**Homily**

**of Archbishop Michael W. Banach,**

**Apostolic Nuncio to Hungary**

**Mass on the occasion of the 100th Anniversary**

**of the Embassy of the** **Sovereign Military Hospitaller Order**

**of St. John of Jerusalem and Rhodes and of Malta**

Thursday, Fifth Week of Lent

*Szűz Mária neve plébánia* - Solymár - 10 April 2025

(Gen 17: 3-9; Ps 105; Jn 8: 51-59)

**1.** *Introduction*. It is an honour and a privilege to celebrate the Holy Eucharist with you and to give thanksgiving to God on the centennial of the establishment of diplomatic relations between the Sovereign Military Hospitaller Order of St. John of Jerusalme and Rhodes and of Malta. Thank you Dr. Heinz Anton Hafner, Ambassador of the Order of Malta to Hungary, and Mr. Kristóf Szabadhegÿ, President of the Hungarian Association of the Order of Malta, for your kind invitation.

The Patriarch Abraham, Jesus, Count Jenő Karátsonyi, the Holy Name of Mary and the Order of Malta are the five *dramatis personae* this evening. I invite you to reflect with me.

**2.** *Abraham, Jesus and the Order of Malta*. The great patriarch Abraham is mentioned in both Scripture readings this evening. The promises of Abraham reach forward, even into the centuries beyond our present age. “*I will maintain my covenant with you and your descendants after you throughout the ages as an everlasting pact, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you*” (Gen 17:7). The choice of Abraham, when compared to the later exodus out of Egypt under Moses, has a more universal sweep to it. It reflects the Kingdom of David when Israel opened lively diplomatic relations on an international scale (like the Order of Malta in Hungary 100 years ago) and absorbed many customs and values of their neighbours – with God’s blessing. God’s promises to Abraham advise us to think big (like Count Jenő Karátsonyi), to respond openly (like Blessed Gerard), to seek and dream the divine ideal of one world, one people (like Mary and her sons and daughters in the Order of Malta).

While Abraham looks ahead excitedly, the words of Jesus reach back not only to the age of the great patriarch, but even behind the first day in Israel’s history to the eternal day before creation. “*Before Abraham came to be, I AM*” (Jn 8:58). Jesus identifies himself with Yahweh. This name for God, very special and sacred to Israel, means in the Hebrew language “He who is always there.”

Jesus consequently claims to be more than the fulfillment of Abraham’s faith and hopes; Jesus is one with God who planned for the day of Abraham before the universe was created, directed world history so that Abraham would be the single hope of all people, led Israel’s history forward till this eternal Word became incarnate as Jesus, Son of Mary.

This Lent is the duty of each one of us to see that Abraham can rejoice even more abundantly to see Jesus’ day now. The heart of father Abraham will beat with greater satisfaction to the extent that each of us breaks down barriers of prejudice and bias, of antagonism and refusal to forgive. Abraham will be even happier as each of us, our church across the world, and the Order in Hungary, champions the rights of oppressed people, people neglected in hospitals, rest homes and prisons.

Charity such as than benefits from the promise of Jesus: “*whoever keeps my word, will never see death*” (Jn 8:51). Charity cannot die. It surpasses faith and hope and alone extends into heaven. The bond of love promised in Abraham, fulfilled in Jesus, summons us as the only way we can live forever. That’s what the past 100 years demonstrates!

**3.** *Count Jenő Karátsonyi and the Order of Malta*. After the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy in 1918, a short transitional period followed during which the domestic and foreign policies of the new independent Hungary were consolidated, creating the need to regulate relations with the Sovereign Order of Malta. This intention coincided with the effort to establish an autonomous territorial organization for the Hungarian branch of the Order of Malta, four centuries after it had been dissolved due to the Turkish occupation.[[1]](#footnote-1)

The Grand Master of the Order of Malta, Fra’ Galeazzo von Thun und Hohenstein, appointed Bailiff Grand Cross of Honour and Devotion Count Jenő Karátsonyi as the envoy to Hungary in 1925. On April 8, 1925, the presentation of his Credentials to Governor Miklós Horthy marked the official beginning of diplomatic relations between the Sovereign Order of Malta and the Kingdom of Hungary.

One of the Ambassador’s most important initial tasks was to restore the organizational structure of the Order of Malta in Hungary, partly through the admission of new members and partly by incorporating Hungarian members of the Order who belonged to the Grand Priory of Bohemia. Thanks to his organizational work, there were enough members available in 1927 to formally apply for the establishment of an independent Hungarian Association.

The diplomatic relations between the Sovereign Order of Malta and Hungary ended again 20 years later, following the collapse of 1945 and the subsequent communist takeover. Following the end of the communist regime and the fall of the Iron Curtain, full diplomatic relations at the ambassadorial level could be resumed in 1990.

Count Jenő Karátsonyi was born on August 5, 1861, in Beodra, now Serbia, the historical Torontál County, on the family’s central estate. He completed his secondary school studies in Budapest, then studied law in Louvain, Belgium. Upon returning home, he continued his studies at the Economic Academy in Magyaróvár. In 1869, he became involved in the work of the Parliament with a liberal party program. His wife was Countess Karolina Andrássy.[[2]](#footnote-2)

According to recollections of the time, the Count was a contradictory person, who evoked both respect and dislike from the inhabitants of Solymár. Like his father, he made many charitable, noble gestures. You know that he was a founding member of the Hungarian Order of Malta, established in 1928, and that he built the building in the Buda Castle, which became the headquarters of the Order.

At the same time, he pursued an extravagant lifestyle that he could maintain only by slowly banishing his estates. His troubled property affairs undermined his authority. The inhabitants of Solymár especially murmured against him. It turned out that the Count sold more lands from his lands in Solymár than he actually owned. In addition, some of the estates were heavily indebted to the sale.

The inhabitants of Solymár were so angry with the count that in 1931, Count Jenő Karátsonyi Street, which led between the old rectory and the church, was renamed Prince József Street. A month before his death, the representative body nevertheless elected the Count an honorary citizen. The church in Solymar eventually received a very valuable crystal chandelier from the Count’s wealth.

Writing some years later, Miklós Majthényi described the Count’s funeral in these words: “I myself witnessed the burial of Count Jenő Karátsonyi in the Church of Solymár. The funeral ceremony took place in a large crowd on the Church Square. In the church, the floor tiles were laid out in the area between the side altar and the pulpit, where a suitable place for the coffin had been prepared. There the deceased was laid to rest, and then the floor tiles were put back in place.”

If I refer to these historical facts and anecdotes, it is in no way to disparage the Count’s contributions to the Order in Hungary, It is, rather, to highlight an important spiritual truth: “*God chose the foolish of the world to shame the wise, and God chose the weak of the world to shame the strong,* *and God chose the lowly and despised of the world, those who count for nothing, to reduce to nothing those who are something,* *so that no human being might boast before God*” (1 Cor 1:27-29). This seems to be the Count’s cry to us one hundred years after his appointment as Ambassador of the Sovereign Military Order of Malta to Hungary. God uses those who are willing. God works in our weakness. It’s never too late to discover your purpose. All of us have something God can use. In fact, feelings of weakness and inadequacy actually qualify you as a candidate in God’s service! God is looking for people just like you, because He knows He will receive the glory for what He does through you. You’re exactly the kind of person God wants to use! We pray for the eternal repose of the soul of Count Jenő Karátsonyi. And we ask him to accompany the Order and its works in Hungary with his prayers for at least the next 100 years.

**4.** *The Holy Name of Mary and the Order of Malta*. This Parish Church in Solymár is dedicated to the Holy Name of Mary. It was built in the late Baroque style during the reign of Károly Majthényi, between 1782 and 1785, and was designed by János Mangel, a carpenter from Buda. Its altarpiece depicting the Virgin Mary was long considered miraculous, which is why the church was a destination for pilgrimages for a long time.

Calling on the name of Mary is a way of seeking her prayers in a personal and intimate way. Hence, the names of Jesus and Mary should be seen and understood as being powerful, compelling us to call upon them personally, with trust in Who they are. As we celebrate in this Church dedicated to the Holy Name of the Blessed Virgin Mary, we reflect upon the depth of trust we have in her motherly intercession. Kings and armies called upon her for protection and victory. Sinners have sought her motherly help to overcome their weaknesses. Saints have entrusted themselves to her, knowing that she would elevate them and present them to her divine Son. Popes have sung her praises. Church councils have taught definitively about her role in salvation history. All who call upon her should have certainty that their prayers will be heard. How many Knights of Malta have gazed into her maternal eyes! Like them, let’s turn to her tonight, entrust ourselves to her intercession, and have confidence that her prayers will win for us an abundance of grace and mercy from her Son.

The image of Mary in this church recalls the image of Mary so sacred for the Order of Malta, for the sons and daughters of the Order of Malta who call on the name of Mary in a unique way:

**Mary, Our Lady of Philermos**, for over seven hundred years you have protected our Order, often against great odds and in the bleakest of conditions. Thank you for the blessings given to the Hungarian Association over the past 100 years. Beloved Patroness, we pray you continue to guard and guide our Order in the fulfillment of its work for the poor and the sick, and for peace, still often carried out against opposition and in dangerous conditions. Amen.[[3]](#footnote-3)

As it was over the past 100 years, so may it be in the next 100 years! *Tuitio Fidei et Obsequium Pauperum*: strengthened in faith, hope and love, we go forth determined to make a difference in the world by the quality of our charity and service as Knights and Dames and Members of the Sovereign Military Hospitaller Order of St. John of Jerusalem and Rhodes and of Malta.

Amen.

1. This summary on the relations of the Sovereign Military Order of Malta with Hungary is taken from the website of the Hungarian Association: https://hungaryembassy.orderofmalta. int/en/relations-with-hungary/ (.) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. The historical references and quotations are from the Article “*gróf Karátsonyi Jenő (1933)*”, published in *Vörösvári Újság* (2005. április): <https://pilisvorosvar.hu/varosunk-elete/varosinformacio/pilisvorosvar-informacio/diszpolgarok/grof-karatsonyi-jeno-1933-1>

   [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. This Prayer to Our Lady of Philermos can be found on the web site of the American Association of the Sovereign Order of Malta: <https://orderofmaltaamerican.org/2022/09/08/birthday-blessed-virgin-mary/> (.) The reference to Hungary is an addition of the author. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)