



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI

TO THE BISHOPS OF HUNGARY

ON THEIR "AD LIMINA" VISIT*Clementine Hall*

Saturday, 10 May 2008 Dear and Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate, I greet you all with great joy, Pastors of the Church in Hungary, on the occasion of your visit *ad limina Apostolorum*. I greet you with affection and I am grateful to Cardinal Péter Erdö for his words to me on behalf of the Bishops' Conference as a whole. In addition to expressing your fraternal sentiments to me, for which I warmly thank you, he has clearly outlined the salient characteristics of the Catholic Community and the society of your Country, summarizing the knowledge that I have been able to gain at the meetings with each one of you. Thus, dear Brothers, the people entrusted to you are now spiritually before you with their joys and plans, their sorrows, problems and hopes. And we pray first of all that through the intercession of Sts Peter and Paul, and with the help of this Apostolic See which presides in charity, the faithful may find the strength to persevere on their way toward the fullness of the Kingdom of God. Unfortunately, the long period of the Communist regime has so deeply scarred the Hungarian people that the consequences are still being felt today: in particular, many show a certain difficulty in trusting others, typical of those who have lived for a long time in an atmosphere of suspicion. Moreover, the feeling of insecurity, is accentuated by the difficult economic situation, which heedless consumerism does not help to improve. People, including Catholics, generally feel the "weakness" of thought and will that is very common in our day. As you yourselves have noted, today it is often difficult to initiate a serious theological and spiritual deepening because, on the one hand the necessary intellectual training is lacking and on the other, the objective reference to the truth of faith. In this context the Church must certainly be a teacher, but must always show herself first and foremost to be a mother, so as to foster growth in mutual trust and to encourage hope. Unfortunately the family, which is going through a serious crisis in Hungary too, is the first to suffer from the widespread secularization. Its symptoms are the considerable decrease in the number of marriages and the striking rise in divorces, that are also very often premature. The so-called "de facto couples" are proliferating. You rightly criticized the public recognition of homosexual unions, because they are not only contrary to the Church's teaching but also to the Hungarian Constitution itself. This situation, together with the lack of subsidies for large families, has led to a drastic fall in the birth rate, made even more dramatic by the widespread practice of abortion. The family crisis is of course an enormous challenge to the Church. Conjugal fidelity and more in general the values on which society is founded are called

into question. It is therefore obvious that after families it is youth who are affected by this problem. In the cities they are attracted by new forms of entertainment and in the villages are often left to themselves. I therefore express my deepest appreciation of the many initiatives that the Church promotes, even with the limited means at her disposal, to animate the world of youth with periods of formation and friendship that awaken their sense of responsibility. I am thinking, for example, of the activities of choirs, which fit into the praiseworthy commitment of parishes to encourage the spread of sacred music. Again, in the perspective of attention to the new generations, you offer praiseworthy support to Catholic schools, and in particular to the Catholic University of Budapest which I hope will always be able to preserve and develop its original identity. I encourage you to persevere in your efforts for the pastoral care of schools and universities, as well as, more generally, for the evangelization of culture which in our day also avails itself of the media; in this sector your Church has recently made important progress. Venerable Brothers, to keep the people's faith alive you justly seek to develop and update traditional initiatives, such as pilgrimages and expressions of devotion to Hungarian Saints, particularly St Elizabeth, St Emeric and, of course, St Stephen. With regard to pilgrimages, while I appreciate the fact that the custom of pilgrimages to the See of Peter has endured (significantly, there is an evocative Hungarian Chapel in the Basilica dedicated to the Apostle), I learned with pleasure of the increasing number of pilgrimages to Marizell, Czestochowa, Lourdes, Fatima and the new Shrine of Divine Mercy at Krakow, where your Bishops' Conference also recently erected a "Hungarian Chapel". In the 20th century, there has been no lack of heroic witnesses of faith in your Community: I urge you to keep their memory alive, so that the Christian spirit with which they faced suffering may continue to inspire courage and fidelity in believers and in all who work for truth and justice. There is another concern that I share with you: the lack of priests and the resulting excessive burden of pastoral work on the Church's ministers today. This is a problem in many European Countries. Nonetheless, it is necessary to ensure that priests nourish their spiritual life adequately so that despite the problems and the pressing work they do not lose sight of the centre of their existence and their ministry, and are consequently able to discern the essential from the secondary, identifying the proper priorities in their daily activity. It is only right to reaffirm that joyful adherence to Christ, witnessed by the priest among his faithful, remains the most effective incentive to reawakening in young people sensitivity to a possible call from God. In particular, it is fundamental that the Sacraments of the Eucharist and of Penance be received regularly with the greatest devotion first of all by the priests themselves and then generously administered by them to the faithful. The exercise of presbyteral brotherhood is likewise indispensable, to avoid any dangerous isolation. It is equally important to encourage positive and respectful relations between priests and the lay faithful, in accordance with the teaching of the Conciliar Decree *Presbyterorum Ordinis*. The good relations existing between the clergy and religious also deserve to be increased further. In this regard I would like to address my encouragement to the women's Religious Congregations, which with humble discretion carry out precious activities among the poorest. Venerable Brothers, in spite of secularization, the Catholic Church continues to be the Religious Community to which many Hungarians belong, or, at least, an important reference point. Thus it is particularly desirable that relations with State Authorities be marked by respectful collaboration, also by means of

bilateral Agreements whose correct implementation should be overseen by a special Joint Commission. This will not fail to benefit the whole of Hungarian society, particularly in the fields of education and culture. And if the Church, thanks to her commitment in schools and in social service, is to make a considerable contribution to the civil community, how can one fail to hope that her activities will be seconded by public institutions, especially for the benefit of the less privileged classes? On the ecclesial side, despite the general financial difficulty at this time, the commitment to serve those in situations of need will not be lacking. Lastly, venerable Brothers, how could I fail to tell you that the unity which characterizes you in following the Church's teachings is a source of serenity and comfort to me? May it always continue and develop! I am also pleased that you have recently increased your contact with the Bishops' Conferences of the neighbouring Countries, especially Slovakia and Romania, where Hungarian minorities are present. I warmly applaud this line of action, motivated by a sincere Gospel spirit and, at the same time, by a wise concern for harmonious coexistence. Tensions are of course far from easy to overcome, but the direction the Church has taken is right and promising. For this and for all your other pastoral projects I assure you of my support. In particular, I am thinking at this moment of the "Year of the Bible", which you have very appropriately promoted in 2008 to coincide with the upcoming Ordinary Assembly of the Synod of Bishops. This is also an excellent opportunity for you to deepen relations with your Christian brethren of other denominations. In thanking God for his constant help, I invoke upon you and upon your ministry the motherly protection of Mary Most Holy. For my part, I accompany you with prayers, while I impart to you with affection the Apostolic Blessing, which I willingly extend to your Diocesan Communities and to the entire Hungarian Nation.

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