importance of a unity that is not the same as uniformity. In Budapest, this is seen in the remarkable variety of the more than twenty districts that make up the city. So too, the Europe of the 27, built to create bridges between nations, requires the contribution of all, while not diminishing the uniqueness of each. As one of the founders declared: “Europe will exist, yet nothing will be lost of what constituted the glory and felicity of each nation. For within a larger society, and a greater harmony, individuals will be able to flourish” (*Intervention*, cit.). This is the harmony we need: a whole whose parts are not blandly homogenized, but fully integrated with their proper identities preserved. In this regard, the Hungarian Constitution rightly states: “Individual freedom can only be complete in cooperation with others”, and again, “We believe that our national culture is a rich contribution to the diversity of European unity”.

I think of a Europe that is not hostage to its parts, neither falling prey to self-referential forms of populism nor resorting to a fluid, if not vapid, “supranationalism” that loses sight of the life of its peoples. This is the baneful path taken by those forms of “ideological colonization” that would cancel differences, as in the case of the so-called gender theory, or that would place before the reality of life reductive concepts of freedom, for example by vaunting as progress a senseless “right to abortion”, which is always a tragic defeat. How much better it would be to build a Europe centred on the human person and on its peoples, with effective policies for natality and the family like those pursued attentively in this country – there are countries in Europe with a medium age of 46-48 –, a Europe whose different nations would form a single family that protects the growth and uniqueness of each of its members. The most famous bridge in Budapest, the chain bridge, helps us to envision that kind of Europe, since it is composed of many great and diverse links that derive their solidity and strength from being joined together. In this regard, the Christian faith can be a resource, and Hungary can act as a “bridge builder” by drawing upon its specific ecumenical character. Here, different confessions, with whom I met a year and a half ago, live together without friction, cooperating respectfully and constructively. My thoughts turn with great affection to the Abbey of Pannonhalma, one of the great spiritual monuments of this country, a place of prayer and itself a bridge of fraternity.

3. This leads me to consider the final aspect: Budapest as a *city of saints*. Madam President spoke of Saint Elizabeth. This is also suggested by the new picture placed in this hall. Naturally, we think of Saint Stephen, the first King of Hungary, who lived at a time when Europe’s Christians were in full communion. His statue, inside Buda Castle, dominates and protects the city, while the Basilica dedicated to him in the heart of the capital, together with that of Esztergom, is the most imposing religious building of the country. Hungarian history was marked by sanctity from the start, not simply the holiness of the King but of his entire family: his wife Blessed Gisela and his son Saint Emeric. The latter received from his father a number of admonitions that constitute a sort of testament for the Magyar people. Today, they promised to give me a copy of it. I look forward to receiving it. There we read advice that remains timely: “I urge you to show favour not only to relations and kin, or to the powerful and wealthy, or to your neighbours and fellow-countrymen, but also to foreigners and all who come to you”. Saint Stephen displays an authentically Christian spirit when he declares that, “the practice of love leads to supreme happiness”. To which he adds: “Be gentle, so that you will never oppose justice” (*Admonitions*, X). In this way, he inseparably joins truth and gentleness. This is a great teaching of faith: Christian values cannot be proposed by rigidity and close-mindedness, because the truth of Christ demands meekness and gentleness, in the spirit of the Beatitudes. Here we see the roots of the innate Hungarian gentility that is reflected in certain expressions of everyday speech, as for example, “*jónak lenni jó*” [it is good to be good] and “*jobb adni mint kapni*” [it is better to give than receive].

This is an affirmation not only of the value of a clear identity, but also of the need for openness towards others. The Constitution recognizes this in stating: “We respect the freedom and culture of other peoples, and shall strive to cooperate with every nation of the world”. It likewise states that “the nationalities living with us form part of the Hungarian political community and are constituent parts of the State”, and commits itself to “promoting and safeguarding... the languages and cultures of nationalities living in Hungary”. This spirit is truly evangelical, and contrasts with a certain tendency, at times proposed in the name of native traditions and even of the faith, to withdraw into oneself.

The text of the Constitution, in a clear and concise phrase imbued with Christian spirit, goes on to state: “We have a general duty to protect the vulnerable and the poor”. We are reminded of the long history of Hungarian sanctity, as witnessed by the many places of worship in this capital. From the first king, who laid the foundations for communal life, we pass to a princess who elevated the walls of that edifice to greater strength and purity. Saint Elizabeth’s fame has spread throughout the world. This daughter of your land died at twenty-four years of age after renouncing all her possessions and distributing everything to the poor. To the end, she devoted herself to ministering to the sick in the hospice that she had built. She remains an outstanding witness to the Gospel.

Distinguished Authorities, I express my gratitude for the promotion of the charitable and educational works inspired by these values, in which the local Catholic community actively participates, as well as for your concrete support of the many Christians worldwide who experience hardship and adversity, especially in Syria and Lebanon. Cooperation between the State and the Church has proved fruitful, ever respecting the need for a careful distinction between their proper spheres. It is important that all Christians keep this in mind, taking the Gospel as their point of reference, freely embracing the liberating teachings of Jesus without yielding to a sort of “collaborationism” with a politics of power. This calls for a sound sense of “laicity” that does not degenerate into the widespread “laicism” that is allergic to any aspect of the sacred, yet ready to sacrifice itself at the altars of profit. Those who profess themselves Christian, in the company of the witnesses of faith, are called to bear witness to and to join forces with everyone in cultivating a humanism inspired by the Gospel and moving along two fundamental tracks: acknowledging ourselves to be beloved children of the Father and loving one another as brothers and sisters.

In this regard, Saint Stephen bequeathed to his son extraordinary words of fraternity when he told him that those who arrive with different languages and customs “adorn the country”. Indeed, as he wrote, “a country that has but one language and custom is weak and fragile; for this reason I urge you to welcome strangers with benevolence and to hold them in esteem, so that they prefer to be with you rather than elsewhere” (*Admonitions*, VI). The issue of acceptance and welcome is a heated one in our time, and is surely complex. Nonetheless, for those who are Christians, our basic attitude cannot differ from that which Saint Stephen recommended to his son, having learned it from Jesus, who identified himself with the stranger needing to be welcomed (cf. *Mt 25:35*). When we think of Christ present in so many of our brothers and sisters who flee in desperation from conflicts, poverty and climate change, we feel bound to confront the problem without excuses and delay. It needs to be confronted together, as a community, not least because, in the present situation, its effects will be felt, sooner or later, by all of us. It is urgent then, as Europe, to work for secure and legal corridors and established processes for meeting an epochal challenge that is ineluctable and needs to be acknowledged, in order to prepare a future that, unless it is shared, will not exist. This challenge especially calls for a response on the part of those who are followers of Jesus and wish to imitate the example of the witnesses of the Gospel.

It is not possible to cite all the great confessors of the faith of *Pannonia Sacra*, but here I would like at least to mention Saint Ladislav and Saint Margaret, and to recall a few majestic figures of the past century, such as Cardinal József Mindszenty, Blessed Vilmos Apor and Blessed Zoltán Meszlényi, bishops and martyrs, and Blessed László Battyány-Strattmann. Together with so many righteous persons of various creeds, they are fathers and mothers of your country. To them I desire to entrust the future of this nation, so dear to my heart. I thank you for having listened patiently to these reflections that I have shared with you, and I assure you of my closeness and my prayers for all Hungarians, with a special thought for those living outside the country and all those whom I have encountered in my life and who were so good to me. I think of the Hungarian religious community that I assisted in Buenos Aires. *Isten, áldd meg a magyart*” [God bless the people of Hungary!]
