



The Holy See

**LETTER OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II
TO CARDINAL LADISLAUS LEKAI, ARCHBISHOP OF ESZTERGOM
AND PRESIDENT OF THE EPISCOPAL CONFERENCE OF HUNGARY**

To Our Esteemed Brother Cardinal Ladislaus Lekai

Archbishop of Esztergom

and to the other Bishops of Hungary Within a few days the Most Reverend Luigi Poggi will once again go to this country of yours as the representative of the Holy See for talks with the authorities of your nation. In the past, as often as such matters had to be dealt with, he brought you the cordial greetings of our lamented predecessor Pope Paul VI as proof of the spiritual union with him. Therefore, observing the same custom at this time, we wish with this letter to convey to you, dear brothers, a like greeting. We think that this is highly opportune, since we have been given this occasion, which comes so soon after the new Pontificate entered upon by us. Moreover, the same representative of the Holy See, who in the name of His Holiness Paul VI visited you quite often, comes now in the name of John Paul II, who by the will of Christ, became the successor of blessed Peter after only thirty-three days of the Pontificate of John Paul I, who will never be forgotten. We wish, then, dear brothers, that Archbishop Luigi Poggi will now be the interpreter for you of that same pastoral concern which the Supreme Pastor feels strongly for the Church of your fatherland. It was also the object of so much solicitude on the part of previous Popes. There are indeed a number of reasons for this. And yet to all those reasons referred to above, there is now added the special consideration of our origin and country and of the See of Krakow itself from which we were called to the See of Peter in Rome. We cannot pass over all these considerations in silence. Indeed they impel us, dear brothers, to speak to you in this letter. For our Polish origin and our belonging to that nation which is closely linked with the people of Hungary by several ties, by ties of a common history, of close proximity, a royal dynasty, and of similar fortunes, clearly require that since this opportunity has presented itself, we should of necessity keep each of these considerations before our eyes. Moreover, in the cathedral in Krakow, which we had to leave to accept the Roman heritage of the Apostles, the relics of that daughter of Hungary, Queen Hedwig, whom the Church in Poland for many centuries calls "blessed", are devoutly venerated: a queen, we say, of outstanding merits whom all the people of Poland, but especially the youth, honour with a love that is lasting. If, therefore, esteemed and dear brothers, we honour the memory of these things, we do so to add the fullest possible historical significance to this first contact of ours, as it were, established by this letter. Past ages have given your people a very high place indeed in the history of the whole of Europe, and especially with regard to the advancement of the Church and of the Christian religion. But Saint Stephen, the patron of Hungary, stands out as a proof and in some way as a sign of the same high position. We rightly consider him both the patron of your fatherland, the apostle of the faith, and the founder of the Church in Hungary. It is just over a thousand years since these remarkable beginnings. At the same time they indicate

the commencement of the entire history of the Church, of the people, and of the civil community in Hungary. Turning our thoughts, then, to all these facts and circumstances, we wish at the same time to state that we are convinced that the Catholic Church, which has played such an important role in the history of Hungary, can also continue to shape the spiritual image, as it were, of your country by bringing to your sons and daughters the same light of the Gospel of Christ which for so many centuries illuminated the way of life for your citizens. Indeed we desire very much that through your episcopal ministry, the pastoral care of the priests, the religious, and laity, the same light may continue to exercise a great influence on the minds, consciences, and hearts of men. May it also show them the meaning of the precept of charity, a respect for the dignity of every man, a desire for a freedom that is ennobling, together with a love for vigorous activity for the common good and for all those personal, family, and social virtues which are necessary for the attainment of such good. Strive, esteemed and dear brothers, to devote yourselves with good advantage to all these aims by your apostolic witness, your zeal for the salvation of souls, your love for your national traditions, and your union with the successor of Saint Peter and the entire College of Bishops in the Church of Christ. Finally, together with this fraternal greeting we send the Apostolic Blessing to you and to the whole ecclesial community over which Christ has placed you as pastors and teachers (cf. Eph 4:11). Thus through you, the interpreters of our fatherly good will, we wish our greeting to reach all the people of Hungary. Mindful of its remarkable achievements, we pray God to give it an abundance of peace and continued greater prosperity. *From the Vatican the second day of December in the year 1978, this first of our Pontificate.* **IOANNES PAULUS PP. II** © Copyright 1979 - Libreria Editrice Vaticana
