



Insignes

Encyclical Of Pope Leo XIII On The Hungarian Millennium

May 1, 1896

To the Bishops of Hungary.

1. You have most rightly decreed that special, joyful thanksgiving be offered to the eternal God of Hungary. For your nation, beyond all others, is bound to recall the great abundance of benefits which it has received from God, the most provident establisher and preserver of kingdoms, throughout many centuries and in troublesome trials. The birthday of your country, as it most happily returns, is a very suitable time for recollecting and celebrating these blessings. For you are now marking the thousandth year since your ancestors established their homes and residences in those lands and the history of Hungary began.

2. We are in no doubt that the observances planned will have an outcome worthy of the occasion and be productive of the most noble advantages. For there can be no citizen with pure love whom the glories of the country in which he has a share do not affect and to whom the ancient glories of the past publicly remembered affects him with a keen desire to imitate them. To all of this will be added the unanimous approval of so many civilized nations who, as they share rejoicing in friendship, will surely congratulate a kingdom founded on appropriate laws and institutions, preserved by its civil prudence and valor in war and brought by many deeds of excellence to its present longevity and growth.

3. Your prosperity affects Us in the most delightful possible way, and We desire nothing more than to be present with you among your people, Venerable Brothers, and to dwell there in mind and spirit. This Our wish is prompted chiefly by Our special attraction towards and loving care for Catholic Hungary and by their devoted feelings towards this Apostolic See and Ourselves. Among other indications of devotions, in recent years Rome has seen Hungarians in great numbers come, under your leadership, to venerate the tombs of the Princes of the

Apostles. They have presented beautiful testimonies of faith, obedience, and love in the name of all their fellow countrymen. They won Our benevolence and an exhortatory address to strengthen their spirits in the duties of their holy profession. Indeed We had purposely manifested this benevolence of Ours to the entire nation in Our first and second letters to you. Now, however, recollecting the modesty and favor with which the clergy and all good men received Our instructions, once again may this letter convey Our love and may it both increase the joy of the secular celebration and redouble its fruits.

4. In the preparation for your celebrations, the power of the Catholic religion as an excellent promoter of public safety and as the source or support of good things among the peoples shines forth. Certainly, as your wiser historians state, the Hungarian nation would not have held their occupied areas either very long or very prosperously unless the Gospel had led it, freed from the yoke of superstition, to accept these well-known principles: to respect natural law, to do harm to no one, to be merciful, to pursue peace, to be subject to princes as to God, and to practice brotherhood at home and abroad.

5. In a wonderful manner, the beginnings of the Catholic faith in your country were consecrated in the persons of Prince Geza and the leaders of the nation, especially by the efforts of the holy bishop Adalbert, a man famous for his apostolic labors and finally, his martyr's crown. Those beginnings, however, were the more remarkable in that, considering the times and the position of their territories, they lay dangerously open to the lamentable separation from the Roman Church which was breaking out among the Easterners. What his father had begun, Stephan, a most exemplary Christian prince, persisted in and completed. He is therefore rightly celebrated as the chief pillar and light of your nation; he not only instructed it in the attainment of eternal salvation, but he also increased its extent and renown.

6. Under that same prince, who offered and dedicated his sceptre to the Mother of God and blessed Peter, that exchange of deeds of zeal and duty between the Roman pontiffs and the kings and people of Hungary began, which we have already praised. A permanent symbol of this bond was the royal crown adorned with images of Christ the Savior and the Apostles which Our predecessor Sylvester II sent as a gift to Stephan, when he conferred on him the title of king because "he had greatly spread abroad the faith of Christ"[1] in your country. That famous incident establishes the constancy of the Hungarians in their obedience to Peter, for this crown has borne the brunt of the shifting and dangerous squalls of critical times unscathed, still radiant with its ancient honor; consequently it has always been regarded as the great glory and defense of the kingdom, and therefore protected religiously.

7. Thus it came about that Hungary, as it grew in resources, entered on the same paths as the peoples of youthful Christian Europe were traveling; because of the outstanding character of the race, it attained virtue and humanity more rapidly.

For this reason, many men came forth who brought true fame to their country and themselves by holiness of life, teaching, literature, arts, and the fulfilling of their duties.

8. We have heard that a project has been undertaken which We fully approve for the current celebration. It is planned to publish the ancient forgotten evidence of services conferred by religion. Furthermore, the letters, both those from you and those in Our Apostolic records, bear concordant witness to the fact that religion has benefitted mankind. It is of great importance to reflect upon this, especially at the present time. Consider what functions the Church fulfilled for your ancestors in establishing and administering public law; certainly its wisdom, order, and fairness permeated everywhere at the request of all classes. Moreover, the Roman pontiffs have shown themselves guardians and defenders of civil liberty whenever it was placed in critical danger, either when requested to or of their own accord. Your people have also never ceased to fight for this liberty. This has happened many times in the past, especially when the attacks of the bitter enemies of the holy faith had to be beaten back. When the Turks invaded, everyone without exception agrees that the terrible defeat which was threatening most of the Western peoples was averted by the unconquerable courage of the Hungarians. Nevertheless, Our predecessors contributed greatly to the success of the events by supplying money, sending reinforcements, arranging treaties of alliance, and by effective prayer for heavenly support.

9. Innocent XI in particular gave aid in this struggle. His name is famous in connection with two extraordinary deeds: the liberation of Vienna from enemy siege and the great deliverance of Buda, your chief city, after long oppression.

10. Likewise Gregory XIII performed an undying service for your nation when your religion was dangerously afflicted by the influence of revolutionary movements which spread from neighboring peoples. He undertook for Hungary the sound measure which he had already carried through for other countries. We refer of course to the College which he established for you in Rome, which he then combined with the German College, in which chosen students would be thoroughly educated in the learning and virtues worthy of the priesthood. Then afterwards, they would work with greater effect in your churches. And this indeed was the richly productive result, since many who were educated there also held episcopal rank and brought equal glory to Church and state.

11. These and similar benefits from the continuous favor of the Church are not so much recalled in history books as they are deeply etched on the minds of your citizens. A witness whose credibility is equal to all the rest is the famous John Hunyadi in the fifteenth century, whose strategy and bravery Hungary will always remember and praise. He declared in a welcome and eloquent manner, "This country would never have stood fast on its resources, I think, if it had not stood fast in its faith." And while the same man was governor of the kingdom, all classes in a common letter to Nicholas V professed: "Whatever our condition is, it is

especially due to the support of your Apostolic favor that we hold our own." Far from reducing the importance of these testimonies, succeeding ages have clearly added substantially to them as their benefits increased.

12. The Hungarians have always striven to keep their kingdom bound as closely as possible to the Apostolic See as its "very own and most devoted possession." The register of public proceedings records many proofs of this, whether in the form of letters written by kings and nobles to the Roman pontiffs, or in the form of examples of heroic and energetic virtue which assisted the Church to protect its rights or to avenge its loss of rights on its enemies. This was even before the struggle began against the invading forces of the Moslems. The relationship of mutual service between King Louis the Great and Innocent VI and Urban V indicate this. And when Paul II urgently requested that the Catholic cause should be given strong help against the attack of the Hussites in Bohemia, King Mathias replied: "I have dedicated myself and my kingdom entirely to the Holy Roman Church and to your Beatitude. The Vicar of God on earth, nay, God Himself, cannot command any deed so difficult for me, or any so dangerous, that I should not think it dutiful and salutary to undertake, that I should not fearlessly attempt, especially when it is a case of strengthening the Catholic faith and crushing the perfidy of the impious.... Whatever enemies of religion it is necessary to meet in battle, behold, Mathias together with Hungary . . . remain devoted to the Apostolic See and to your Beatitude and will remain so for ever." And the event did not fall short of the words of the king nor of the Pope's expectation; and it remains an evidence of great importance for later times.

13. Moreover, the cooperation of nation and Church is shown by those commendations, neither few nor faint, with which this Apostolic See has honored your people, and likewise by the extraordinary titles of honor and privileges which it has given to your kings. We desire, however, and it is completely suited to the present celebration - to produce a glorious page from the long official document in which Clement XIII, in accordance with his power, confirmed to Maria Theresa, Queen of Hungary, and to her successors in the same kingdom, the title of Apostolic King. That title was to supersede previous privilege and custom. So as their fathers and grandfathers have already done, let the grandchildren themselves rejoice in this Papal proclamation: "The flourishing Kingdom of Hungary has been accurately considered the best fitted of all for extending the boundaries of Christian authority and glory, both by reason of the bravery of a most enterprising nation and the nature of its territories. And indeed, everyone knows the Hungarians' many outstanding deeds for the protection and expansion of Our religion. They have often engaged in battle with terrible enemies; by blocking as with their own bodies the advance of the same enemies, who were bent on destroying the Christian state, they wrested great victories from them. These famous events have been published in well-known literary works. But We can in no way pass over in silence Stephan, that most holy and brave King of Hungary, consecrated with heavenly honors and placed among the number of the Saints. The imprint of his virtue, his holiness, and his bravery survives in your country to

the eternal praise of the Hungarian name. And all his successors in the kingship have at all times imitated his beautiful examples of virtue. So it should seem strange to no one that the Roman pontiffs have always honored with great praises and privileges the Hungarian nation and its leaders and kings for their outstanding services to the Catholic faith and the Roman See. The principal mark of honor, of course, is the right to have the Cross carried in front of the kings in public procession as the most shining symbol of the Apostolate; this is in order to show that the Hungarian nation and its kings glory only in the Cross of Our Lord Jesus Christ and that in this sign, they are accustomed always to fight for the Catholic faith and to be victorious." [2]

14. We greatly enjoy gracing your religious festivities with these recollections of famous men and their deeds. But this event itself prompts some additional action, which will bring with it real improvement for the common good. Hungary should reflect upon itself and, inspired by a consciousness of the nobility of its most religious ancestors together with a knowledge of the present time, devote its efforts to worthy ends. The exhortation of the Apostle certainly summons you, whatever your rank: "Stand fast in the faith, act manfully and be strong." [3] To this all ought to respond with one mind and voice: "Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering." [4] "Let us have no cause to question our honor." [5]

15. When we observe the tendency of this age as a whole, it is lamentable some Catholic men everywhere do not practice the Catholic religion as they should, either in thought or in action. It is also lamentable that men make Catholicism almost the same as the form of any other religion and, in fact, even hold the former in suspicion and hatred. It is scarcely any use to say what sort of act it is to reject with degenerate spirit this outstanding inheritance from their ancestors. Nor is it any use to note how much it is the mark of an ungrateful and uncircumspect mind, both to be unwilling to recognize the longstanding benefits of the Catholic religion, and to neglect those anticipated benefits. In Catholic wisdom and doctrine, a power and effectiveness inheres which is thoroughly wonderful and works in many ways for the good of human society. Since it does not vanish with the passage of time, it is always the same and vigorous; in the same way, it is likely to be beneficial in modern times provided it is not stifled.

16. As to what pertains more nearly to your people, in former letters and similar pronouncements, We have denounced dangers from which religion should be protected, and We have proposed aids which would lead more suitably to its freedom and dignity. And since civil affairs cannot be separated from religious, We have been extremely eager to give Our attention and help to the former as well, since this is clearly an integral part of Our Apostolic duty. For the frequent advice and commands which We gave you as your circumstances required, contributed not a little, as you rightly remember, to the public safety and prosperity as well. But if, in this very people, the actions of good men comply more strongly each day with Our advice and warnings, why should We not embrace the hope which blossoms more abundantly on the occasion of this secular commemoration, and

which foreshadows to a rapid fulfillment of all men's prayers? For surely all good citizens pray that by removing causes for disagreement, the Church will not be denied its proper honor. Then the proper honor of the state too will shine more brilliantly in alliance with and under the guidance of the ancestral religion. This will result in the authority of governments, the mutual duties of the classes, the education of youth, and many other matters like these maintaining themselves in truth, in justice, and in love: for on these foundations and supports especially, states depend and thrive.

17. Not the least effective means of your enjoying this combination of good things, as your famous forefathers did, is to allow your feeling of piety towards the Roman Church to be inspired by their example, as under new auspices. The most honorable crown of Stephan will be borne on a set day through the capital city in an unusually solemn procession; this will be in the course of the public rejoicings for the dedication of the House of Assembly. Indeed, nothing is more closely connected with the glory of your nation and your kings, nothing so suitable to the right organization of civil affairs, than that sacred symbol of royal power. But We anticipate that a twofold permanent result will arise without difficulty from this occasion: first that among the nobility and the common people, obedient and faithful allegiance to the august House of Hapsburg will be strengthened. That House has always worn this same crown, which was conferred on it by your ancestors of their own accord. The second anticipated result is that the consequent recollection of the very close relations of your ancestors with the Chair of Peter, which are plainly approved and consecrated by this papal gift, may add firmness and strength to these same bonds.

18. Let the illustrious people of Hungary know, however, that they can and ought to entrust themselves completely to the authority and favor of the Apostolic See. This See will never forget their famous deeds for the Catholic cause; it retains and will continue to retain its former disposition of forethought and maternal kindness towards them.

19. If up to now We have helped you, may God help you to prosper even more. During this celebration in particular, may He be concerned for your Apostolic King, for the nobility, for the clergy, and for the whole people; and may He make them abound with those good things which He has Himself promised to nations and kingdoms which preserve justice and peace. And may your great lady Mary be concerned for you all likewise, together with Stephan and Adalbert, who are apostles and heavenly patrons of your kingdom. Under their salutary protection, which your forefathers experienced, you rejoice in more abundant fruit as the days go by. We add a special prayer with the greatest love: may all the citizens whom a single love of this country inspires, and whom this occasion of public thanksgiving joins in a brotherly fashion, be bound together some day by one and the same faith in the blessed embrace of Mother Church.

20. You, however, Venerable Brothers, continue as you are doing watchfully and

attentively so that you deserve well of your people and the state: receive, as an auspice of divine rewards and as a witness of Our special kindness, the Apostolic blessing which We impart most lovingly to each one of you and to the whole of Hungary the nineteenth year of Our Pontificate.

Endnotes

1. Clement XIII in his address *Si qui militan*, 1 October 1758.
2. Epistle *Quum multa alia*, 19 August 1758.
3. I Cor 16.13.
4. Heb 10.23.
5. I Mc 9.10.