

"*Where are you, King Stephen?*" asks Mihály Babits in his poem *The City of the Holy King*.

Where are you now, King Stephen, when we need you? – we are asking the same question.

King Stephen is here with us.

As he was there with Bethlen, Rákóczi, Kossuth, Imre Nagy or Mindszenty, Endre Ady and Attila József. We carry St Stephen in ourselves, he became part of us. By founding Christian Hungary, by making our country part of the Western World through a deliberate decision, he did not only chart the course we must walk on, but he also gained an undisputable place in our lives. He is there with us in our daily lives and on our national holidays, in the schools, at our public spaces, in our churches, at the hospitals, in poems, novels, he is there in a movie and a rock opera inside our borders and beyond. To him we bow our heads on our national holiday, him we thank for his courage, faith, wisdom and humbleness. St Stephen is the common denominator of the Hungarians. He is within us while standing above us, he is behind us while walking before us.

Dear Celebratory Audience!

It is an honour and also a joy that today – at the initiative of the Mayor of Esztergom – we have the opportunity to celebrate together in Esztergom, the birthplace of our Holy King. After last year's 20th of August in Székesfehérvár, we have now witnessed the formal alliance of two cities that are crucial for Hungarian statehood.

Dear Residents of Esztergom, dear Mayors, thank you for the invitation!

Home and the celebratory days are what make the world, often incomprehensible and changing at a breathtaking speed, liveable for people. Home is where we feel safe, where we move with self-certainty, where we find our way. Home is the space we can shape according to our own taste and needs. It feels good to leave from a home and to have one to return to.

And to avoid being lost in time, we need celebratory days. Special days serving as road signs and giving us a sense of security in the round and round of time. Holidays make our lives bearable, measurable, comparable, predictable. They help us remember and look ahead.

Home and holidays – our anchors in space and time.

It feels good to say: we have a home. The draughty region of the Carpathian Basin is a place in the world where every Hungarian can find a home. We like the hot sand of the Great Plain beneath our feet, the silence of the Bakony Hills, the mesmerising view of the Danube Bend. We are proud of the most beautiful parliament building of the world, it is a true adventure to swim across the Hungarian Sea, to hike the Blue Trail. It is heartwarming to look at Lake Balaton from Káptalan-tóti or the Chain of the Bükk Hills from Fehérkő-lápa. We know the savour of the apples from Szabolcs, the plums from Szatmár, the apricots from Gönc, the grapes from Badacsony, the melons from Drávaivány. We are at home on the Székelykő hilltop, in Újvidék, Gombaszög and Munkács. We have shaped this little country embraced by flames to reflect our own image, we have made it into our home. And all the while we know that Hungary is made wealthy and loveable by its wonderful natural treasures and the people who live here both at the same time.

Today, we have a home, and we also have celebratory days. 20 August is not a dusty tradition, nor a modern party. 20 August is a national celebration in the fullest sense of the word. A celebration reminding us of our past and filling our future with hope over and over again. This is when the unimportant fades into the background and the important comes to the fore. We have the chance to experience the depth and rise to the height where we can feel the natural togetherness of the Hungarian nation.

The commissioning ceremony this morning was such an uplifting moment. When two hundred uniformed Hungarian young people took the oath at the same time: I will defend the independence of my country, the rights and the freedom of the Hungarians even if it costs me my life.

Yesterday evening, our hearts were filled with pride enough to forge a nation together, as we opened the largest sporting event ever held in Hungary so far, the World Athletics Championships, in our new, world-class Athletics Centre.

We could feel our togetherness when the night before that, tens of thousands of us were singing together at the reimagined show of the rock opera Stephen the King, premiered forty years ago: Give us peace, O Lord!

A few weeks ago, our hearts were beating to the same rhythm at the success of the world champion fencing teams, the men's water polo team, Máté Koch, Hubert Kós, Blanka Kata Vas and Dominik Szoboszlai.

Unsurpassable joy over the unquestionable togetherness of our nation filled our hearts during the three days of the Apostolic visit of Pope Francis.

And we feel the strength of the community of our nation when, with unprecedented unity, we help the Transcarpathian and Ukrainian families fleeing the bloodshed of the war.

Seeing all this, we must realise how fortunate we are. We cannot get lost in space or time, because we have a homeland, we have national holidays and we have special moments when we feel that there is more to unite us than to divide us.

Ladies and Gentlemen!

On celebratory days, even those who have no time, opportunity, or who otherwise lack the attention or the will to do so, sit around a table shared with others. And when we are all seated around that table, we break the bread, look into each other's eyes, and ask: how are you? And we Hungarians ask and answer this question with genuine interest and seriousness. We will tell you how we are. We keep you posted on how our children are doing at school, if grandma is well, what kind of disagreement we have had with our boss, what happened in our immediate or broader environment. Woe to anyone who dares ask us the question how we are!

During the one and a half years of my presidency, I have met people from Somogy, Nógrád, Szabolcs, Szatmár, Beregi, Komárom-Esztergomi and Budapest. I visited **Transylvania, the Felvidék, Délvidék, Muravidék and Transcarpathia** (moreover, as we have not had the opportunity to spend time together since Advent, I am leaving to meet the Hungarians of Transcarpathia on Tuesday). I sat down on the low stool, I listened to the joys, the proud moments, the worries and the doubts. I talked to parents and children, campers and camp masters, cadets, mothers and fathers who lost sons in the war, entrepreneurs and factory workers, policemen and protesters, women leaders, kitchen helpers, nurses, priests, doctors, students and teachers. Our meetings were an opportunity for me to ask them: how are you?

In my mind now, I am sitting at the table with you, turn to you and ask you: how are you?

How are you coping with the uncertainty of a year and a half of war in our neighbour?

How are you coping with the pressure from the illegal migrants arriving in our country along the Southern border?

How are you coping with the high prices, the more difficult circumstances?

Can you feel joy to see your family thrive, over the good harvest, the fresh bread, a kind word, attention, caring, community?

We should be grateful for a successful decade in Hungarian history, which has brought more prosperity for most Hungarians, and which preceded the unexpected challenges. The coronavirus epidemic has left a deeper and more lasting mark than what we had hoped. And the war in our neighbour is a heart-wrenching, soul-trying tragedy even if it had not befallen us just in the last hours of the pandemic, or if it had not resulted in economic difficulties across borders. I have seen and keep watching the economic indicators. Domestic prices are undoubtedly high. I am aware that the years of relative plenty have been followed by a more difficult period.

But I also know how much it determines our mood to remember where we are heading. When we know: the hard part is now over, we can already see the light of an easier tomorrow, and an even easier day after that.

Thank you for looking ahead. Thank you for struggling through the more difficult periods with the perseverance, tenacity and creativity that Hungarians are known for, and with the diligence we have re-learned.

Thank you that instead of endless complaints, you are willing to roll up your sleeves again and again, thank you for being there at the workplaces, in the factories, in the fields, at the protection lines along the borders and when floods need to be controlled, for standing your ground in the schools, the hospitals, in social homes, in offices or at the head of communities.

Thank you that instead of looking at the downside, you are capable of looking at the upside of our lives. And thank you for persevering! Thank you for believing in Hungarian life, for helping to set an example for young people. Thank you for being able to offer support and assistance to those in need. Thank you that together we can clinch our future.

How are you? – I am asking. And in an honest answer, there is perhaps more doubt, uncertainty, fear, bitterness. I can see and I can hear the voices of concern, but even in the downheartedness, I can discern the power of hope. Our national holiday amplifies that now. The 20 August is not a superfluous touristic spectacle, the 20 August is a celebration of strength-gathering by a nation hopeful about its future and ready to take action for it.

Dear Ladies and Gentlemen!

The legacy of St Stephen does not belong to Prince Imre alone. Almost a thousand years after his death, there is probably no one in Hungary who does not know who King Stephen is. We do not cherish his memory as a historical figure, nor as a bearded, male member of a panopticon, but as the founding father of our nation, a nation that has survived a millennium of often painful and bloody struggles, a

nation that has stood up again and again. The thousand year old teaching of St Stephen was valid also when the printing press and paper had not even been invented, and would be valid also when we perhaps will no longer use paper.

Behind me, on the Western facade of the Esztergom Basilica facing the Danube, the inscription is a sentence from the Epistle to the Colossians. In his letter, Paul directs the attention of the Colossian congregation to the same virtues that St Stephen reminds Prince Imre in his Admonitions. We are called to gentleness, patience, compassion, moderation, humbleness, honour and love. Let us take their message to heart! If our decisions are based on these values, we will be better than the profiteers and our descendants will be proud of us. We cannot let go of these values. There is no place for compromise here. If we live our lives according to these values, even the more difficult days cannot break us. That is when we have the chance to face the challenges, feeling strong, with our heads held high.

We know: we are not lost in space, nor in time, because we have a motherland, and we have national holidays. And with that to rely on, we only need to take the inscription on the Basilica's facade to heart: „quae sursum sunt quaerite” – seek those things which are above!

For the Kingdom, the Power and the Glory are His.

God bless the Hungarians, God bless Hungary!