



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS

to HUNGARY

(28 - 30 APRIL 2023)

MEETING WITH POOR PEOPLE AND REFUGEES

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS

St. Elizabeth of Hungary Church (Budapest)

Saturday, 29 April 2023

[[Multimedia](#)]

Dear brothers and sisters, good morning!

I am happy to be here with you. Thank you, Bishop Antal, for your words of welcome, and for describing the generous service that the Hungarian Church carries out for and with the poor. Those in need – let us never forget – are at the heart of the Gospel, for Jesus came among us “to bring glad tidings to the poor” (*Lk* 4:18). The poor, then, present us with a great challenge: we must refuse to let the faith we profess be imprisoned by a piety removed from life, one that results in a kind of “spiritual egotism”, a spirituality of my own creation that serves to preserve my own inner tranquillity and complacency. Genuine faith is challenging, it takes risks, it leads us to encounter the poor and, by the witness of our lives, to speak *the language of charity*. Saint Paul tells us that we may speak in many tongues and possess great wisdom and wealth, but if we lack charity, we have nothing and we are nothing (cf. *1 Cor* 13:1-13).

The language of charity. This was the language spoken by Saint Elizabeth, to whom the Hungarian people have great devotion and affection. Upon my arrival this morning, I saw her

statue in the square, with its base that shows her receiving the cord of the Franciscan order and giving water to quench a poor man's thirst. This is an eloquent image of faith: those who "bind themselves to God", like Saint Francis of Assisi, who was an inspiration to Saint Elizabeth, become charitable to the poor. For "if anyone says, 'I love God,' and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen" (1 Jn 4:20). Saint Elizabeth, the daughter of a king, had grown up in the comfort of a life at court, in a luxurious and privileged environment. Yet once she was touched and transformed by her encounter with Christ, she felt repelled by worldly riches and vanities, and sought to renounce them and to care for those in need. Thus, she not only sold her possessions but also spent her life serving the poor, lepers and the sick, personally caring for them, even carrying them on her own shoulders. That is the language of charity.

Brigitta spoke to us about this, and I thank her for her witness. She told us of her many privations, her struggles and her hard work to try to get by and to keep her children from going hungry. Then, at the most devastating moment, the Lord came to her aid. She told us how the Lord intervenes. He who hears the cry of the poor, who "secures justice for the oppressed, who gives bread to the hungry" and "raises up those who are bowed down", almost never intervenes by solving our problems from on high. Rather he draws near to us with the embrace of his tender love, inspiring compassion in our brothers and sisters who take notice and choose not to remain indifferent. As Brigitta mentioned, she was able to experience the Lord's closeness thanks to the Greek Catholic Church, to so many people who did their best to help her, to encourage her, to find her a job and support her in both her material needs and her journey of faith. That is the kind of witness we are asked to give: showing compassion toward all, especially those experiencing poverty, illness and pain; compassion, which means "to suffer with". We need a Church that is fluent in the language of charity, that universal language which everyone can hear and understand, even those farthest from us, even those who are not believers.

Here I wish to express my gratitude to the Church in Hungary for its generous and wide-ranging service to charity. You have built up a network that links pastoral workers, volunteers, parish and diocesan Caritas organizations, while also engaging prayer groups, communities of believers, and organizations belonging to other confessions, yet united in the ecumenical fellowship that is born of charity. Thank you too, for having welcomed – not only with generosity but also with enthusiasm – so many refugees from Ukraine. I was moved as I listened to the testimony of Oleg and his family. Their "journey to the future" – a different future, far from the horrors of war – actually began with a "journey of memory", because Oleg remembered the warm welcome he received in Hungary years ago, when he came to work here as a cook. The memory of that experience encouraged him to take his family and come here to Budapest, where he met with generous hospitality. The memory of love received rekindles hope and inspires people to embark upon a new journey in life. Even amid pain and suffering, once we have received the balm of love, we find the courage needed to keep moving forward: we find the strength to believe that all is not lost, and that a different future is possible. The love that Jesus gives us and commands us to practise can

help to uproot the evils of selfishness and of the scourge of indifference from society, from our cities and the places where we live, and to rekindle hope for a new, more just and fraternal world, where all can feel at home.

Sadly, many people, even here, are literally homeless. Many of our more vulnerable sisters and brothers – living alone, struggling with various physical and mental disabilities, devastated by the poison of drugs, released from prison or abandoned because they are elderly – are experiencing severe material, cultural and spiritual poverty; they have no roof over their heads and no home in which to live. Zoltàn and his wife Anna offered us their testimony about this immense problem – thank you for your words! Thank you too, for responding to the prompting of the Holy Spirit, which led you with courage and generosity to build a centre to take in the homeless. I was moved to hear that, together with their material needs, you are attentive to their personal stories and their wounded dignity, caring for them in their loneliness and their struggle to feel loved and welcomed in the world. Anna told us that, “Jesus, the living Word, heals their hearts and relationships, because people are rebuilt from within”; once they realize that in God’s eyes they are beloved and blessed, they are reborn. This is a lesson for the whole Church: it is not enough to provide bread to fill stomachs; we need to fill people’s hearts! Charity is much more than material and social assistance. It has to do with the whole person; it strives to put people back on their feet with the love of Jesus: a love that helps them to recover their beauty and their dignity.

Offering charity means having the courage to look into people’s eyes. We cannot help others while looking away. To be charitable requires the courage to touch: we cannot give alms at a distance, without touching. To touch and to look. In this way, by touching and looking, we begin to journey with those in need. And this makes us realize how much we ourselves need the Lord’s gaze and touch.

Brothers and sisters, I encourage you always to speak the language of charity. The statue in this square represents the most famous miracle of Saint Elizabeth: we are told that the Lord once turned the loaves of bread she was carrying to the needy into so many roses. This is also the case for you: whenever you strive to offer bread to the hungry, the Lord makes joy blossom within you and infuses your life with the fragrance of the gift of love that you give. Brothers and sisters, my hope and prayer, then, is that you will always spread the fragrance of charity in the Church and in your country. I ask you, please, to continue to pray for me. Thank you.