



SALA STAMPA DELLA SANTA SEDE
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Apostolic Journey of the Holy Father Francis in Budapest for the concluding Holy Mass of the 52nd International Eucharistic Congress, and in Slovakia (12-15 September 2021 – Welcome Ceremony, Visit to the President of Slovakia, and Meeting with the Authorities

Welcome Ceremony and Courtesy visit to the President of Slovakia in the Presidential Palace

Meeting with the Authorities, Civil Society and the Diplomatic Corps in the garden of the Presidential Palace in Bratislava

Welcome Ceremony and Courtesy visit to the President of Slovakia in the Presidential Palace

This morning, after celebrating Holy Mass privately, the Holy Father Francis left the apostolic nunciature and transferred by car to the Presidential Palace in Bratislava.

Upon arrival, at 9.15, the Pope was welcomed by the President of the Republic of Slovakia, Mrs. Zuzana Čaputová, at the entrance to the Palace, where the welcome ceremony took place. Two children gave bread and salt to the Holy Father. The Pope and the President then took their places for the official photo.

After the anthems, the Guard of Honour and the presentation of the respective delegations, the Holy Father and the President went to the Golden Hall of the Presidential Palace where, at 9.30, the Courtesy Visit took place.

At the end of the visit, after the signing of the Book of Honour and the private meeting, the President of the Republic accompanied Pope Francis to the adjoining Green Room where the exchange of gifts and the presentation of the family took place. They then went to the garden of the Presidential Palace for the meeting with the authorities, the representatives of civil society and the members of the Diplomatic Corps.

Meeting with the Authorities, Civil Society and the Diplomatic Corps in the garden of the Presidential Palace in Bratislava

At 10.00 this morning, in the garden of the Presidential Palace in Bratislava, the Holy Father Francis met with political and religious leaders, representatives of civil society and the members of the Diplomatic Corps.

After the greeting from the President of the Republic of Slovakia, Mrs. Zuzana Čaputová, the Pope delivered his address.

At the end, the Holy Father and the President proceeded to the main entrance for their final greeting. Pope Francis then transferred by car to Saint Martin's Cathedral for the meeting with the bishops, priests, men and women religious, seminarians and catechists.

The following is the Pope's address to political and religious leaders, representatives of civil society and members of the Diplomatic Corps:

Address of the Holy Father

Madam President,
Members of the Government and of the Diplomatic Corps,
Distinguished Civil and Religious Leaders,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am grateful to President Zuzana Čaputová for her words of welcome in your name and in that of the entire nation. In greeting all of you, I express my joy to be in Slovakia. I have come as a pilgrim to a young country, yet one with an ancient history, a land of deep roots situated in the heart of Europe. Truly this land is, and has always been, a crossroads. It was an outpost of the Roman Empire and a point of encounter between Western and Eastern Christianity. From Great Moravia to the Kingdom of Hungary, from the Czechoslovak Republic to the present day, you have overcome numerous trials and attained integration and distinctiveness through a fundamentally peaceful process. Twenty-eight years ago, the world followed with admiration the peaceful emergence of two independent countries.

This long history challenges Slovakia to be *a message of peace in the heart of Europe*. That calling is evoked by the great blue stripe on your flag, which symbolizes fraternity with the Slavic peoples. Such fraternity is necessary for the increasingly pressing process of integration. All the more so, in these days when, after long and trying months of pandemic, fully conscious of the difficulties to be faced, we look forward with hope to an economic upturn favoured by the recovery plans of the European Union. Yet there is always the risk of succumbing to impatience and the lure of profit, leading to a fleeting sense of euphoria that, rather than bringing people together, proves only divisive. Nor is economic recovery by itself sufficient in a world that has itself become a crossroads, in which all are interconnected. Even as battles for supremacy are waged on various fronts, may this country reaffirm its message of integration and peace. And may Europe be distinguished by a solidarity that, by transcending borders, can bring it back to the centre of history.

Slovak history has been marked indelibly by the faith. It is my hope that faith, by its very nature, will encourage projects and feelings inspired by fraternity, drawing upon the epic experiences of the holy brothers Cyril and Methodius. They worked to spread the Gospel at a time when the Christians of this continent were united; today they continue to unite the different religious communities in this land. Cyril and Methodius identified with all, and sought communion with all: Slavs, Greeks and Latins alike. Their firm faith found expression in a spontaneous openness to others. This is the legacy that you are now called to preserve, so that in our time too, you can be a sign of unity.

Dear friends, may your hearts always cultivate this vocation to fraternity, along with your native gifts of warmth and sincerity. Hospitality is extremely important to you: I am struck by the Slavic custom of offering *bread and salt* to visitors as a sign of welcome. I would like to reflect with you on those simple yet precious gifts, so rich in evangelical meaning.

God chose *bread* to make himself present in our midst. Bread is something essential. Scripture commands us not to hoard our bread, but to share it. The bread spoken of in the Gospel is always bread that is broken. This sends a powerful message for our life as a community: it reminds us that true wealth does not consist simply in multiplying the things we have, but in sharing them fairly with those around us. The broken bread speaks to us of frailty; it demands that we take especial care of the vulnerable in our midst. No one should be stigmatized or suffer discrimination. Our Christian way of looking at others refuses to see them as a burden or a problem, but rather as brothers and sisters to be helped and protected.

Bread broken and equitably shared reminds us of the importance of justice, of giving each person the chance to find fulfilment. We need to cooperate in building a future in which laws are applied fairly to all, based on a system of justice that is not up for sale. If justice is not to remain an abstract ideal, but to be as real as bread, a serious battle against corruption must be undertaken and, above all, the rule of law must be promoted and must prevail.

Bread is also inseparably linked to an adjective: “daily” (cf. *Mt 6:11*), “daily bread”. Daily bread means daily work. Just as without bread there is no nutrition, without labour there is no dignity. At the basis of a just and fraternal society is the right of each person to receive the bread of employment, so that none will feel marginalized or constrained to leave family and homeland in search of a better life.

“You are the *salt* of the earth” (*Mt 5:13*). Salt is the first symbol that Jesus used to teach his disciples. More than anything, salt gives flavour to food; it reminds us of the flavour our lives need, if they are not to become tasteless and insipid. Organized and efficient structures will not suffice to improve our life as a human community. We need flavour, *the flavour of solidarity*. Just as salt gives flavour only by dissolving, so too society rediscovers its flavor through the gratuitous generosity of those who spend their lives for others. It is good for young people in particular to be encouraged in this, to feel that they have a share in shaping the future of their country, so that they can take it to heart and enrich its history with their dreams and their creativity. There can be no renewal without young people, yet they often end up being disenchanted by a consumerism that makes life bland and dull. In Europe, all too many people live lives of weariness and frustration, overwhelmed by the frenetic pace of life and incapable of finding reasons for inspiration and hope. The missing ingredient is concern for others. When we feel responsible for someone else, this gives flavour to our lives and enables us to realize that what we give away is really a gift we make to ourselves.

At the time of Christ, salt gave flavour but it was also used to preserve food, to keep it from spoiling. It is my hope that you will never allow the rich flavours of your finest traditions to be spoiled by the superficiality of consumerism and material gain. Or by forms of ideological colonization. In these lands, until just a few decades ago, a single thought-system stifled freedom. Today another single thought-system is emptying freedom of meaning, reducing progress to profit and rights only to individual needs. Today, as then, the salt of the faith acts not by reacting in worldly terms, by engaging in culture wars, but by quietly and humbly sowing the seeds of God’s kingdom, especially by the witness of charity, of love. Your Constitution expresses the desire that the country be built on the legacy of Saints Cyril and Methodius, Patrons of Europe. Without impositions or pressure, they enriched culture by the Gospel and thus set in motion beneficial processes. This is the path to follow: not the battle for influence and position, but the road pointed out by the saints, the road of the Beatitudes. For the Beatitudes are the inspiration for a Christian vision of society.

Saints Cyril and Methodius also showed that preserving what is good does not mean repeating the past, but being open to newness without ever losing one’s roots. Your history abounds in writers, poets and men and women of culture who were the salt of the country. Just as salt burns when placed on wounds, so their lives often had to pass through the crucible of suffering. How many illustrious men and women endured imprisonment, yet remained interiorly free, offering a radiant example of courage, integrity and resistance to

injustice! And most of all, forgiveness. That is the salt of your earth.

The pandemic is the great test of our own time. It has taught us how easy it is, even when we are all in the same boat, to withdraw and think only of ourselves. Let us instead set out anew from the realization that all of us are frail and in need of others. None can stand apart, either as individuals or as a nation. May we take up the challenge of this crisis, which only makes it “all the more urgent that we rethink our styles of life” (*Fratelli Tutti*, 33). It is useless to hurl recriminations about events of the past; we need to roll up our sleeves and together work to build the future. I encourage you to do so, lifting up your eyes as when you gaze upon your splendid Tatra mountains. There, amid forests and mountaintops that point heavenward, God seems more close and creation appears as an unspoiled home that over the centuries has sheltered one generation after another. Your mountains combine in one range a variety of peaks and landscapes, spilling over national borders in order to join together in beauty different peoples. Cultivate this beauty, *the beauty of the whole*. It requires patience and effort, courage and sharing, enthusiasm and creativity. Yet it is the human work blessed by heaven above. God bless you. God bless this land. *Nech Boh žehná Slovensko!* [God bless Slovakia]. Thank you.
