



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS

to HUNGARY

(28 - 30 APRIL 2023)

**MEETING WITH BISHOPS, PRIESTS, DEACONS, CONSECRATED PERSONS,
SEMINARIANS AND PASTORAL WORKERS**

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS

St. Stephen's Co-Cathedral (Budapest)

Friday, 28 April 2023

[Multimedia]

Dear brother bishops, priests and deacons,
consecrated men and women and seminarians,
pastoral workers, brothers and sisters,
dicsértessék to Jézus Krisztus! [Praised be Jesus Christ!]

I am happy to be with you once again, after we shared the experience of the 52nd International Eucharistic Congress. The Congress was a moment of great grace, and I am sure that you continue to enjoy its spiritual fruits. I thank Bishop Veres for his kind introduction, in which he expressed the desire of Hungary's Catholics in these words: "In this changing world we want to testify that Christ is our future". Christ: it is not "the future is Christ" but Christ is our future. We cannot interchange the two. This is one of the most important things demanded of us: to interpret the changes and transformations of our time, seeking to meet pastoral challenges as best we can. With Christ and in Christ. There is nothing beyond the Lord or too far from him.

This is possible by looking to Christ as *our future*. He is "the Alpha and the Omega... who is and

who was and who is to come, the Almighty” (*Rev 1:8*), the beginning and the end, the foundation and the ultimate goal of human history. In this Easter season, as we contemplate the glory of the One who is “the first and the last” (*Rev 1:17*), we can face the storms unleashed upon our world, the rapid pace of social change and the crisis of faith affecting our Western culture without yielding to resignation or losing sight of the centrality of Easter. The risen Christ, the centre of history, is indeed the future. Our lives, for all their frailty, are held firmly in his hands. If ever we forget this, we, clergy and laity alike, will end up seeking human ways and means to defend ourselves from the world, either withdrawing into our comfortable and tranquil religious oases, or else running after the shifting winds of worldliness. In both cases, our Christianity will lose its vigour, and we will cease to be the salt of the earth. Let us return to Christ, who is the future, so that we do not fall into the shifting winds of worldliness. That is the worst thing that could happen to the Church: a worldly Church.

These are the two approaches – I might say the two temptations – against which, as a Church, we must always be on guard. The first is a bleak reading of the present time, fuelled by the defeatism of those who insist that all is lost, that we have lost the values of bygone days and have no idea where we are headed. Father Sándor nicely expressed his gratitude to God for having “delivered him from defeatism”! And what did he do with his life, build a great cathedral? No, he built a small “emergency church”, a country church. You did it; defeatism did not win. Thank you, brother! Then there is the other risk, that of a naive reading of our time, based on a comfortable conformism that would have us think that everything is basically fine, the world has changed and we must simply adapt without thinking critically about it. This is bad. So, to combat a *bleak defeatism* and a *worldly conformism*, the Gospel gives us new eyes to see. It gives us the grace of discernment, to enable us to approach our own time with openness, but also with a spirit of prophecy. In a word, a *receptivity* open to prophecy. I do not like to use the adjective “prophetic”. It is used too often. The noun: prophecy. We are experiencing a crisis of “nouns”. We rely too often on adjectives. Instead, prophecy, Spirit, a receptive and open attitude with prophecy in the heart.

Here I would like to reflect briefly on a parable used by Jesus: that of the fig tree (cf. *Mk 13:28-29*). He brings it up in the context of the Temple in Jerusalem. To those who were admiring its magnificence, in a certain spirit of worldly conformism, placing their security in the sacred space and its solemn grandeur, Jesus says that nothing on this earth is absolute; everything is precarious: a day will come when stone will not remain upon stone. In these days, we are reading from the Book of Revelation in the Office of Readings where we see that stone will not remain upon stone. At the same time, lest he induce discouragement or fear, he goes on to say that when everything passes away, when human temples collapse, terrible things happen, and violent persecutions erupt, “then they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds with great power and glory” (v. 26). He asks us to consider the fig tree: “From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near. So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that it is near, at the very gates” (v. 28-29). We are called, then, to be open to the times in which we live, with their changes and challenges, and to

see them as a fruitful plant pointing, as the Gospel says, to the time of the Lord's future coming. In the meantime, however, we are called to cultivate this present season: to interpret it, to sow the seeds of the Gospel, to prune the dead branches of evil and to allow it to bear fruit. We are called to *receptivity* with prophecy.

Receptivity with prophecy: it is about learning how to recognize the signs of God in the world around us, including places and situations that, while not explicitly Christian, challenge us and call for a response. At the same time, it is about seeing all things in the light of the Gospel without yielding to worldliness, as heralds and witnesses of the Christian faith. Pay attention to worldliness. Falling into worldliness is perhaps the worst thing that could happen to a Christian community. Even in this country, with its solid tradition of faith, we witness the spread of secularism and its effects, which often threaten the integrity and beauty of the family, expose young people to lifestyles marked by materialism and hedonism, and lead to polarization regarding new issues and challenges. We may be tempted to respond with harshness, rejection and a combative attitude. Yet these challenges can represent opportunities for us as Christians, because they strengthen our faith and invite us to come to a deeper understanding of certain issues. They make us ask how these challenges can enter into dialogue with the Gospel, and to seek out new approaches, methods, and means of communicating. In this regard, Benedict XVI said that different periods of secularization proved helpful to the Church, for they "contributed significantly to her purification and inner reform. Secularizing trends... have always meant a profound liberation of the Church from forms of worldliness" (*Meeting with Catholics Engaged in the Life of the Church and Society*, Freiburg im Breisgau, 25 September 2011). With every kind of secularization, there is a challenge and an invitation to purify the Church from every type of worldliness. Let us focus again on that word, which is the worst: falling into worldliness is the worst thing that could happen. It is a soft paganism that does not take away peace. Why? Because it is good? No, because it numbs you.

Commitment to entering into dialogue with our current situation demands that the Christian community be present as a witness to the Gospel, capable of responding to questions and challenges without fear or rigidity. This is not easy in today's world; it demands great effort. Here I think in particular of the *excessive workload of our priests*. The demands of parish and pastoral life are numerous, yet vocations are declining and fewer priests are available. Many priests are elderly and show signs of fatigue. This situation is common in many parts of Europe, and everyone – pastors and laity alike – should feel responsible for addressing it. First, by prayer, since the solutions will come from the Lord and not from the world, from the tabernacle and not from the computer. Then, by renewed fervour for promoting vocations and finding ways to attract and excite young people about a life of following Jesus, also in special consecration.

What Sister Krisztina told us is beautiful... However, her vocation was difficult. In order to become a Dominican she was first helped by a Franciscan priest, then by the Jesuits with the Spiritual Exercises. In the end, she became a Dominican. You had a beautiful journey. It is beautiful what

she told us about “arguing with Jesus” about why he chose to call her – she wanted her sisters to be called, not her –, because we need people who can listen and help us to “argue” well with the Lord! More generally, we need an ecclesial reflection – a synodal reflection, involving everyone – on how to update pastoral life without being satisfied with merely repeating formulas from the past and without being afraid to reconfigure local parishes, making evangelization a priority and encouraging active cooperation between priests, catechists, pastoral workers, and teachers. You have already begun this process: please, keep moving forward. Seek ways to cooperate joyfully with one another in the cause of the Gospel, each contributing his or her own charism, and viewing pastoral work as a *kerygmatic* proclamation, that is, something that moves consciences. In this regard, what Dorina told us about the need to reach out to our neighbour through storytelling and talking about daily life, is important. Here, I would like to highlight the beautiful work of catechists, an *antiquum ministerium*. There are places in the world, Africa, for example, where evangelization is carried out by catechists. Catechists are pillars of the Church. Thank you for what you do. I also thank the deacons and catechists, who play a decisive role in passing on the faith to the younger generation, and all those teachers and formators who are so generously committed to the work of education. Thank you!

I want to assure you that good pastoral ministry is possible if we are able to live as the Lord has commanded us, in the love that is the gift of his Spirit. If we grow distant from one another, or divided, if we become hardened in our ways of thinking and our different groups, if we think only of ourselves, our ideas and our theologies, then we will not bear fruit. It is sad when we become divided, because, instead of playing as a team, we start playing the game of the enemy: it is the Devil who divides. He is a master at it; it is his specialty. We see bishops not communicating with each other, priests in conflict with their bishop, older priests versus younger ones, diocesan priests versus religious, priests versus laity, Latins versus Greeks. Issues about Church life, and political and social problems, polarize us and we become entrenched along ideological lines. Do not let ideologies in. The life of faith, the act of faith cannot be reduced to an ideology: this is from the Devil. No! Always remember that our first pastoral priority is to bear witness to communion, for God is communion and he is present wherever there is fraternal charity. May we overcome our human divisions and work together in the vineyard of the Lord! May we immerse ourselves in the spirit of the Gospel, grounded in prayer, especially in adoration and listening to the word of God, and cultivating ongoing formation, fraternity, closeness and concern for others. A great treasure has been placed in our hands; let us not squander it by chasing after things that are secondary to the Gospel!

Here, I would like to say the following: be careful with gossip, gossip among bishops, priests, sisters and lay people. Gossip is destructive. It seems to be a very beautiful thing, a sweet candy. We often fall into it. Be careful, because it is a path of destruction. If a consecrated person or a lay person avoids speaking badly of others, this person is a saint. Follow this way of avoiding gossip. “Yes, Father”, one may comment, “but it is difficult and at times one slips”. There is a beautiful remedy against gossip: prayer, for example. There is another remedy: bite your tongue. Bite your

tongue and no gossip. Are we agreed?

There is one more thing I would like to say to priests. To show the face of the Father to God's holy people and to create a family spirit, let us avoid rigidity and instead regard others with mercy and compassion. In this regard, I would like to highlight something: God's style. The primary style of God is an attitude of closeness. He said it himself in Deuteronomy: "Tell me, which peoples have their gods as close as I am with you?" The attitude of God is closeness, compassion and tenderness. This is God's style: closeness, compassion and tenderness. Let us follow this style. Am I close to people? Do I help people? Am I compassionate, or do I condemn everyone? Am I warm and gentle? No rigidity, but closeness, compassion and tenderness. I was struck by the words of Father József, who reminded us of the dedicated ministry of his brother, Blessed János Brenner, who was barbarously murdered at the young age of 26. How many witnesses and confessors of the faith did your people have during the totalitarian regimes of the last century! You have suffered greatly! Blessed János experienced much suffering in his life, and it would have been easy for him to grow resentful, withdrawn and hardened. Instead, he was a good shepherd. That is what is required of us all, but especially of priests: a merciful gaze and a compassionate heart that forgives always, that helps others to begin again, that accepts and does not judge or send away, encourages and does not criticize, serves and does not gossip.

This attitude is our training in receptivity, a receptivity that is prophecy: bringing the Lord's consolation to situations of pain and poverty in our world, being close to persecuted Christians, to migrants seeking hospitality, to people of other ethnic groups and to anyone in need. In this regard, you have great examples of holiness, such as Saint Martin. The image of his sharing his cloak with a poor man is more than a mere example of charity: it is an image of the Church for which we strive and of what the Church in Hungary can bring to the heart of Europe: the prophetic witness of mercy and closeness. Yet I would like once more to mention Saint Stephen, whose relics are here by me. Saint Stephen, who first entrusted the nation to the Mother of God, was an intrepid evangelizer and founder of monasteries and abbeys. He also listened and conversed well with everyone, and showed especial care for the poor, lowering their taxes and begging for alms in disguise, so as not to be recognized. This is the Church to which we must aspire. A Church capable of mutual listening, dialogue and care for the most vulnerable. A Church welcoming to all and courageous in bringing the prophecy of the Gospel to everyone.

Dear brothers and sisters, Christ is our future, for he is the one who guides all history. He is the Lord of history. Your confessors of the faith were firmly convinced of this: the many bishops, priests, religious women and men martyred during the Communist persecution. They testify to the unwavering faith of Hungarians. This is not an exaggeration. I am convinced that you have a granite-like faith. Let us thank God for it. Here I would mention Cardinal Mindszenty, who so believed in the power of prayer that even today, his words are repeated, almost like a popular saying: "If a million Hungarians are praying, I will have no fear of the future". Be welcoming, bear witness to the prophecy of the Gospel, but above all be women and men of prayer, because the

future depends on this. Thank you for your faith and faithfulness, for all the good that you are and do. I always remember the courageous and patient witness of the Hungarian Sisters of the Society of Jesus, whom I met in Argentina after they left Hungary during the religious persecution. They were great women of witness! They helped me by their witness. My prayer for you is that, following the example of your great witnesses of faith, you will never be seized by an interior weariness that leads to mediocrity, but will always press on with joy. And I ask you, please, to continue to pray for me. *Köszönöm!* [Thank you!]