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Apostolic Journey of Pope Francis in Hungary (28 to 30 April 2023) – Holy Mass and recitation of the Regina Caeli in Kossuth Lajos Square

This morning, after leaving the Apostolic Nunciature, the Holy Father Francis transferred by car to Kossuth Lajos Square for the celebration of Holy Mass.

Upon arrival, after changing vehicle and touring several times among the faithful by popemobile, at 9.30 the Pope presided over the Eucharistic celebration on the fourth Sunday of Easter.

During the Holy Mass, after the proclamation of the Gospel, the Holy Father delivered his homily.

At the end of the celebration, His Eminence Cardinal Péter Erdő, metropolitan archbishop of Esztergom-Budapest, addressed a greeting and thanks to the Holy Father. Pope Francis then led the recitation of the *Regina Caeli* with the faithful in attendance. According to the local authorities, around 50,000 people participated in the Holy Mass, of whom more than 30,000 were in Kossuth Lajos Square.

The following is the homily delivered by the Pope during the course of the Eucharistic celebration, and his words of introduction to the Marian prayer:

Homily of the Holy Father

Jesus' final words in the Gospel we have just heard sum up the meaning of his mission: "I came that they may have life and have it abundantly" (*Jn 10:10*). That is what a good shepherd does: he gives his life for his sheep. Jesus, like a shepherd who goes in search of his flock, came to find us when we were lost. Like a shepherd, he came to snatch us from death. Like a shepherd who knows each of his sheep and loves them with infinite tenderness, he brought us back to the Father's fold and made us his children.

Let us reflect, then, on the image of the Good Shepherd and on two specific things that, according to the Gospel,

he does for the sheep. *He calls them by name, and then he leads them out.*

First, “he calls his sheep by name” (v. 3). The history of salvation does not begin with us, with our merits, our abilities and our structures. It begins with the call of God, with his desire to come to us, with his concern for each one of us, with the abundance of his mercy. The Lord wants to save us from sin and death, to give us life in abundance and joy without end. Jesus came as the Good Shepherd of humanity, to call us and bring us home. With gratitude, all of us can think back on the love he showed us when we had wandered far from him. When we, like sheep, had “gone astray” and each one of us “turned to his own way” (*Is* 53:6). Jesus took upon himself our iniquities and bore our sins, leading us back to the Father’s heart. This is what we heard from the apostle Peter in today’s second reading: “You were going astray like sheep, but now you have returned to the shepherd and guardian of your souls” (*1 Pet* 2:25). Today too, Jesus calls us, in every situation, at all those times when we feel confused and fearful, overwhelmed and burdened by sorrow and self-pity. He comes to us as the Good Shepherd, he calls us by name and tells us how precious we are in his eyes. He heals our wounds, takes upon himself our frailties and gathers us into the unity of his fold, as children of the Father and brothers and sisters of one another.

And so, brothers and sisters, this morning, in this place, we sense the joy of our being God’s holy people. All of us were born of his call. He called us together, and so we are his people, his flock, his Church. Though we are diverse and come from different communities, the Lord has brought us together, so that his immense love can enfold us in one embrace. It is good for us to be together: bishops and priests, religious and lay faithful. And it is beautiful to share this joy of ours with the ecumenical delegations, the leaders of the Jewish community, the representatives of civil institutions and the diplomatic corps. This is the meaning of catholicity: all of us, called by name by the Good Shepherd, are summoned to receive and spread his love, to make his fold inclusive and never to exclude others. It follows that all of us are called to cultivate relationships of fraternity and cooperation, avoiding divisions, not retreating into our own community, not concerned to stake out our individual territory, but rather opening our hearts to mutual love.

After calling his sheep, the Shepherd “leads them out” (*Jn* 10:3). First, he brought them into the fold, calling them by name; now he sends them out. We too were first gathered into God’s family to become his people; then we too were sent out into the world so that, courageously and fearlessly, we might become heralds of the Good News, witnesses of the love that has given us new birth. We can appreciate this process of “entering” and “leaving” from yet another image that Jesus uses. He says, “I am the door; if anyone enters through me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture” (v. 9). Let us listen to those words again: “he will go in and out”. On the one hand, Jesus is the wide open door that enables us to enter into the Father’s fellowship and experience his mercy. Yet, as we all know, open doors are not only for entering, but also for leaving. After bringing us back into God’s embrace and into the fold of the Church, Jesus is the door that leads us back into the world. He urges us to go forth to encounter our brothers and sisters. Let us never forget that all of us, without exception, are called to this; we are called to step out of our comfort zones and find the courage to reach out to all those peripheries that need the light of the Gospel (cf. *Evangelii Gaudium*, 20).

Brothers and sisters, “going forth” means that we, like Jesus, must become open doors. How sad and painful it is to see closed doors. The closed doors of our selfishness with regard to others; the closed doors of our individualism amid a society of growing isolation; the closed doors of our indifference towards the underprivileged and those who suffer; the doors we close towards those who are foreign or unlike us, towards migrants or the poor. Closed doors also within our ecclesial communities: doors closed to other people, closed to the world, closed to those who are “irregular”, closed to those who long for God’s forgiveness. Please, brothers and sisters, let us open those doors! Let us try to be – in our words, deeds and daily activities – like Jesus, an open door: a door that is never shut in anyone’s face, a door that enables everyone to enter and experience the beauty of the Lord’s love and forgiveness.

I repeat this especially to myself and to my brother bishops and priests: to those of us who are shepherds. Jesus tells us that a good shepherd is neither a robber nor a thief (cf. *Jn* 10:8). In other words, he does not take advantage of his role; he does not lord it over the flock entrusted to his care; he does not occupy spaces that belong to his lay brothers and sisters; he does not exercise inflexible authority. Brothers, let us encourage one another to be increasingly open doors: “facilitators” of God’s grace, masters of closeness; let us be ready to offer

our lives, even as Christ, our Lord and our all, teaches us with open arms from the throne of the cross and shows us daily as the living Bread broken for us on the altar. I say this also to our lay brothers and sisters, to catechists and pastoral workers, to those with political and social responsibilities, and to those who simply go about their daily lives, which at times are not easy. *Be open doors!* Let the Lord of life enter our hearts, with his words of consolation and healing, so that we can then go forth as open doors within society. Be open and inclusive, then, and in this way, help Hungary to grow in fraternity, which is the path of peace.

Dear brothers and sisters, Jesus the Good Shepherd calls us by name and cares for us with infinitely tender love. He is the door, and all who enter through him have eternal life. He is our future, a future of “life in abundance” (*Jn 10:10*). Let us never be discouraged. Let us never be robbed of the joy and peace he has given us. Let us never withdraw into our own problems or turn away from others in apathy. May the Good Shepherd accompany us always: with him, our lives, our families, our Christian communities and all of Hungary will flourish with new and abundant life!

The Holy Father's words before the recitation of the *Regina Caeli* prayer

I thank Cardinal Erdő for his kind words, and I greet Her Excellency the President, the Prime Minister and the Authorities present. As I prepare to return to Rome, I wish to express my gratitude to them, to my brother bishops, the priests and consecrated men and women, and to all the beloved Hungarian people for their warm welcome and the affection I have experienced in these days. I am also grateful to those who travelled a great distance to be here and to those who worked so hard, and so well, for this visit. To all of you I say, *köszönöm, Isten fizesse!* [Thank you, may God reward you!]. I think especially of the sick and the elderly, of those who were unable to be present with us, of those who are lonely and those who have lost faith in God and hope in life. I am close to all of you; I pray for you and I give you my blessing.

My greeting goes likewise to the members of the Diplomatic Corps and our brothers and sisters of other Christian confessions. I thank you for your presence and for the fact that in this country the different confessions and religions interact and are supportive of one another. Cardinal Erdő said that here you have been living “on the eastern border of Western Christianity for a thousand years.” It is a beautiful thing when borders do not represent boundaries that separate, but points of contact, and when believers in Christ emphasize first the charity that unites us, rather than the historical, cultural and religious differences that divide us. We are united by the Gospel, and it is by returning there, to the source, that our ecumenical journey will continue, in accordance with the will of Jesus, the Good Shepherd, who desires us to be united in one flock.

We now turn to Our Lady. To her, *Magna Domina Hungarorum*, whom you invoke as Queen and Patroness, I entrust all Hungarians. From this great city and from this noble country, I desire to entrust to her heart the faith and the future of the entire continent of Europe, which has been on my mind in these days and, in particular, the cause of peace. Blessed Virgin, watch over the peoples who suffer so greatly. In a special way, watch over the neighbouring, beleaguered Ukrainian people and the Russian people, both consecrated to you. You, who are the Queen of Peace, instil in the hearts of peoples and their leaders the desire to build peace and to give the younger generations a future of hope, not war, a future full of cradles not tombs, a world of brothers and sisters, not walls and barricades.

To you do we turn, Holy Mother of God! After the resurrection of Jesus, you accompanied the first steps of the Christian community, helping the disciples to persevere as one in prayer (cf. *Acts 1:14*). You held the faithful together, guarding their unity by your docile and generous example. We pray to you for the Church in Europe, that she may find strength in prayer, renewed humility and obedience, and be an example of convincing witness and joyful proclamation. To you we entrust this Church and this country. As you exulted in the resurrection of your Son, so fill our hearts with the joy of his presence. Dear brothers and sisters, this is my wish for you, that you may spread everywhere the joy of Christ. *Isten éltessen!* [Best wishes!]. With gratitude for these days, I keep you in my heart and I ask you to pray for me. *Isten áld meg a magyart!* [God bless the Hungarians!]

