



HUNGARIAN UNITARIAN  
MINISTERS' ASSOCIATION



International  
Council of  
Unitarians and  
Universalists

As President of the International Council of Unitarians and Universalists it is my pleasure to welcome the publication of this book of Transylvanian prayers and sermons. The church in Hungary and Transylvania is the oldest organized Unitarian community on the planet, dating back nearly 500 years. It is important to recognize this part of our heritage in our liturgies and our libraries. I am also pleased because this sharing of heritage supports our ICUU Mission which calls us to:

- Build relationships through communication and collaboration;
- Develop spiritual community among member groups and their leaders;
- Identify and nurture prospective and emerging groups;
- Foster our U-U faith for mutual inspiration, development and growth.

Rev. **Brian J. Kiely**  
President, ICUU  
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Humble in Front of God Words for Worship from Transylvanian Unitarians



# Humble in Front of God

## Words for Worship from Transylvanian Unitarians

KOLOZSVÁR • 2014

HUMBLE IN FRONT OF GOD

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# **HUMBLE IN FRONT OF GOD**

**Words for Worship from Transylvanian Unitarians**

International Council of Unitarians and Universalists  
Hungarian Unitarian Ministers' Association

Kolozsvár  
2014

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# INTRODUCTION

Hungarian is one of the most beautiful languages in the world that God has given humanity to use to communicate.

Unfortunately I do not speak it, understand it, nor am I able to write prayers and sermons in that wonderful tongue.

It is my shortcoming and I am filled with admiration for native speakers and for anyone who learns Hungarian as a second language.

Ever since humanity has been sharing the story of God's reaction to the building of the tower of Babel, there has been constant debate as to whether the wide variety of languages people speak is a curse to keep us in our place or merely an explanation of the diversity of cultures embodied in the different tongues we use to communicate with our kin.

For some, such reflection has been part of a quest to find some uniformity, some consistent commonality, behind the rainbow of tongues we use both to raise our voices to proclaim our living gospel and to lower our heads in healing prayer.

Unitarians and Unitarian Universalists in their indigenous cultural expressions around the world see diversity and difference as one of the most precious of God's gifts. We do not need to be alike to love alike. Walking in the spiritual shoes of people who live in a different language can offer insights and inspiration beyond that in one's native tongue.

This is why the International Council of Unitarians and Universalists (ICUU) partners with the Ministers Association of the Hungarian Unitarian Church in making available this anthology of prayers and sermons from their members translated into English.

It is the first in a series of such collections from various language traditions that ICUU hopes to help publish to share cultural expressions of our liberal and progressive spiritualities.

Of course, these English versions are just replicas of these expressions of the sacred that convey such spiritual power in the original Hungarian. But like a window, we believe the

translations offer a glimpse of the oldest practiced tradition in our global liberal religious rainbow.

Know that the gifts of the spirit found in these pages are but reflections of the faith best shared in the tongue of creation. Yet we can use them in personal meditation and group worship to bring something of their rich meaning into our own celebrations of that which is holy.

And even if through a glass darkly, the inspirational light and spiritual warmth found in these translations might move us to try to learn some Hungarian, to get even closer to that rich vein of human spirituality embodied in the people of the Hungarian Unitarian Church.

*(Rev.) Steve Dick*

Executive Director

International Council of Unitarians and Universalists

# I. PRAYERS

*Our Father, who art in heaven,  
hallowed be thy Name,  
thy kingdom come,  
thy will be done,  
on earth as it is in heaven.*

*Give us this day our daily bread.  
And forgive us our trespasses,  
as we forgive those  
who trespass against us.*

*And lead us not into temptation,  
but deliver us from evil.*

*For thine is the kingdom,  
and the power, and the glory,  
for ever and ever. Amen.*



## ON NEW YEAR'S DAY

### **Prayer at the Beginning of a New Year**

#### **Our Loving God!**

We approach you, providing Lord of our lives, with hesitation, and stumbling speech. We are seeking the best words to address you. We would like to meet you, and as we have done so many times before, we invite you again to join our community, be with us, beside us and within us. You are our only eternal friend, support, parent and sibling. You are the keeper of our hearts' blooming flowers and the consoling tender of our souls when we wither.

Now, when we are searching for our path at the beginning of a new year, we thank you for coming to meet us again and for trying to show the way to your children. The sweeping steps of the passing years urge us to reflect on whether we are on the right path.

Our God, we indeed wish to walk on your path. Here we have come to you and asked you to appear within us so that our infinite anguish can come to an end and we can walk with you. Thank you for directing our sight towards our inner journey, enabling us to discover our own secrets. Thank you for encouraging us to know ourselves better. Thank you for providing new opportunities over and over again to meet you and to meet ourselves.

Enable us to discover at the end of our road the things we have been craving. Help us find the things our hearts have been longing for. Give healing to those that need healing, give recovery for their body and their soul. To those in need of bread, give golden wheat fields; to those waiting for peace, give calmness; and to those craving love, send the people whom they miss. Visit the ones who wish to be close to you

and bring blooming flowers and brighter spring into their hearts.

Our God, we confess together with the prophet that those who wait upon you shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint. What greater gift, what greater promise could we need, than to trust in you, our Lord?

Our speech is stumbling but you have been and will remain our shining hope, forever.

Amen.

*Ildikó Makkai Ilkei*

## **Prayer on New Year's Day**

### **Blessed God of Renewal!**

A year has passed again; New Year's Day is breaking.

We are aware that this coming year will also be spent in ceaseless concern, endless search, and perpetual work. The year that has just passed had been like this, too, and this is how things ought to be.

Our worry is inevitable. We are constantly concerned for our parents and for our children. Nothing can be done to avoid that, other than to pray and work hard. As people with religious faith, we know: this is the light that can heal all the troubles of the world.

Thank you, our God, for inviting us this coming year to constant prayer and perpetual work.

Please, remind us how quickly our time, this valuable treasure, flies away. We would like to stop the passing of time every so often; we would frequently like to return to the past and live through the joys of our lives again, or to prevent our tragedies.

We ask you, Our Dear Father, to protect us this coming year from passiveness and aimlessness, but also from overwork.

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Help us remain in good relationship with you, ourselves and our fellow-beings.

Give us the hope, Dear God, that our future can truly be like we dream it. Help us be able to take the right actions in order to make that future we are dreaming about become reality. Help us cope with everyday reality. Give us successes and triumphs, and make us strong enough to change the things that ought to be changed.

Assist us in recognizing our duties in the coming year. Assist us in finding the purpose of our lives.

Engrave in our hearts the words of Jesus, who teaches us to seek your kingdom first, and your righteousness; and all other things shall be added unto us.

Amen.

*Sándor Léta*

**ON THE DAY  
OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM –  
JANUARY 13**

**Prayer for Tolerant Religions  
and for Compassionate Believers**

**Creative God, Almighty Father!**

We address you with the voice of gratitude on this day, when out of your countless blessings we express our thanks for our faith; a faith, which – in the form of a church – has pursued the building of your kingdom here on earth, among your created beings, following a tradition of almost half a millennium. How extraordinary the ways of your providence are, oh God, through which you can lead pure faith to victory. How mighty your truth is, by which you can fill with new life even ideals that are believed to be lost forever!

Our God, our Creator, as religious people we ceaselessly return to the same clear spring, and try to live with the same determination to reach you. When we thank you for your most sacred gift, our faith, we are not only overwhelmed with thankfulness, but also with a sense of responsibility. We know we must be careful that our faith remains a balm on the wounds and does not turn into a weapon; that it should encourage and not harm us; that it should bring us closer to each other and not erect barriers or walls to separate us.

We are also grateful for the wisdom of those who have walked ahead of us, for wisely preserving our Unitarian faith from arrogant exclusiveness.

Our Father, we have to confess with bowed heads that there have been occasions when we criticized the faith, traditions, and churches of our neighbors, when in our self-contentedness we saw religion as some kind of a competition or order of merit. At such times we forgot that our Unitarian

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traditions oblige us to respect the faith of others, at such times we denied the truth that all Christians must be sisters and brothers in the faith that aims to live Jesus' teaching in this earthly life.

Providing God, in our supplication we ask you today to give all trusting souls the responsibility and freedom necessary to find their own faith. Preserve, dear Father, the precious liberty of the gift of faith among human beings, so that those praying to you can be people freely finding you, according to their chosen beliefs, and not captive souls.

We want to pray to you in spirit and truth, and by our prayers to create a community where religions are not rivals to each other but fellow-workers striving to achieve the same goal. Give us all, Dear God, the wisdom to live our faith and religion without harming, offending or hurting others, but rather with good intent, to bring the fruits of our faith, our good deeds, among the people. Protect those who are persecuted and insulted for their religious beliefs today in the world and give kindness and consideration to those who take arms against each other in the name of faith.

Dear God, Our Creator, this is how on this occasion we express our gratitude for the freedom of our faith, and we ask you to listen to our prayer, be the protector of religious freedom on earth now and forever.

Amen.

*Endre Nagy jr.*

## FOR PARTNER CONGREGATION CELEBRATION

### **Prayer for the Occasions of Meeting with Sisters and Brothers in Faith**

#### **Our Creative and Providing God, Almighty Father!**

Confessing our faith and trust we stand before you and search for words and thoughts that could open-heartedly tell what we feel and think. When our curious souls, always eager to learn about the world, have the opportunity to meet new friends and acquire new knowledge, following our first surprise we immediately remember the prayerful sigh of the psalmist, who, watching the stars in the sky, exclaimed: "*O Lord, our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth!*" Such an encounter is the present blessed occasion, too, when standing side by side with our sisters and brothers in faith arriving from across the ocean, we examine ourselves. How truly excellent is thy name in all the earth, oh God, on this side of the ocean and on its other side, far away and quite near to us. How wonderful your works are in all the corners of the world, that such variety, and such diversity are included in the loving embrace of you providence!

Dear God, Our Father, if we think of all the languages that are used to praise you in this created world, of all the different names praying lips whisper to address you, we feel indeed small and unimportant. Yet if in our faith we succeed in finding the certainty that all this diversity and richness is an opportunity for the edification of our souls, we look at each other in your house with grateful feelings. This far-reaching tree of life of religious traditions is a new certitude that our Unitarian heritage provides a viable, community building faith under all circumstances, and evokes Jesus' teachings

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about pure love amidst different countries and in the bosom of different nations.

Forgive us, oh God, if it is difficult sometimes for our selfish, uncomprehending souls to grasp the order of other worlds, other societies. Save us from the traps of prejudices, so that we can preserve the pureness of our belief that man was created to be good.

Give us all pure, openly curious souls, so that we can approach each other as sisters and brothers. Even if we do not entirely know each other's language and customs, let us understand each other through the language of love. Allow us to understand that actions deriving from love are equally understandable and equally valuable in every part of the world.

We ask, dear Father, that you do not allow us to only perceive the otherness, but allow us to be able to go beyond the differences and discover the things that connect us together, the things in which we are all one and the same. May this blessed meeting become an occasion to fulfill your laws, so that we approach each other in the spirit of the commandment of love. Let us find strength in our sisters and brothers, to build our congregations and communities, to provide support for each other on an individual level and on the level of our community.

Bless, God, this gathering and make us spiritually enriched by it. You be the providing God of guests and hosts, of visitors and receivers, so that each and every minute of our meeting can be embraced by your everlasting love and providence.

Amen.

*Endre Nagy jr.*

## PREPARING FOR EASTER

### **Closer to You, Our Lord**

Our Loving God, from day to day, from Sunday to Sunday we seek you out and call upon you as the preserver and provider of our lives. Aware of our smallness we turn to you: the infinite, the almighty, the eternal love. We make an attempt to thank you for all the things we ought, for all the things we so often even fail to take the measure of.

For us this is the moment to thank you for all your blessings, your patience towards us, your provision, and compassion. It is the day to give thanks for what our limited human minds cannot even conceive most of the time: the peculiarities of nature, all the incomprehensible things that happen to us, and last, but not the least, our successful or less successful lives.

Today we would like to thank you for this new day, to be grateful to you for your best child, who showed us how to live and die truly worthily. Through him you presented us with a human life that is an example to follow. We often keep trying, and even more frequently keep vowing to follow his way, but our worldly troubles repeatedly prevent us from succeeding. We somehow always find excuses why we cannot walk along or why we cannot stay on the path Jesus has shown us.

Our God, please forgive us for being so weak. Forgive us for not having enough will, persistence, and for not having enough confidence. We are not brave enough to utter that thy will should be done.

When we remember the ideal victory of your son, we would like to believe in the way, the truth and the life he shows us. We would like to be stronger in faith, in will, in perseverance. That is why we turn to you in our prayer. Give us a faith that is as firm as a rock, and enfold us completely



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with your love, so that we can pass it on to others. Give us understanding and forgiving hearts, and firm determination to step on Jesus' path, to follow his way until the last moments of our lives.

Amen.

*Erika Demeter*

## IN TIME OF FASTING

### Search My Soul

#### **My God, Dear Father!**

The music of the carnival amusements has grown quiet, and I sense that the world around me is changing. Still, nothing unusual is happening; only the saying of the Ecclesiastes prevails: *“to every thing there is a season”*. It has been the season of carnivals, of revelry, a season that lasted until this day.

Before moving on, I thank you, my God, for the moments of joy and cheerfulness, and also for being able to enjoy the opportunities of mirth and merriment around me, while still preserving my dignity as a human being. And I also thank you that I have not forgotten you amidst the ecstasy of joy and the dizziness of revelry, and I have not lost my connection to you, I remained a child of God.

Now the time of earnestness, of self-examination, of inner reflection has come, according to your command. I ask you, my God to stay with me on this path of fasting. Help me, so that my self-examination does not become hypocrisy, but true repentance to your liking. Show me the clear light of faith that leads me on the way to Easter, and help me be aware that you are beside me on that way. In this manner listen to me, my God.

Amen.

*Sándor Máthé*

## ON PALM SUNDAY

### **Blessed is He that Cometh in the Name of the Lord**

#### **God of Joy, Dear Father!**

It is Palm Sunday today, and my heart is filled with light and enjoyment. I also greet Jesus with delight: *“Blessed be the King that cometh in the name of the Lord: peace in heaven, and glory in the highest.”*

I see him with delight: the prince of life that comes in the name of truth, of love and in the name of God. I also render homage to him; I scatter the flowers of my soul before him.

The King is coming: brought not by an adorned carriage, but by a small donkey. And purity, innocence, truth and true human greatness come along with him.

One would expect him to celebrate with self-satisfaction, to wave his hand smilingly; yet he is so sad, his eyes are wet from the water of the soul. He could not be deceived; he knew his people quite well, and knew how easily they could be deluded and cheated.

Many had passed along that road with pompous carriages, expensive vehicles in the name of selfishness, power, violence and wealth. Their trails have vanished, covered by the dust of oblivion.

It is Palm Sunday today, the day of rejoicing. Although I know that the enthusiastic, rejoicing crowd will turn against Jesus in just a few days, still I am happy that there is a day after all, when purity, innocence and true human greatness can be victorious.

Oh, God! I confess to you today that so many times I had paid homage to false values and to those that were unworthy of respect.

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Allow me, my Father, to greet Jesus on Palm Sunday with the full joy of my heart!

Allow me to open up my heart in front of him, so that he can bring purity, truth and love into my life.

Amen.

*Mózes Kedei*

## ON GOOD FRIDAY

### **Our God, Protect the Sufferers!**

#### **Providing God, our Good, Loving Father!**

We express our gratefulness for your providence, for this new occasion to meet with you. Today we remember the death of your true son, and his readiness to sacrifice. When we do this, we do not only mourn the death of Jesus, but also evoke his entire life. We remember an exemplary life, which is not drowned by the mourning of this day, but becomes full together with Good Friday, occurring between Christmas and Easter.

As the dawn of this day was marked by the twittering of the birds, the road leading to Good Friday also started with Christmas, once upon a time. We are grateful to you, our creative Father, for the birth of Jesus, for sending him into this world as a great friend of humanity and a true teacher. And again, we thank you that he can also be born within us, by our character and active will. We should be equally grateful for our personal Christmases of all times, when our families are completed with new lives, when we succeed in acting according to your will, when true values prevail in our lives, or when we are simply enjoying a good day.

Thank you, dear Father, for the perfect example of a life that the Master of Nazareth so authentically presented us. His teachings and his example still form the basis of our ethics and religious life. By his humble character he was the king of the poor and of the rich at the same time, for whom the color of the skin, social rank or the refinement of the mind made no difference. He looked at the inner values instead, ennobled the soul of his fellow-beings, and tried to teach them how to attain the things that are truly essential. In order to achieve that, he worked with deepest humbleness, yet with the most vigorous determination, to build your Kingdom here on earth.

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His authenticity is crowned by his final readiness to sacrifice. He is the Jesus we see as an example, both at Christmas and on Good Friday. We are not looking for him among the stars or in the center of all-time celebrations, for to us he is much closer than that. His spirituality can be found within our inner self, and his influence can also be achieved through us, because it is where pure hearts and unconditioned good will operate, where one soul lives for another soul.

Our Providing Father! As the Lord of our lives and of history you have permitted that after almost two thousand years, the sorrowful Good Friday turn into a grateful memorial feast. Teach us to pray with this faith when we are in trouble, and enable us to live together with this suffering. On Good Friday we turn to you and ask to strengthen this faith within us. Thank you for listening to our prayer.

Amen.

*László Szabó*

## AT EASTER

### Easter Prayer

We give thanks to you, eternal God, for letting us experience the marvelous holiday of Easter.

May you be praised for reaching out to us by the powerful waves of springtime, through the surging power of the river of life. May you be praised for nourishing and revitalizing nature, and helping us celebrate spring in our soul.

We come to you today as seekers. We come to your holy place to find relief after a heavily dark Good Friday, we come to celebrate a joyful Easter. We are like the women who were looking for Jesus' body on the morning of Easter, wanting to cover his body with the balm of love.

Today we have no more pain in us. We are not haunted by the idea of defeated love because we already know what the women did not, that we don't have to look for Jesus in a tomb. Jesus defeated death, Jesus lives with us, in us, and in the love and goodness we share.

Still, unwillingly we hold pain in our lives. There are burdens on us, burdens we talk about and burdens we want to keep in secret. These all once were blooming flowers but everyday life has changed them into thorns.

There is hope in our hearts that all our burdens will be dissolved, punctured or at least eased by the power of Easter faith.

Come close to us! Please hold our hands! Comfort us and help us to cocoon our soul by the power, joy and purity of this holiday.

And forgive our sins, our inability to believe, our shameful lack of courage. Forgive us for not understanding the mystery of Easter. Forgive us for cursing often and for accusing you for our problems and sufferings.

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Let us look at you as Jesus did. Help us recognize in you our father, who loves us, who helps us be joyful.

Make us find the vision of Easter, make us look beyond the tomb, and recognize in the eternal light our beloved ones. Make us acknowledge our future self in that eternal light.

Teach us to believe that we belong to you both in our life and in our death. Teach us to live our lives with courage, without the shadow of fear.

Amen.

*Lajos Lőrinczi*

### **Prayer for Receiving the Easter Faith**

#### **Caregiver God, great loving father!**

We thank you for letting us live through these days, when we can show our gratitude for the spiritual victory of our prophet and teacher. Today we celebrate the eternity of the soul, and we give thanks for the life and teachings of Jesus from Nazareth who wanted to found your kingdom here on earth.

Loving father! We are grateful to you for receiving the Easter faith, because it helps us defeat our fear of death, gives us power to face suffering, and propagates the eternity of our soul. Through the radiance of the Easter faith even the gloomy message of Good Friday turns into thanksgiving. We need the Easter faith because Good Friday makes us remember not only the death of Jesus but our own mortality and the barriers of our everyday life as well. We cannot guess when the next Good Friday will appear in our life, nor can we guess what will face us in the future. Will we stand beside cradles or by coffins? We might face our next Good Friday in the corridors of a hospital, holding the phone, or opening our front door to messengers we don't know. These are risks we take every day, we cannot avoid them, but at least we can be prepared to face them. We know that mourning and death are inevitable. Faith and trust are a gift and through them we can hold up a shield against fear.



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We believe that you are neither the source nor the reason for suffering, loving God; instead you are the shield for those who suffer, and you are the comforter of those who mourn. We believe that your comfort is well proportioned to the pain we have to bear. We hope to receive from you the Easter faith through which we can soften the echo of dirt coldly hitting the lid of the coffin as it descends.

We would like to strengthen our Easter belief, so we turn to you. We are confident that our prayer is heard.

Amen.

*László Szabó*

## AT PENTECOST

### By the Light of Your Heavenly Flame

*“Rekindle, heavenly flame of holy Pentecost,  
Descend upon us descend upon us today, holy spirit,  
Lead into our souls your flaming mercy,  
Holy breath!”*

What this old psalm puts into words is so comforting for our souls; it sings its lovely tune and colorfully paints the emotions we have in our hearts.

We know it is hard sometimes to find the perfect words and expressions. It is also hard to get rid of our problems, to fight our fears, to throw off the pain and celebrate with honesty. It is hard to gather our hopes from the ashes, to dry our soaking wet faith, and to clean our ragged love.

Still, today, on the day of Pentecost with the help of the psalms our prayer is unstained and honest. In our prayer, gratitude comes first. We are grateful for our lives. We are grateful for this holiday which lifts us from everyday life, awakes us, purifies us, and makes us better people.

We are grateful for the very first Pentecost when your holy spirit founded the first Christian community. This community protected us from danger, gave us comfort in painful moments, held us together in times when things fell apart.

We give thanks for becoming followers of Jesus, and even though we are few, we still can serve your laws and your people.

We ask you to forgive our sins. We know that sometimes we pushed your holy spirit into the mud, we know that sometimes we detested, we scorned your holy community. Help us get free of our internal barriers.

Give us a new way of knowing each other. Give us joyful Pentecost. May your holy spirit come upon us and give

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us rebirth so we can witness your miracle. May we speak languages, languages we have forgotten, the language of love, of forgiving, of comforting, and of encouragement. Help us learn Jesus' language through which he was able to have a conversation with anybody, because he was able to see the inner value of each person. Help us create a blessed community.

You know our pains and you see our fears. We would like to enjoy a better future, so strengthen our faith, our trust, and our hope. Bless our community with mutual empathy, with good intentions, and with life.

Amen.

*Lajos Lőrinczi*

## AT SUMMERTIME

### Elijah's Struggles

#### **Our God!**

Once upon a time, you called Elijah to stand in front of you, face to face. Now you are calling us and we are expecting your stirring appearance in a storm, in fire, in an earthquake. Yet, we know, our God, that you live not only there but everywhere. You are placing us every given day at the top of a hill, where we must bury our ego, and face you.

There are storms and lightning everywhere, but beyond the frightening noise of these happenings we are listening to soft and calming voices. We see smiling faces, and today we want to say thank you for these human messages. Our everyday fears are Elijah's fears. It is hard for us to look into your striking light. Your light is purifying, and awakens in us unknown emotions which are coming from our deepest spheres.

From time to time we peek out from our cave because we yearn for your presence, we miss your voice. Still, we are like children playing hide and seek. Your questions are sharp and looking for a real answer. Elijah knew this.

Our God! Our answers to your core questions are complicated and many times we get mixed up in our meanings. We feel that we must find the answer to these questions: what are we doing here, what are we living for, and why are things as they are.

We are confident that you will let us experience the simplicity and clarity of human life. Let us hear the voice coming from our soul, let us experience you even in the rhythm of a silent moment.

The fears that we share with Elijah will perish when we come close to you, and we can declare we are no longer afraid of new questions and new emotions. At this moment, we are

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ready to step out on the top of a rock and expect to see you face to face.

Help us believe that in every moment of our lives we are holding your blessing.

Amen.

*Erika Demeter*

## AT THE OPENING OF THE SCHOOL YEAR

### Teach us Steps on your Path

#### **Eternal love, God of providence!**

Our first word goes to you. Our first thought leads to you. Yours are our folding hands, our reason, and every fluttering of our soul. To you we offer our strength, to you we confess, to you we whisper our secrets, our troubles, and also our hopes.

We call you Lord of our life, we call you Creator, we call you Caretaker, and we want to express this not only in words, but by the posture of our body, by the tone of our voice, and by our deeds. We are your children, and we want our prayer to be uplifting, beautiful, and also modest and humble.

Our father! We are grateful to you and we give thanks to you! It is great being here! It is such a good feeling pampering our soul with the mood of this fancy room. Our ancestors, those who erected this building, and those who lifted this place into a spiritual fortress, are with us. We sense the sight of the glorious prince (John Sigismund, 16th century), we sense the ethical sentences of our legendary teachers, and we relive the time we spent with our old time playmates. We hold the essence of their lives. We hold their spirituality, we stand on the foundation they laid down, we hold the past they glorified through their deeds, and over all we hold your blessing because it was your blessing which made our ancestors abide.

Dear God! We say thank you for the past, but also we say thank you for this inspiring present time. We say thank you for the future we are seeking together, which we want to create together.

Look at us and see this handful of youth gathered, who came to this town with youthful zeal, with souls dreaming, and with a salvific vision for this world, to lay down the foundation of your kingdom, and to build an ideal church for

themselves. We have boys and girls who collected the treasures of their souls, the beauties of their ancestry, the taste of their dialects, so in a few years they can become cut diamonds.

We say thank you for the teachers whose duty is to refine the mind of the students, to open their eyes, to touch their soul, to plant in their hearts the sprouts of calling, and to light the prophetic fire in them, so they will courageously stand up, and they will be able to cure the people with broken hearts.

We need your help our God, because this work is hard. We need inner strength in order to act rightfully. We need proper spirituality which helps us create values. We need inner strength in order to embrace those who get tired and weak, and to stand firm during harsh times. Let us be joyful.

Please listen to the prayer we say, not only for ourselves, but for all who belong to us. We are grateful that we could come so far. We are grateful for the gifts of everyday life. May we never lose sight of the essence of our life, may the flame of our soul never be extinguished by indifference and disinterest.

May we deliver your prophecy both in good and bad times. May our calling be visible through our speech and through our deeds. May the speech inspired by you be always sweet in our mouth. May we all become prophets sent by you.

Bless our work, bless our studies, and help us nourish the soul you have given us.

Amen.

*Botond Koppándi*

## AT THANKSGIVING

### In the Labyrinth of Thanksgiving

**My God,**

I give thanks to you for opening the palm of your hand towards me. I feel I have received gifts from you.

I have gotten words from you and I pronounced them sometimes in a very simple way, more so in a childish way, as you strummed the strings of my soul.

You have taught me to give, rubbing my clenched fist into a giving hand.

You have taught me to laugh again. You have opened my eyes to see joy.

Today I feel I belong to you as a tired wing belongs to the bird. Only with you am I able to open my wings and fly. Only with you can I fly up to the blue skies.

Only with you can I face the rising sun, the people around me, and myself.

Only with you am I able to live as a human being.

Only with you can I go on trackless roads, from tree to tree, sometimes feeling sweet as honey, sometimes feeling sour as vinegar. Having joy and sorrow on my face, only with you can I march on shiny and wintry roads.

Holding your hand I'm able to keep standing next to cradles and by coffins.

I can witness your presence right here, right now. I can be with you without fear.

Listen to my childish stuttering, my always present, still unknown God.

I would like to return to you all the gifts I have received from you as a mirror reflects the light.

I would like to offer you my open hands, and the tam-tam of my heartbeat.

Receive my ungraceful and vague grace.



Read my words, peek beyond my words into the labyrinth of my emotions, love me, never leave me alone, and never let me go away. I'm close to dust-, make me alive through your Word.

Amen.

*Adél Szabó*

## **Humble in Front of God**

*Fall has arrived, it has arrived again,*

*And as always, it is beautiful to me*

Sándor Petőfi

We immerse ourselves in the beauty of fall reciting this poem, praising your name, God. There is a deep sense of gratitude we feel, and we would like to express it to you through our deeds, thoughts and emotions.

We know we have spent less time looking for you these days, still we rejoiced experiencing your love in our lives. There are long tiresome weeks behind us. Resting in our beds was always short, but the hard labor is done and we are grateful to you -- witnessing your blessing in our struggle for daily bread.

On this Sunday we are stepping out from the long line of working days, and we are ready to meet you. We come to you to celebrate and we feel that our souls are full of gratitude.

Only words of thanks come to our mouth. We are grateful for being alive, we are grateful for the endurance you gave us in our time consuming and energy consuming work.

Loving God, there was sadness, failure, and hate in our days, but you have been always around. You comforted us, you gave us new strength, and you set us at ease.

Give us peace and love in our lives, so we can approach each other with empathy. Show us the road that leads to you. May we never end up in a dead end.

## I. PRAYERS

Help us follow Jesus' teachings, so we can become better people. May we learn from Jesus the steps of gratitude.

There is a feeling of ease we have in our souls, this hour is embedded in gratitude. Please listen to our prayer and let us enjoy the harvest and the yield.

Amen.

*Zsuzsánna Kiss*

# ON THE DAY OF THE REFORMATION - OCTOBER 31

## **Giving Thanks for the Reformation**

How may we call you? We are not afraid of you because we have experienced your love, oh God! Still, sometimes it is hard to find your proper name. How can we call you, knowing that you have been called so many names throughout the centuries? You have always been with us, still you came to us through the Bible in a foreign language, and we needed time to get back to your real names pronounced in our mother tongue.

We are asking for help from poets, from writers, from prophets, from psalms to find your name. We say 'our father', but we might also say 'our mother, our brother, our sister, our parent, our friend, our creator, the soul of our souls'. We call you power, trust, the remains from the sacrificial smoke of our ancestors.

Dear God, we trust you understand all our words, our verbs, nouns, adjectives, and our metaphors.

We have agreed to walk with you on the narrow path which leads to life. Please forgive us if sometimes we end up off your track, if sometimes we are not pleased with the salvation offered at the end of the narrow road.

We stand firm in the conviction that we don't need - that nobody needs - the sad, star-killing smoke of the burning stakes, nor do we need salvation from indulgences bought with pennies.

Our hope is transformed by the always renascent faith. As we are always able to call your name, we feel blessed. May our sisters and brothers never become our enemies. May there be peace among different believers. May we never be committed to salvation acquired with fiery stakes.

## I. PRAYERS

We praise the courage the reformers had to stand up for truth and dignity. We follow the reformers in their perseverance. We know, dear God, that simply weeping and whining does not bring us wellbeing, but rather unwavering, persistent work.

We thank you, dear God, for the strong and clear voices of our reformers, and the trustful prayers which kept them fearless. We thank the loving and strong spirit of Luther, Calvin, Melanchthon, Zwingli, Servetus, John Sigismund, and Francis Dávid.

We give thanks for the centuries-long hope our ancestors had. We thank you for our mother tongue by which we were able to call your name. May we call your name with awe forever. May the spring of reason and faith never dry out; may we never be short of spiritual resources.

Amen.

*Szilárd Sándor*

## COMMEMORATING THE DEAD - ON NOVEMBER 1

### **Honoring the Memory of our Ancestors**

#### **Living God, our Father,**

The silence of autumn engulfs us. There is a silence within, too- the silence of memories and loss. Nature's silence reminds us that your laws apply to us all- that after hopeful springs, scorching summers, after the ripeness and fruitfulness of autumn, there comes the time of motionlessness, of death - the silence of winter.

God, we remember those who passed away, who are silent forever.

We give thanks that they have walked in our midst and enriched our lives; we give thanks that in our thoughts, memories and dreams they remain our constant companions and help strengthen us in our faith that besides the visible death there is an invisible eternal life.

We remember them and we think also of our frailness. There is in us a fear, that according to our present knowledge, we too will step into the unknown, the darkness. But we believe in you and we believe that you are the safety, the certainty in the unknown, in the darkness of passing away.

Help us to live up to the memory of our beloved ones, to have no cause to be ashamed before them, but to look forward with hope to our own passing, according to your laws.

Amen.

*Előd Szabó*

**COMMEMORATING  
FRANCIS DÁVID -  
ON NOVEMBER 15**

**Thanksgiving Prayer for the Church  
and its Founderr**

**Source of all Life, one, true, eternal God,**

It is so heartening to stop in the middle of the rushing time to look upon the past, to find our true selves in its light.

At this celebration it is timely and necessary to look back, to enrich our lives with the treasures of the past, to gather new inspiration for our sometimes outwardly tradition-bound faithfulness.

God, we feel the need to remember, so that the spirituality, the religious insights, the continual search for truth of the reformation might imbue our soul.

We give thanks that today at the anniversary of his death we can celebrate the memory of our church founder, Francis David. We give thanks that you gave him to us, not just to the Unitarians, but to the Hungarians and the world. We are overcome when we think that he stood steadfast with you, the one true God, throughout his life and that nothing and no-one could deter him.

We give thanks for the light of his intellect, with which he was able to rediscover the forgotten truth that you are the only God and there is none but you. He was able to recognize that we have one teacher, the prophet of Nazareth, whose teachings are for us „the way, truth and life.“ We give thanks that through Jesus you enhance our human dignity and with him we can confess that we are the light of the world, the salt of the earth.

We give thanks that we had been able to be faithful to our founder for so many years, and ask your help that our faith and commitment might remain steadfast forever.

## HUMBLE IN FRONT OF GOD

We give thanks that you have kept our Unitarian Church in times of hardships and oppressions and you did not let us dwindle in history. When we were torn by doubts, ready to give up the struggle, you gave us determined and committed forbearers who were not men to shrink back but men of faith and life.

We give thanks that today we are seen as a living and serving Church and not a curiosity to be studied by historians of religion or art.

God, so many of us leave the past behind, forgetting that this past formed us, shaped our present. We are dwarfs but we stand on the shoulder of a giant idea, which gives us a place of safety in the world of those who search for you.

Help us today, so that this intellectual power, this longing for truth, this sensitivity of faith might imbue us and help us forward.

Help us to uphold this heritage of religious tolerance, of freedom of conscience and intellectual openness.

Help us show the world our values with the assurance, that these were not forced on us by present requirements, but are as old as our church.

Help us to live up always to the spiritual heritage of Francis David.

Help us stand by our church, strengthen our committed faith, steadfastness and faithfulness, to proclaim your oneness, to live up and to fulfill your laws forever.

Amen.

*István Lajos Józsa*

## AT THE TIME OF ADVENT

### Prayer in Advent

#### **Source of all life and love, our Father !**

We give thanks for this community, of which we are a part. We give thanks for the life of those, who seek peace, justice and love in a world of enmity and division. Help us heal our souls and our lives and strengthen our community.

May we see in ourselves and in each other the miracle of the coming Christmas, the possibility of a new life and new hope. May we see in ourselves and each other the seeds of love, forgiveness, and understanding. Help us nourish and feed these seeds in our life to grow each day in knowledge of ourselves, of life, of your providence.

May the light of our souls shine and give light and warm to all creation. May the dark night of the soul be dispelled by each step we take on this Advent road, by each word, gesture, service which comes from love and proclaims your benevolence and our community and fellowship with all living around us.

May the love which is lavished on us make our days joyful and our work and struggle meaningful.

May the love we lavish on others be given without thought and parsimony, with the magnanimity and assurance of our life `s endless source in your fatherly love.

May our faith, love and work help the unraveling of the Whole.

May the hopes and dreams of Advent become true in our lives.

Amen.

*Mária Pap*



## Prayer for the 1<sup>st</sup> Sunday of Advent

### **Our loving God,**

In the longing of Advent we lift up our soul to you. As the psalmist, we too gather our wishes and hopes for the possibility of the big encounter, when love will celebrate. We are longing for your brightness, when the starless, black nights will come to an end, when the light of the Bethlehem star will once again help our hearts beat together.

We can almost hear the stir of the child in the crib, the song of angels. We can feel that a heavenly hand is ready to set this world straight, to stop for a little while the axis of this antagonistic world, so that at least for one night those on opposing side should surrender their weapons.

This heavenly hand is yours, oh God and is exhorting us to turn our face to each other, so that the clenched hands should unclench for embrace.

Help us God, that when the ancient chant reverberates, the tears in our eyes should show that our mind and heart are pure. With a strong faith in you, we walk toward Bethlehem, toward the light, toward each other.

We confess O Lord, that we need to set straight many things, in order to stand childlike next to the crib, to be able to give our heart's most exquisite gifts to the king of peace. There should be many changes in order for us to be able to understand the mystery of Christmas, the miracle of love. Your light, your love feed your creation and show us the way on this road and will enable us to arrive at the blessed day of Christmas.

Make us strong that we might stay our course and deserve to be lifted up by your love, to be angels once again.

Amen.

*István Buzogány-Csoma*

## Prayer for the 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Advent

### **Loving God, benevolent Father,**

Our road of Advent slowly runs out. A couple of days and all the noises of an awful and malevolent world will be silenced by the holy day. In these last moments, our steps are faltering, our words are exhausted and the glorious song of angels soars up to the sky :

„ Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.”

The angels` voices will blast:” Fear not, for unto you is born this day a Savior.” And this world which spins around its own sins might cease for a moment, its errant heart might relent. The suffering man might confront himself and realize for a short time while moaning about his own distress, that he could wipe away the tears of others, `cause a new star was born in the sky- the prince of peace, the apostle of love, a mightier man. You sent him, O God, to be the envoy of peace, to make this world happier, more blessed, to comfort the mourners, to give hope for those in distress, to be the healer of the suffering human soul.

The advent road slowly runs out and in this expectation we ask you with a blessed hope in our heart to make us deserving for discipleship. We long for peace and love and we would like to experience these spiritual treasures on the birthday of the teacher from Nazareth.

“Prepare ye the ways of the Lord, make his path straight”- calls to us the prophetic voice.

Our God, be with us in this endeavor of setting the way straight, so that at the end of the road, when we will account for ourselves at the crib, might be able to say with upraised head:

I walked the road of Jesus, the road of love, peace and forgiveness, so that all of us should enjoy a true and merry Christmas.

Amen.

*István Buzogány-Csoma*

## Prayer for the 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Advent

### **God, our keeper,**

We look to the future with the miraculous expectation of a childlike soul which dreams about a beautiful Christmas, a blessed holiday. We become children once more and the memories of previous Christmases fill our hearts. We glimpse at bygone holidays, when we stood next to the Christmas tree with a candid and pure heart, when we believed that man is good, that at least at Christmas everyone loves, that each face is gently smiling, that each hand caresses and embraces.

But then we glimpse our daily reality, too, with its trials and tribulations and we have to admit that our preparation for the holiday is not completely pure, as not everyone experiences love. We know that not every hand is caressing or embracing, that there is bitterness, grief and deception- in these times of distress, to whom could we turn for strength, support and consolation, if not to you, our Lord ?

“Where is my God”-cries out our distressed soul?

Lift us up, father and embrace our soul. Strengthen us, your children, on our Advent journey. Let us believe that it is you, who waits for us at the end of the road, that your embrace, your love, your encouragement will be the reward for our struggles.

Let us believe that those who trust you will always have strength to love, will have faith to love and cherish, even in times of adversity. Though this world is different from what we have imagined as children, help us in our adulthood to make the preparations for the holiday with the same purity and candor of the soul.

Amen.

*István Buzogány-Csoma*

## Prayer for the 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Advent

A few more days and the noise of the world will diminish.

A few more days and the heavenly song will be intoned and multitudes will start with the three kings on the road to Bethlehem to welcome the child, to hail your beloved son.

A few more days and the atrocities of this world will pale next to your love. The distressed and those in pain will know happiness as the song reverberates. "Do not be afraid", and in this joyful news the hearts will find each other.

We wish to celebrate Christmas thus, with the shining star of Bethlehem - the star of hope, the star of love and faith, the light of our humanness, the light of our candid, childlike soul.

Just a couple more days, but they seem so far away for your children, who yearn for you. Yet, in our impatience, we do know that these seemingly long days are painfully short for an honest assessment of our life, for repentance.

The time is short for preparing our arrival at the cradle of the child, with all the beautiful gifts of our heart. Time is short to be able to say: "My heart is pure as snow, I have no anger or evil thoughts. Please accept my gifts."

God, we bring to the cradle the gold of our faith, the gold of our gentleness, the gold of our forgiveness. Accept the frankincense of our compassion, the myrrh of our devotion.

Heavenly father, it is thus that we would like to arrive at Christmas. Please help us in our endeavor.

Forgive the latecomers, as we sometimes are slow in realizing that we have not loved enough, that we have not kept the purity of our heart. Forgive us if the year was not long enough to give us time to gather our treasures, the frankincense, the gold, the myrrh.

See our goodwill, our diligence, as we join the procession and we journey toward the star of Bethlehem.

Amen.

*István Buzogány-Csoma*

## AT CHRISTMAS

### **In the Radiance of Love – Prayer at Christmas**

#### **Benevolent God,**

It's Christmas and this short statement explains the radiance of our eyes, the warmth in our heart, our presence here in your abode.

Christmas is your holy day. Everything praises your benevolence: the landscape of winter, the light of the stars and your children's clear, devout prayer. You are our continual caretaker and you gave us this beautiful holiday to experience the beauty of the world.

Christmas is the holy day of gratitude. Gratitude for all you did for us, for the holiday, gratitude for sending us Jesus. Through him are we able to get closer to you. It was he, who taught us how to address you and through his life, which was according to your will, showed us how to live a full life.

Christmas is the holy day of forgiveness. This is the time when we can forgive everyone, as in our heart love finds place instead of hatred, trust instead of suspicion. But we know that we trespass many times your will and many times we forget to ask for forgiveness. Forgive us for our weaknesses.

Christmas is the holy day of human beings, of humanity, of humanness, as at Christmas we might be good, truthful, loving. At Christmas we might be generous and we might give each other with open heart not just material goods, but spiritual ones, too.

We beg you to make this holy day more beautiful and more blessed. Help us to find the newborn child and through this meeting enable us to live closer to you with a grateful soul, a forgiving heart, in our full humanness.

Amen.

*Előd Szabó*

## COMMUNION

### Communion Prayer

#### **Spirit of Life and Love, eternal Father**

As we allow ourselves to enter in the magic circle of our community, we open our souls and minds in your presence, in the presence of the most holy. We come to this encounter leaving behind the turmoil of the outside world and we concentrate on our most deep, most secret, holy inner being.

We come together in your presence, in the midst of our community to feel and to participate again and again in the everlasting bond of love and gratitude, which holds us together.

We look around us and we wonder about our almost infinite capacity to mirror your love.

We look at our hands, which can strike or caress, which can create or destroy. We look into each other's eyes, seeking understanding, love and compassion. We look around us and see familiar faces with tears of joy or sorrow and seeing the other, we see ourselves. We see our common human fragility. We see our uniqueness and our gifts. We see ourselves and all of your creation as flickering of lights emanating from the same source.

We see the gifts of our lives: the laughter of our children, the embrace of our friends, the limitless and creative capacity of our mind and imagination, the power of our souls, the blessing of old age's wisdom, the never ending quest of our lives.

Do we give thanks for what we have? Do we give a passing thought for the grace of our lives?

Is gratitude nourishing for us or is it a burden?

Let us see that gratitude is the source of our love, compassion and understanding. Teach us to be grateful for the everyday miracles of our lives- a smile from a stranger, a

## HUMBLE IN FRONT OF GOD

friend in time of need, a falling leaf in all the splendid colors of autumn, an accepting and loving community.

For who we are and for what we might be let us be thankful.

For what we have and for what we can share with each other, let us be grateful.

May our gratitude, love and joy keep us company, may we share it with those less fortunate than we.

Spirit of Life and Love, fill our hearths with joy and harmony. Help us seek peace for ourselves and help us pursue it in the world.

May our life nourish our beloved ones and those all around us in the sharing of the wonderful gifts of our being. May we proclaim through our words and deeds the wondrous work of the Spirit, for the sake of our individual and communal growth, for the sake of a world of peace and justice and love.

Amen.

*Mária Pap*

## ON NEW YEAR'S EVE

### **Our Gathered Treasures**

Our God, to you who watches over our homes, we pray at the threshold of the year and we send our honest praise, giving you thanks tonight.

Our lives did not abound in gold, silver or glittering riches, but this year has had days, hours, moments, which sparkled like gold and silver. We give thanks for these treasures, for our daily bread and feasts of holy days, for the affection of our parents, for the encouragement of our sisters and brothers, for the hope in our children.

Our pockets were not full - alas - they were mostly empty, but we owned other riches. We have managed to be good from time to time, to uncover the light of love from under the bushel, to shine for all around and were even able to give magnanimous service.

We did not have power, our fellow beings did not bow before us or fan us, but it meant much more to us to be able to look our fellow beings straight in the eye, to shake hands, to be in community.

God, you who see everything in the world and in the soul, you know that we have to acknowledge not just our goodness but our failures and faults. Forgive us and make us aware that with our failings and guilt we are hurting not only others, but ourselves, too.

Help us, so that what is darkness might remain in the night, so that at the dawn of the New Year, our world and soul might be filled with the light of your love.

Amen.

*Előd Szabó*



## II. SERMONS

### FOR PARTNER CONGREGATION CELEBRATION

#### The Attraction of Otherness

*"You say either and I say either,  
You say neither and I say neither  
Either, either, neither, neither,  
Let's call the whole thing off."*

Ira Gershwin

#### **Dear Friends,**

Do those lyrics sound familiar? Do they ring any bells?

You do not have to be a fan of old musicals with Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers in order to appreciate the truth expressed by the song. Life is about encounters and about an unending fascination with the otherness-otherness in people, in places, in events, in experiences.

What is different, what is strange, what is completely opposite and outside our experience is always fascinating. This fascination can have several layers and several outcomes. At one end of the scale you have annoyance and fright and perhaps even disgust, while at the other you have interest, a thirst for comprehension, and finally acceptance. The first fascination can end up in hate, the second one in love.

Today I will try to talk about the second one - about that quickening of pulse, about the racing of thoughts and emotions, about that desperate effort of our intellect to grab, to analyze, to make sense of this strange encounter with the different, with the other.

## II. SERMONS

The difference is so out of place, so unexplainable, so ridiculous that we succumb to the desire of exploring it and by the time we wake up - it is too late - we have been taken in head over heels. This is love. Most of the time it does not make any sense, but this is one of territories of our lives, where we do not want to be sensible. To love and be wise is good advice from those who never experienced the butterflies in their stomachs or that sensation of floating above the ground, or that exhilarating desire to embrace and love the whole humanity, which overcomes us so rarely otherwise.

What ultimately triggers love, we will never know for sure, but we do know from personal experience that the attraction of the otherness comes into it somewhere. Opposites attract - a title of a song, a fact of life. Opposites attract, but let me add, at least in the early stages, because later on the situation might change. And this is where the problems of our lives and relationships start. What in the beginning was a source of wonder and delight might turn out in the long run to be a source of annoyance and distress.

I love to dance but you have two left feet.

I am an early riser and it pains me to see you in bed until noon.

I like classical music, you like rock. You think my music affected and snobbish; your music gives me a headache.

You are an intelligent person, so why are you reading mystery stories instead of Austen or Joyce?

My relatives are all angels to various degrees; yours are all a bunch of unfeeling morons.

And so on and so forth. That attraction born out of our dissimilarities, which gave the zest and depth of our relationship, is turning sour. Those differences we praised, we wallowed in, start to be too much to bear, too much to cope with - we start to realize the width of the gap between us.

Should we call the whole thing off? It is not an easy question to answer - and the longer it takes to figure it out the wider the gap will become. Some will never be able to fill this gap but many do so and this is how we have happy marriages and long-lasting partnerships.

What is the secret? Well, nothing out of the ordinary, really, just the realization that love is not enough. It takes lots of patience and understanding and compromise, lots of victories and defeats to be able to see not just the dissimilarities but the commonalities too. To accept the differences graciously and to discover and strengthen the common strands in our life makes the difference between parting and staying, between giving up and trudging forth.

This is true for couples but it is true for the partnership between our congregations too. What attracted us to each other, when we started to get to know the other side a little bit better, was the otherness, the strangeness, the unknown. And let me assure you that we are really wallowing in dissimilarities. Even if I scheme and exaggerate a little, I could go on for hours about all the differences between our communities on the whole spectrum, ranging from theology to our everyday life.

Let me enumerate a few:

We belong to a minority ethnic group, Hungarians living in Romania, feeling always threatened in our heritage and culture, a group, whose loyalty for the state is always under suspicion and whose members feel many times second-rate citizens. For you, as American citizens this is hard to understand, as you have the safety and assurance of belonging to your country, which was never questioned.

We are simple people, with most of our congregations in villages and most of our parishioners farmers eking out painstakingly a living from the land, people who do not travel further than the nearby small town, whose dreams and aspirations never soar above the land they inhabit. In contrast you are over-educated, sophisticated people, with exquisite tastes, with many of you widely traveled and well-versed in the ways of the world.

We live in a country so small that is hard to find it on the map and our language is so weird that nobody really bothers to learn it. In contrast your country is a super-power of the world and your language is the "lingua franca" of today.

## II. SERMONS

We are born into our religious community, while you have chosen yours. We have no choice in the matter, which is why sometimes we are so careless with our heritage, taking it for granted, while you give all your best abilities to further the cause you have chosen.

We are Christian in our theology, while many of you have left behind traditional Christian communities to search for your spiritual freedom and for many of you every reminder is full of pain.

We put the community's needs before the individual ones, while for you the individual's rights and aspirations shape your community.

We are poor people with our congregations struggling to get along, while economically you are well-off.

We are traditional communities trying to survive in this globalized world, which is slowly running us over, while you are a liberal community taking in its stride any challenge.

So, if we need strangeness or even incompatibility to get attracted to each other, we cannot complain, we have the whole range. Our problem is that turning point in every relationship when these dissimilarities instead of being interesting or appealing turn towards obnoxious and incomprehensible - when we start wondering if perhaps the gap is too big to be filled with love and good intentions.

Can we find the common threads of our life when so many things separate and set us apart? Can we look beyond the unquestioned attraction of love to the honest assessment and acceptance of our differences and to what these might teach us about the other and about ourselves? We can but try if we do not want to call the whole thing off.

As I get older I find myself quoting Shakespeare more and more, a wonderful fellow Shakespeare, apt to have a quote for every occasion. In his 116th Sonnet, he says: "Let me not to the marriage of true minds admit impediments."

Of course, he is talking about love, and so far that is what we have done too. We talked about love and we were silent about the impediments. But admitted or not, talked about or not,

they are there and we need to face them. One impediment is the major imbalance in our relationship, which as far as I know was never acknowledged. This is not something new or unexpected, as in every relationship there is inherent imbalance -- one of the partners always gives more than it receives. It depends on both sides if this could be worked out without resentment and loss of self-esteem. In our partnership you are the ones, who in our perception are continually giving, while we are unable to return it. This is surely true in financial terms and although we are immensely grateful for your help, we struggle with the sentiment of indebtedness. I wonder, too how do you feel or what your reaction is, when you are asked for financial support for a congregation about whom you barely know and whose theology and outlook on life is so different from yours?

The inducement and references to our common heritage, to our roots might sound hollow for those who do not know and are not interested in the history of the denomination. Like Pallas Athena springing forth from the head of Zeus, for many of you the relationship starts with this community in this given time and place and a past history might not be that relevant. Yet, what we can offer would shed light not just on your denomination's history but on all those values for which you chose it. Because even if on the surface we are very different, even if we use God-language, even if we are village farmers far away from the world of Academia, the basic values of our lives are the same and have their roots in our faith.

When we talk of God and you of Spirit of life we try to express the same human desire, the same human aspiration to overcome our limitations, to understand and make sense of our life and struggle, to feel the connectedness with the world around us.

When we fight for our rights to keep our culture, our heritage and when you fight for the rights of gays and lesbians we are treading the same path in our struggle for the right of minority groups, for the freedom and dignity of every human being.

When we proclaim our faith in human reason, when we uphold the necessity and importance of a liberal education, the tolerance and acceptance of others, we do on a small scale what

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you are doing on a larger scale in your society working against injustice, intolerance, and division.

When we gather together as a community or when you gather together as a community we and you do it to affirm what we believe, to proclaim that we belong, to enjoy our togetherness and to strengthen our community in working for the vision of a better world.

It is true - all this we do on a different scale from you, using a different language, in a different context and with all the limitations our society, culture and history imposes on us. But for you to perceive this, you have to overcome the fascination of either rejection or love and move beyond the surface.

For this I would like to use the analogy of our home. I know that we are culturally conditioned to be nice to the guests, be they friends or acquaintances, but the place we take them in our house speaks volumes about our relationship with them. Depending on the level of intimacy, we take them to the parlor or the kitchen and serve them coffee in china or a mug. The parlor many times is suggesting the distance, the conventions of our society, while in the kitchen there is no need for pretense. They can see the unwashed dishes in the sink or look into the pot - we feel comfortable enough to be who we really are. They are not family, in a sense they are strangers, different, but belonging to us.

This does not mean that we will not have secrets from each other. For a healthy relationship individuals or communities have to have their seventh room, which will remain perhaps forever closed for us. We will still have our own ways of doing things but we will be willing to accept that there could be other alternatives.

Still, there are plenty of rooms in the house of our life worth sharing and exploring and I invite you to do that.

You have the open mind to admit the impediments, to accept the dissimilarities and work with us to find the common thread.

You have the means and possibilities to visit us, to get to know us better, to be part even if it is for a short period, of our life and struggles.

You have the awareness and sensibility to help us in restoring some balance in our partnership by accepting the gifts we can offer - our homes, our hearts, our gratitude, our community.

But for that we need to move beyond the attraction of otherness on both sides - because in time this is going to fade away and what are we going to be left with?

I hope that the answer might be - with each other. With two communities in different parts of the world, in different circumstances, with different challenges but holding up the same values and bound together in partnership, support and understanding.

Let ours be a partnership of true minds that admit the impediments but are willing to work to overcome it in love, acceptance and dedication for the benefit of both communities.

*Mária Pap*

## ON SOCIAL AWARENESS

### The Art of the Impossible

*"...if the trumpet does not sound a clear call,  
who will get ready for battle?"*

1Cor 14,8

I enjoy immensely Helen Mac Innes's books. I can read them over and over again, even if by now I know all the plots and the happy or sad endings. Most of her books are spy-stories, mainly from the cold war era. What fascinates me and endears her writing to me is not just the cleverness of the stories, the reality of her characters, but above all her stance about freedom, human dignity and justice.

Behind all her books you can sense her commitment and strong views about the role and responsibility of the West in trying to keep that delicate balance of power but upholding all the values of a liberal and free world; in showing an alternative for millions of people, who saw none of it.

Coming from a background where communism was not just an idea but an oppressing everyday truth, I find that her books describe closely a reality which changed our lives, our thinking and our behavior for generations to come. The reality of a police-state has been shattered but it takes a long time and perhaps a new generation to heal, to have the courage of hope and to claim the responsibility and accountability for our lives and deeds.

As in all works of fiction, most of the time there is a clear dividing line between good guys and bad guys, between truths/lies, between clashing ideas and values, between the open fights and the hidden war. Yet the message and characters are not schematic. The good cause manages to survive defeats and traitors and there is always hope, hope for those who fight and hope for those for whom the fight is going on.



Her books, while entertaining millions of readers, are a clear call against oppression and fear, against everything that threatens our fragile human world. Her books are a reminder that even if officially the Cold War is over, there is another battle raging on, sometimes bloody and messy, sometimes subtle and almost unrecognizable. It is a battle which does not have geographic boundaries, a battle where most of the time it is hard to dichotomize. The dividing line is so blurred that in facing the other/the enemy, you may find that you are facing yourself.

Policies and values are shifting. More and more people join the stream of migration either of their free will, or by constraint. Cultures clash and old prejudices melt away as new ones take their place.

This is not just a fight between different ideas and conceptions about human communities. It is not just a fight about values, but ultimately is about survival, about the world we call home.

We are all of us in it, willingly or not, and according to our values and position, to our background and upbringing, we fight for our world or our World. It is the same word, with a small difference (lower case or upper case), yet this small difference talks about two worlds apart. The first word is about the person, the surrounding, the community, the relationship that I can contain, that to which I can relate, for which I can struggle, which I can hate or love, which touches my everyday life in a palpable way. The second one is about the human community, about the interdependent web of all existence, something far beyond my eyes, my scope, something which I will be never able to hold, to understand, to love or to hate completely.

Bringing these two worlds together looks like the art of the impossible, yet as far as I understand, that is what many UU congregations are trying to achieve. We want to expand this small world of ours, where we feel mostly comfortable and secure, to mean the whole World and make the whole World a safe and peaceful home for humankind.

Is this possible or is it just a dream, which may devour the dreamer?

There is no easy answer to this question, nor is there one single answer. You definitely say yes, I definitely say no and both of us could be right, according to our circumstances.

Let me explain: I say this dream is not possible, because I already have a hard time in dealing with my small world. I am the weak, the poor, the sick, and the defenseless. My horizon is about today, about myself and my family, about nourishment and water, about clothes and a safe abode. My life and my concerns start and end with me and those around me. Do not think that I am selfish or unfeeling, but I have no emotions and thoughts to spare for others. I need them all for survival. I may not even know that across borders and continents there are millions of other men, women and children in my situation, fighting for the gift which belongs to all of us: life. I am not interested in politics, I know nothing about decisions and resolutions, and I have no knowledge, no choice and sometimes no hope. I am just a pawn in a big game, where I do not know the rules and I am threatened by each move.

From where I stand every new day counts as a victory and every night brings the fear of an unfulfilled tomorrow. This is my small world, I cannot, I do not, and I dare not look beyond it. What for? I know things will not change, it is impossible.

And yet, there are people who say “this *is* possible.”

The work of the United Nations, the work of individuals and groups in the UU congregations are all geared toward proving the answer is yes.

Have you ever considered why your answer is yes?

If you have, I am sure you are able to build up a wonderful argument based on different factors like human rights, education, the Unitarian Universalist principles, care and concern for other people, for our world, the heritage of freedom and tolerance and so on and so forth. These are all driving forces behind your answer but not the whole truth.

For me, and I may sound harsh, it all boils down to this: your answer is yes because you can afford it. Please don't

misunderstand me, this is not a judgment, it is a statement of facts.

It is not by your own fault, nor by your own virtue that you live in a world, where most of the time the concepts of freedom, justice, human dignity, peace or economic stability continue to have meaning.

It is neither by your own fault, nor by your own virtue that you are highly intelligent, well educated people and knowledgeable in the ways of the world. You can make choices, you have ideals and try to live according to them.

It is not by your own fault, nor by your own virtue that because of your circumstances, you are able to see beyond your small world, that you are able to think not in small letter case but in upper-case.

What I am talking about is privilege. The privilege to live in a free country, in a democracy, the privilege to belong to a church with like-minded people, the privilege to be educated, loved, helped, the privilege to see the bigger picture, the privilege to choose your causes and your fights.

But privilege comes with a cost: the sense of responsibility. It is a price which some are unwilling to pay, while others are taking up double loads to make up for the selfish. Responsibility can be taught, can be expected but cannot be enforced. You do not have to be poor or weak to burrow yourself in your small world. You do not have to be uneducated, unprivileged to shut yourself from the others, pursuing your own ends. You do not need any excuse to step aside and let others save the world. Why should you? It is not your duty!

But some of you still think it is. Some of you are still trying to act out the impossible- some, but not enough.

That is why you need to sound the call.

You need to sound a clear call in order to be able to fight this battle. You need to sound a clear call to wake up not just the UU's and not just the Americans, but all those like-minded people across the world, who are willing to join you, who are not afraid of the impossible.

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You need to remember that you are fighting for those who cannot fight for themselves, that your work is giving them voice, alternative, hope, life, future.

From where you stand this seems still possible.

I am waiting! I can do no more! Not yet! Perhaps when your World touches mine, I will be able to see beyond today, beyond my world. Perhaps I will be able to see hope and rejoice that you have proved me wrong.

Is our world one world? Can our hearts hear a different call?

*Mária Pap*

## ON PALM SUNDAY

### The Donkey-Riding Man

*“And a very great multitude spread their garments in the way; others cut down branches from the trees, and strawed them in the way.*

*And the multitudes that went before, and that followed, cried, saying, Hosanna to the son of David: Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest.*

*And when he was come into Jerusalem, all the city was moved, saying, Who is this?*

*And the multitude said, This is Jesus the prophet of Nazareth of Galilee.*

*And Jesus went into the temple of God, and cast out all them that sold and bought in the temple, and overthrew the tables of the moneychangers, and the seats of them that sold doves,*

*And said unto them, It is written, My house shall be called the house of prayer; but ye have made it a den of thieves.*

*And the blind and the lame came to him in the temple; and he healed them.”*

Matthew 21, 8-14

### **Celebrating congregation/Dear sisters and brothers!**

We like to characterize our holidays with crystal clear human feelings or deeds. Christmas is the feast of love, Easter is the will to live, Pentecost is growth and advancement, and Thanksgiving is the feast of gratitude. Our smaller festive occasions also have their emotional charge: Holy Thursday is the feast of courage, Good Friday and All Souls' Day are the days of suffering.

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Palm Sunday is a glorious holiday. It is the mighty feast of our true teacher and redeemer, the best child of our Providing God. It marks the humble yet dignified entry of Jesus and his disciples into the capital city, Jerusalem. It's the day of joy, of success, of no suffering or failure, only of victory. Rare are such days. They were rare in Jesus' life, too. The success stories of Jesus' life are: the temptation, the baptizing and the march into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday.

Even the legend of his birth story is full of pain and humiliation. Our human standards of life would urge us to ask: what good could Jesus expect from life, following such a birth? Using a contemporary term, he surely had no equal opportunities to start life with. His parents had not had enough money to rent a decent accommodation, then they had to flee to Egypt to escape Herod. For someone who has ever fled, like some of us had to, to the West before the revolution in 1989, we do not have to describe what dangers fleeing can represent. It is a humiliating and frightening act, although all its moments are full of unrealistic hope.

Returning to Jesus' life, we see that preaching in his native village in the beginning did not bring him success or recognition. Instead of the much expected recognition, he was simply chased away. Based on his experience, we ourselves declare, so often with a large degree of resignation, that *no prophet is accepted in his own country*. He knew that his mission was to preach the gospel on every day of his life, on weekdays and on the holidays. He knew that his enemies would make an attempt on his life; he accepted and sought martyrdom. He knew his enemies, the reasons why they were after him, the aims they followed. He knew that he was a grain of dust in the eyes of the powerful, and he was aware that they will try to kill him. He also knew his friends, and disciples, he knew his adopted brothers and sisters, and their good intentioned but intimidated human affection. He felt and understood that Good Friday was about to come, that suffering was about to come and death was about to follow.

Yet on Palm Sunday he is still victorious, triumphant. On Palm Sunday he is still the celebrated one, he is still expected to deliver the sentences of salvation, and his way is still seen as the best option.

He is called a prophet. He is given blessings and the crowd shout Hosanna at the top of their voices. *Help us*, the disciples and strangers shout, and they expect him to help them.

He knows that this is his day, the day when he is being listened to. Therefore he must say everything God, his Father, commissioned him to say. He chooses a donkey for his entrance, because it is a symbol of humbleness. By that he gives expression that his power is not rooted in the power of the earthly powerful. With the donkey he expresses that the order through which the Kingdom of God can be achieved here on the earth, does not follow the norms of society. This order can be measured through the spiritual treasures given to the people by God, with the aim of preserving and enriching these treasures.

Yet, in addition to the humbleness of his mission, he also expresses the strength of the mission when he cast the merchants out of the temple. He harshly punishes those who had gone astray. *My father's house is the house of prayer, but you have made it a den of thieves*, he shouts.

Dear sisters and brothers, I am quite confident that Jesus of Nazareth does not need my assistance because with or without my confession of faith he is still a prophet, a teacher and a savior. Still I feel that on Palm Sunday we have to state that unveiling reality is also part of true discipleship.

Our celebration of Palm Sunday will only become authentic if we dare to utter that in our desire to achieve shared welfare and happiness, our system of values gets confused sometimes, and from time to time we indeed need a man on a donkey to make us realize that. By this, we recognize that we are weak, but not bad.

Here is an everyday example: when talking with younger and older parents we often nostalgically remember the times

when there was a special afternoon church service for youth on Sundays. Those were the good times, we say. But if we investigate who sent the youth to church those days, the answer is unequivocal: the parents did. Children look for guidelines and directions from their parents. Let us recognize our weaknesses. Children are educated by their parents, and the community of children by the community of parents. Shouldn't we be the ones to act and contribute to the spiritual education of our children?

My speech today is not intended to be a reprimand, but a special, festive sermon. I only wanted to demonstrate that there had been meaningful moments in the sublime, triumphant, enthusiastic, palm branch entrance. A moment that explains us why Palm Sunday was necessary, which explains us the mission of Jesus, the gospel.

We are also in need of the donkey-riding man, coming from God, who wishes to create a new order, who casts a light upon our weaknesses and shows us the way to conversion and growth.

The great poet, Endre Ady tell us in his Palm Sunday poetry:

**The Donkey Riding Man, a poem by Endre Ady**

*How nice, even if not true, that he had come:  
With flowers, riding on a donkey, and crying.  
The Bible says,  
That he had no thoughts of Good Friday,  
He just rode, rode on, with deep thirst in his heart.  
Such thirsty hearted have been walking ever since  
Without palm branches  
to the speeding Calvary of Life  
And of what it can offer,  
on donkey backs  
so many Champions of Good.*



*How nice: the days of palms tomorrow  
and this new legend brightens up:  
There may come again  
a man on a donkey  
With love strong enough to fight for others.  
For we are in such a need for donkey-riding men.  
Jesus, Spring and Jerusalem:  
What an ancient old story this is,  
Amen, amen.*

Ady, this contradictory poet, who believes in God so unbelievably, because – as he states – he is in need of faith, formulates his opinion about Jesus with such sympathy. *Champion of Good, the man on a donkey-back, who walks to the Calvary of life with love strong enough to fight for others, with thirsty heart.* In noting how ancient the story is, he suggests that although Jesus had entered Jerusalem a long time ago, the effects of that event are still alive today. That triumphant entrance, the embracing of life, the living of the mission has been repeated many times ever since.

This poem and the biblical quote place a mirror in front of us. Let us look at the image in the mirror carefully. To what degree is Palm Sunday present in our lives? Are we walking on the path of success and of triumph, or are we languishing in a deep abyss? Is there anyone listening to us? Is there anyone to tell us: you are blessed, because you are sent by God? On the other hand: is there anyone around us with the spirit of Jesus? Do we turn for assistance to him? Can we follow him? Do his teachings resonate in our souls and in the way we live our lives?

Grown-up people are sometimes tired even of the events of their own lives, not to mention the stories of other people. Let us think of our childhood though, the time when we listened to the life stories of the grown-ups with rapt interest. The long roads the grown-ups talked about appeared in front of our eyes like triumphant entrances to Jerusalem.

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A great story-teller of my childhood was the old bell ringer. He had a waxed moustache and he obviously wore tight Szekler trousers and boots. He was also our butcher, who used to paint a soot moustache on our faces when he came to slaughter the pig. We had shivers when he brandished his huge knife and axe. His stories were frightening and funny at the same time. His favorite story was when he was appointed trumpeter in the army, and he did not know how to alert the troops in the Romanian army, so he played Hungarian tunes instead and got solitary confinement for it. The path the old bell ringer had followed had not been a long Palm Sunday marching in, yet on every Palm Sunday I remember the strength, the faith and the cheerfulness intertwined in his stories.

Let us try to watch carefully. Let us look for Jesus' spirit, for that triumphant Palm Sunday mission consciousness in our neighbors. May we have the eyes to observe that God continues to send people with the spirit of Jesus, who try to assist us in returning to the way of life, by which we are able to achieve the Kingdom of God here on earth.

Jesus kept curing while surrounded by admiration, but also when surrounded by anger and hate. As we learn from the biblical verses, the high priests became angry when the children loudly announced: Hosanna to the son of David. The high priests became angry because they were envious of Jesus. They envied him because of the power he radiated whenever he spoke, cured and prayed. They were obviously afraid of him, too, as we are also afraid of the people we think are different or more powerful than ourselves.

Jesus preached the gospel, cured physical and mental sicknesses, prayed, loved, felt compassion, induced good. He fulfilled his God-given mission. Most people recognized the prophet of God in him – then, and on every Palm Sunday.

Let us also have a true Palm Sunday today. Let us recognize the prophet of God, our teacher in Jesus. Let us taste together with him the beauty of successful, triumphant life. Let us try

to harmonize this splendor with the creation of the Kingdom of God here on earth.

Let us concentrate on values, on persistent faith, on brave love. Seek these and observe these in each other and in different communities. Let us be the Champions of Good. Let us observe the good things coming from God, take the part that enriches us and pass it on to our neighbors.

I know how rare a day Palm Sunday is in the life of a true believer. There are so many temptations, and such great spiritual strength and such unshakable faith are needed to comply with God's laws. But it is worthwhile. It is worthwhile to recognize the path God sends us to. It is worthwhile recognizing the people who walk God's path. Let us not feel sorrow for the flowers scattered on the road Jesus is approaching us. Let us not feel sorrow to lay out our clothing on the road on which a man, riding on a donkey shows us humbleness toward God.

Blessed be the one that cometh in the name of the Lord, who brings blessings and radiates the love of God. Blessed be the one that cometh in the name of the Lord, and teaches us to live according to God's laws. Blessed be the one that cometh in the name of the Lord, and lets us taste the victory of the human life strong in faith.

Amen.

*Kinga Réka Székely*

## ON GOOD FRIDAY

*“Then Peter said, Lo, we have left all, and followed thee.*

*And he said unto them, Verily I say unto you, There is no man that hath left house, or parents, or brethren, or wife, or children, for the kingdom of God’s sake, Who shall not receive manifold more in this present time, and in the world to come life everlasting.”*

Luke 18, 28-30

### **Remembering sisters and brothers!**

On every Good Friday I ask myself the question: would I be able to watch a crucifixion? I hardly believe so. I have to turn my head away even when I watch a movie where the film director presents a much too realistic picture about the crucifixion. If I were a relative of the person being crucified I would either faint, or I would scream, or jump in rage upon the executioners.

I keep telling myself and everyone that I believe that suffering goes together with human life. In a way it is a natural attribute of life, yet I never said that I myself could endure it.

If I want to speak profoundly honestly about Good Friday, I have to confess that I have always tried to banish from my mind the pain of crucifixion and the image of the suffering mother under the cross. Humming the music of the Passion, the story of Jesus’ suffering on Good Friday, I mused about the Good Fridays of bygone centuries, as if I were looking at a mosaic. The truth is that I can hardly integrate the happenings of Good Friday. My anxiety regarding suffering makes it nearly impossible to endure the torments of Jesus. I could probably never accept suffering for my own sake, yet I am aware (as all parents) that I would accept any suffering instead or for the sake of my children, even if I could not bear it. I do not see myself among those causing suffering, either. I cannot imagine myself as an executioner. And although I know that there are people, creatures of God, who torture

other people even in our days, I simply cannot conceive how they can be capable of such things. I cannot find myself in the screaming crowd, either, because I have a horror of mass hysteria, of people casting aside their humanity, of soulless beastly manifestations.

I enjoy solemn crowd scenes. For instance I attended in 2003 the performance of a rock opera about the first Hungarian king, St. Stephen, on the hills of Csíksomlyó, where I sang along with roughly 300 thousand people: "There is no other way than the way of God, no matter what it brings along, there is no mightier force; and I swear upon my father's grave that to him I shall be faithful, and I shall not avoid the battle for his ideals!" I like when we people have a wholesome effect upon each other, and by our relationship we manage to bring out the best, the godly from each other.

The biblical theme of my sermon on Good Friday is a story in which most of the disciples, the best among them, fail. They fail in their faith and vocation.

The weariness of preceding long days must have accumulated in them. They remembered the old days without responsibility when they had not yet been chosen as disciples, when they were simple husbands, brothers, children, civilians with a house and a garden. They had lived as they could and as they wanted to, without the burden of spreading the gospel. They did not have to visit strangers to talk to them about the power of the spirit, about true morality, and true compassion, and about real brotherly love. They had just lived, from one day to the next, without following a particular object in life. Yet this contemplation about the past was interrupted by raw reality. Where do they belong now? Have they got anything at all? They turn against Jesus and start to blame him.

In the biblical verses that I have read, Jesus promises them that they will receive many times more in this present time, and that they will receive everlasting life in the world to come. This is all the verse includes, followed by a part in which Jesus talks about his death. Still, the disciples do not understand his message.

I can imagine quite well how the disciples turn sulky, how they fail to understand him, how they formulate claims. Then, as if the presentiment of some greater wisdom flashed across their minds, they find their peace. They begin to understand what Jesus is talking about. They realize that he is counting backwards. They understand that he had already divided the future into two parts: an earthly one and another world to come. They understand that before his death he would like to see the Kingdom of God realized at least among his own disciples, so that he can also have hope for eternity.

This wise comprehension allows the disciples to spiritually relive their conversion. They relive the moment when they had realized that they were ready to leave everything behind. They had heard Jesus preach about the Kingdom of God and they hoped that a better, more righteous world would come. The initial attitude of the disciples, even if they later realize that their behavior had been unworthy, is similar to the hammer-strokes in the grievous operation of the crucifixion.

We know that the disciples had been dissatisfied with Jesus on several occasions before, asking for rewards. They finally left him alone, and denied him. Good Friday is a day of disgrace resulting from the frailty of the disciples. They dispersed when Jesus was captured. Except for John, whom Jesus recommends from the cross as a son to his mother, they could not overcome their fear.

I believe that the disciples only realized on Good Friday, on the occasion of Jesus' death that they must not follow Jesus with the hope of some reward, but follow him so they might find the Kingdom of God. The disciples only realized the truth when they discovered for themselves that even if Jesus was no longer with them in his physical appearance, still, he is there spiritually.

Just as time is necessary for fruits to ripen, thoughts and feelings and faith also need time to produce fruit. I suppose that following the events, the disciples brooded for a long time over what their Master wanted to tell them. The pain of their Master's death enlightened their minds: After all everyone

primarily lives for their own sake. The disciples realized that they did not leave their families for Jesus' sake, but because they were not happy with their own lives. So what they had done, they did for their own sake and not for Jesus. And if that was the case, they had no right to ask from him a reward.

Sisters and brothers, the motto of Good Friday could also be the quote from Hamlet, the work of William Shakespeare, the famous English playwright from the Middle Ages: "To be or not to be?" To live or to die?

Jesus teaches us that if we are not satisfied with our lives, then we should not put up with that. He teaches us not to be afraid to improve our lives, he teaches us to set out on our journey towards the Kingdom of God as long as we have the opportunity to do that.

Let us make a map of our lives and discover what is not good in it, and let us make an attempt to find the style of living that gives us spiritual peace and happiness.

How much more important every minute becomes, if we are aware of the shadow of the cross! How much more valuable we perceive our lives, our neighbors, our work, our purpose and dreams to be when we discover that God gives us the chance to change the bad things for our own sake! For all that, we must first know ourselves. We should not adjust the environment to our imagined self, but we should rather prepare a fair assessment, a real inventory: what am I able to achieve, and what not, what is valuable and what is trash.

A rich man was walking on the street. He was surrounded by beggars. He gave a little money to them and then he went to see his spiritual leader and boasted of how much good he had done to these miserable beggars. Yet, instead of praising him, the spiritual leader said: what you had done, you did not do for them, but for yourself. The rich man asked uncomprehendingly: What do you mean? What you gave to them did not make you poorer, and it did not make them become richer, either, the spiritual leader answered. You gave because you felt a mental pressure to give. You gave because you wanted to feel good afterwards. But put yourself

in the beggar's place. Don't you think he would prefer to be the giver rather than the taker? Don't you think that it is a lot easier to give than to receive? If you give, this means that you have. It was a nice thing that you helped them, even if only with a small amount of money, but you must know that you did so primarily for your own sake.

Jesus teaches us to do everything for ourselves. And even if sometimes it seems that we are doing something for others, trust me, we always do it for ourselves. Jesus teaches us that we cannot achieve too much by demanding and reproach: these are useless, and only give evidence of our narrow-mindedness.

The daughter in a family of good reputation had become pregnant before getting married, and the suitor did not wish to take fatherhood upon himself. There was a huge argument within the family, and the relatives wanted to persuade the girl to opt for abortion. Finally they agreed to send the girl abroad before the baby was due. When the moment of farewell came, the father told to his daughter: "Can you see how much sacrifice we make for you?" And the daughter answered softly, "You are not doing it for me but for yourselves. I am not ashamed for bearing a child, you are ashamed of me".

On Good Friday, when death is so near to us, it is worth asking the question: Who lives for who's good? It is worth reflecting on the fact that inner peace, as a major feature of existence in the Kingdom of God, is not born from reproach. At the same time, it is also important to remember that the Kingdom of God, this ideal human way of life, does not belong to the passive ones, but to those who act for it, who are able to make sacrifices for it, if necessary.

Sisters and brothers, finding the meaning of the end of your earthly existence is painful but practical. It helps you to identify the purpose of your life and to act for it. It assists you in getting your reward here on the earth. The reward of the struggle of life is nothing else but a peaceful life of happiness, which is pleasing to God.



Be therefore brave enough to change if you feel you need a change. Accept responsibility for your deeds. If you do good you deserve good, if you do wrong you can still hope for God's mercy, for God – as Jesus teaches us with the parable of the prodigal son – is merciful indeed. But do not hope that someone else will take your wrong deeds, decisions, or perhaps your sins upon himself. For all the right and wrong that you do belong to you and everything you think and do is thought and done for your own sake, too. Be self-respecting and assume your thoughts, deeds, faith and expressions. God, the eternal judge will judge you. In front of God you will have to render the account.

As I have said all this, I stand again in front of the Good Friday picture: executioners crucify Jesus on a cross, people with apathetic souls wonder about this dreadful action, the relatives lose their minds because of the pain, and the disciples are frightened and hiding. But if you, my sisters and brothers, if you could just whisper: "Stop it", and if I could see the determination in your eyes, then I could forget that I am afraid. I would stand up against the crucifiers. We could get Jesus off the cross before he dies. People often discover God, the Creator, in the eyes of the other human beings, because for Man, (for you and for me) the most precious value is life itself, its saving and nurturing. May we always be strong and brave enough, may we always nurture and save life.

Amen.

*Kinga Réka Székely*

## ON EASTER

### The Promise of Easter

*“Peter said unto him, Lord, why cannot I follow thee now? I will lay down my life for thy sake. Jesus answered him, Wilt thou lay down thy life for my sake? Verily, verily, I say unto thee, The cock shall not crow, till thou hast denied me thrice.”*

Jn 13,37-38

#### **Dear Friends,**

The biblical passage about Peter’s denial is one of the Bible’s best known parts about the last days of Jesus, next to the betrayal of Judas. In the gospel of John, between the forebodings of Judas’s betrayal and the forecast of Peter’s denial we find the testament of Jesus:

“A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.”

Jesus gives this commandment shortly after he warns them about the betrayal and he concludes it by telling the disciples that he has to leave.

This is the moment when Peter asks permission to accompany him and boasts about his love for the Master, saying that he would be willing to give his life for him. What an unshakable certainty, what a splendid promise. But does it have any reality?

From the gospels we are able to form an opinion about Peter’s character: he is a man of passion in words and deeds, a passion sometimes carried to extremes. He and his brother Andrew were the first disciples of Jesus and he has a close relationship with the Master. His love and concern for Jesus is well illustrated throughout: he tries to follow him on the

water; he rebukes him when Jesus talks about his imminent death, bears evidence of Jesus' priesthood and recoils with horror when the Master wishes to wash his feet.

He is close to Jesus and all these words and deeds lead up to this inevitable declaration of faith, love and support unto death.

It is a wonderful promise but then comes the sobering statement of Jesus that before the cock crows, he will betray him thrice.

Peter's elated promise reflects the promises of the ordinary men and women of all times- promises made with enthusiasm, with flippancy to each other, to our communities, to God.. These are promises born out of love, concern, duty- promises easily and freely given- which will not amount to anything in the long run, because the will is missing, because there is always some obstacle to it.

We promise our old parents that we will take care of them, but most of the time we live afar and the short home-comings and long -distance calls cannot fulfill this promise.

We promise our beloved one that we will stand by him/her a whole life, in sickness and health, for better or worse but at the first difficulty, we flee.

We promise our kids that their life will be a better one than ours- we give them everything money could buy, but no spiritual gifts as there is no time for that in all this rush. Then when things go wrong we are helpless in the realization that money is not everything that somehow we let them down.

We promise God and our community faithfulness and steadfastness, but we get disappointed, the pace of our life becomes too demanding and we turn away, absorbed by our own concerns.

How many promises do we make, most of them never to be fulfilled even though we have love and faith?

How many times we make these promises with the insouciance of Peter and when we make them we are thoroughly convinced that we will keep them.

Jesus knew that our humanity, our love, our faith and our life are under constant threat: threat from human desires,

failings, fears, death. Jesus knew Peter well- not just the faithful disciple but the doubting and insecure one, whom he had to rescue many a time; not just the loving and constant friend but the frail Peter possessed by anger or fear. Jesus saw in him what all human beings possess: courage and cowardice, faith and doubt, love and hate, light and shadow, life and death. He knew that this earthly life is an ongoing struggle between mighty opposing forces which are tearing us apart, forces which sometimes elevate us, sometimes push us into frightening depths, forces which conquer us or lead us to conquer them through sacrifice and pain.

Jesus already knows what Peter will discover later on- that the road to exaltation goes through that denial, that Peter, the "Rock", has to go through the dark valley of powerlessness, fear and defenselessness in order to become that rock on which the church will be built. Peter will need to grow up to his duty and he will do so in the shadow of that denial, in the shadow of the cross and death. His true love and devotion will become really evident not in the lifetime of Jesus, but after the death of the Master, fulfilled by his work as a disciple and by his own death on the cross in A.D. 64, according to church tradition.

But what about the promise of Easter? What about our promises?

The life and example of Peter shows us that there is a way out from our denials, division, treason- a way, which ultimately depends on our attitudes. Peter shows us that the pledge of our love and the evidence of it have to be fulfilled during our earthly life. We cannot give a life for a life, but we have the possibility to live and work not just for ourselves, but for others, too. Peter becomes a true disciple, when he realizes that Jesus does not demand that Peter die with him on the cross, but that he live and through his life, work and devotion keep alive his master's teachings.

This is the promise of Easter- the possibility and opportunity to live fully, even when problems, pains or losses are tearing at us; to live fully and give life to our love and faith,

to give life to the love and faith of those who are not with us anymore.

It is true, that many times we succumb to opportunism, we deceive, we play false to each other and to our Master, but all the afflictions, fears and doubts, when conquered, strengthen our soul. We resolve to start anew, to fulfill those promises we have made.

The promise of Easter is this: there is always hope for change, a path from denial to acknowledgement, from cowardice to heroism, from the fallible human being to a true follower of Jesus. From the discord in us and around us there is a way to true peace.

This is the promise of Easter, the many promises of our life and their fulfillment depends on us, on our willingness and work to make them become true.

If we have faith and love- the promise to our old parents will not be a burden, but a blessed service in the light of all the love, work and anxiety they have lavished upon us.

If we have faith and love- the promise to our beloved one will not be a yoke endured with ill grace, but the sharing of our days, work, concerns and love with a true witness of our life.

If we have faith and love to let our children find their own ways, if we do not hold them to fulfill our dreams and set right our failures- the promise of their life will come true one day.

If we have faith and love- the promise made to our religious community will not be a source of annoyance, seen as a demand on our abilities, time and money but a freely given commitment for a community, which nourishes and helps us, so we can help others.

If we have faith and love- we will see that this world is not just a world of terrors, of conflicts and pain, but a world which could become what God intended it to be: a world of beauty, peace and love made true by our service and care.

If.

## II. SERMONS

Behold..." and Peter remembered the word of Jesus, which said unto him, Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice. And he went out, and wept bitterly."

Peter wept for himself and wept for Jesus, as we have wept bitterly many times over our follies and losses. But the crow of the cock was not just the sound of defeat and darkness; it was the sound of a new morning, a new beginning.

The crow of the cock is a sign for us, too- a new dawn has come. After darkness there is light, after death life is blossoming, after the fall there is the possibility of recovery.

Let us weep for the past, for our unfulfilled promises but then dry our tears and start all over again. Let us learn anew to live and to make promises to ourselves and each other, to our communities and to God. Let us promise a bright new life, forgiveness, love, resurrection, commitment.

Let us promise to ourselves and each other to keep alive the teachings of Jesus, to keep alive the words and works of our predecessors not just in Easter but every day of our life.

Let us show to the world that we have faith and strength for a new life, for love and patience toward each other, as true followers of our Master.

Let our life be the confession and evidence of the resurrection and eternal life, of Easter's promise, according to Jesus' commandment:

"By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another."

May God help us in the fulfillment of our promises for a Happy Easter and a new life!

*Mária Pap*

## ON PENTECOST

### Accepting the Other

*They were with one heart and one soul in the church every day. They shared the bread in the homes, and they eat with joy and pure heart (soul).*

Apostles Deeds 2, 46

Pentecost is the holiday of community makers. It's a holiday when we should stand in the church with one heart and one soul. We should talk about common goals, common problems, and we should accept each other.

At Christmas time we focus on the family, Easter time we focus on the individual who seeks eternity, on Thanksgiving day we say thank you for the harvest which is the result of the work of the individual.

At Pentecost the horizon is wider. We talk about the community that one chooses. We have chosen to be here together in this church, and we decide on how we are going to celebrate this holiday.

The huge question today is: can we, are we able to celebrate this Pentecost with pure heart and with joy? Can we look at each other with acceptance? Can we love each other even though sometime we don't have high respect for each other?

Today we keep the mirror for ourselves, let us look into it.

There are some who were born in this community, and there are some who come to us, choosing us their spiritual home. We do know each other in some ways, and in many ways we are foreigners to each other.

However we all proclaim the same big truth, and that is, that we are in these communities because we like to be among like minded people. Our goal is to accept the other, trying to respect the other, to praise the divine in the human, and to forgive the weaknesses.

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There is a discrepancy honoring this holiday.

We acknowledge that despite our best wishes and good intentions we are not with one soul and with one heart every day.

We see each other in the uncomfortable situations of our personal lives.

We saw aggression, we heard swearing, cursings. We have experienced bad intentions and envy.

How can we celebrate community with pure heart and with joy when we know everybody's shadowy side? The answer is coming to us slowly, as the holy Spirit, the power of God comes to us, opening the door of our hearts and reason.

Every coin has two sides. Next to the undignified side of our humanity there is compassion, empathy, sense of responsibility and acceptance.

Today we focus on this dignified side of our human lives.

As we look back to the origins of our community we see the pioneers with brave hearts who founded our communities. We find many people, who, touched by the power of God were able to honor their call to build the kingdom of God on this Earth. These people looked beyond their personal interests, and they have worked for this community to come to life and celebrate life.

People have donated their work, their goods, and their spiritual values in order to make this community become a resource for everybody who needs compassion, understanding, nurturing and support.

We, as children of God, work for the common good even though we are not perfect and we make mistakes.

We believe that God is good, and a good God cannot create bad people. We believe in the original good, not in the original evil. We believe that this world is meant to be a good place for all who can walk humble in front of God and who feel responsible for his-her own speech and deeds.

Today we celebrate the willingness and the ability of living together as one community. We tolerate diversity, we



accept the differences each of us holds because we know that deep in our hearts we are alike, aiming one goal. That one goal is searching happiness.

We are like a great bouquet of flowers. If we are spread in a huge meadow we cannot be seen, we cannot be heard, but if we get together we form an important asset. If you have one lily of the valley in your hand you can hardly smell its fragrance, but if you have a bouquet of them you'll be overwhelmed with the fragrance.

At Pentecost we say it was the Holy Spirit, it was the Soul, that helped the apostles speak out the gospel and reach for the first Christians. Let's ask ourselves: Did we experience the power of the holy spirit? Could we experience that? Can we become one soul and heart as the apostles did? Can we overcome our-many times poisonous- spirit of competition and our random egoistic approaches?

There were two young men in a small village who went to school together. As they were growing old they have realized that they have very different characters. One of them was modest and meek as John, the youngest disciple of Jesus. The other was competitive and ambitious as the sons of Zebedeus, also disciples of Jesus. The teacher of the village tried to make them understand that there is plenty of space for both of them, and they shouldn't be enemies. Unfortunately most of the time these young men were fighting each other, and rarely were they in peace. One day the teacher has died. According to the village customs the young men meant to carry the coffin and place it in the grave. The two young men were carrying the coffin and they were crying hard. After the ceremony they were walking back to the village from the cemetery and in an instant both of them has asked the other at the very same time: Do we have to die in order to make peace with each other, or should we do that here on Earth? No, we should show more respect to each other before we get in the coffin, they have agreed.

Dear friends, it is a heavy task to live a dignified human life, it is hard to show respect toward the other human being.

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It is hard to be a follower of Jesus, because it is much harder to follow his teachings than to worship him as God.

Let us not wait for too long to build peace in our community. The disciples needed 50 days to realize that they have a mission. They were so afraid on Good Friday, at the time of crucifixion, and they became so transcendental during Easter looking at the empty tomb that they thought their mission was completed. That was not true. They needed the holy spirit and 50 days to realize that their missions just have started, and it takes a lifetime to live out and spread the gospel. The two young men had to hold the coffin of their beloved teacher in order to realize that accepting each other is more important than their selfish every day fights.

We call ourselves the followers of Jesus, we emphasize acceptance and tolerance in our faith and in our worship. We believe in the goodness of humans, still we know that sometimes it is easier to forget about God, to forget about the real goal of religion, which is loving life as it is and loving each other.

Let us look in each other's eyes and realize that the Good God created us to be good, and our call is to live our lives with pure heart. May we share the bread and the wine together to honor our very different lives, to honor Jesus, the teacher, and to honor our ancestors.

Amen.

*Kinga Réka Székely*

## ON THANKSGIVING

### Gratitude

*We always thank God for all of you, mentioning you in our prayers. We continually remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith, your labor prompted by love and your endurance inspired by hope...*

1 Thess 1,2-3

For most people one of the most awkward and sometimes embarrassing feelings is gratitude. There are few people who can accept gifts gracefully. I am not talking about morons, who think they deserve everything they get and even more, but those of us, who wonder and ponder and question the gift and what lies behind it. I am talking about people, like myself, who do not know what to do with themselves when they get a gift and for whom the words or gestures of gratitude seem and sound inadequate.

I always wondered why?

One of the possible answers is the feeling of indebtedness – which becomes stronger with the realization that you either do not deserve that gift or you are in no position to reciprocate it. This may lead to a loss of self-esteem that goes on to become resentment. One of my favorite characters, Harriet Vane, Dorothy Sayers' sleuth, expresses this anger perfectly, whenever reminded that Lord Peter has saved her life: "I am so grateful that sometimes, I could bite."

As funny as it may seem, this sentence could apply to all of us in certain periods or situations in our lives. I am thinking about those of us, most of us, who do not take anything for granted, who strive for everything in their lives and who have a hard time to accept that sometimes you need a helping hand, a shoulder to cry on, another human being to love and be loved.

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Why is so hard to be grateful? Why is it, that sometimes instead of joy and gratefulness, we feel inadequate and shy?

Perhaps, because gratitude is about more than just us. It blows away our self sufficiency and self reliance and teaches us about our connectedness to one another and to God.

Gratitude is about accepting the gifts of life and love and pain and struggle-gratitude teaches us about our own limitations but pushes us to conquer uncharted territories.

For the self-made man/woman of this century here is where the stumbling block lies – to realize that I am more than my achievements, that I owe my life, my happiness, my present and the possibility of my future and that of my beloved ones to others and ultimately to the higher reality we call God.

Can you accept this or at least consider it?

If you cannot, it's not the end of the world-especially not your own-but you will close yourself in your magic circle and your spiritual life might wither away.

For those who will consider it and perhaps even accept it-this is not a passport to eternal happiness but it is the possibility of a road shared with others in all circumstances, it is the possibility of forging the community we strive for.

Today we are gathered together to celebrate Thanksgiving but our gratitude is not just about the harvest, about our daily bread but about the manifold blessings of our life. It is a time of reckoning and acknowledgement, a time of gratitude and hope. It is a time to asses our life, our work, our relationships in the light of God's love and providence. What have we done with the gifts of our life, the gifts of body, mind and soul? What are we bringing before our God and to this circle, our community?

Do we bring a grateful heart or frustrations, discontent? Do we acknowledge what we possess or do we see just what is missing? Do we feel the connectedness with those around us or we feel awkward, estranged?

What we bring into this community is ourselves, our feelings of expectancy, of joys or sorrows, our gratitude or discontent. We stand here with ease or unease, with a cheerful

soul or with heaviness of heart or mind, reluctantly or with abandon but with a willingness to understand and make sense of the place and importance of thanksgiving in our life. If we are able to make sense of it, then we are acknowledging a burden, though a holy one.

This holy burden is the realization that we belong together and we belong to God and in these relationships we strive to give and receive with gratitude. This gratitude has its roots in the perfect love of God toward us and in the understanding of the challenging imperfection of human love towards Him/Her and towards each other. This gratitude steams from the realization that our life unfolds in connections as is nurtured by those around us.

Thanksgiving is the time when we are challenged to look with new insight into our life and the world around us and rediscover what we have considered ordinary and taken for granted.

What can we be grateful for?

First and foremost we have to be grateful for our life. In the whole creation we are unique- our life, our work, our love is the expression of who we are and a continuous possibility for who we could be. The gifts of our life, the work of our hands and the presence of our beloved ones help us realize with gratitude the blessings we share.

We need to be grateful for this community, too. We know we are not perfect-neither was the first community of Jesus' followers, his disciples. There were misunderstandings, little jealousies, even betrayals-yet out of that community of different people a movement emerged, which changed and shaped the world-for better or for worse. We know that we are different, that different circumstances, ideas and hopes drive us but we share the same longing for happiness and contentment. .

We need to be grateful for this community of ours, which shelters us from the world's and our own follies, which gives us warmth, openness and meaning and a sense of belonging. Feel gratitude for those with whom you share this sacred space

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and time – your life - which cannot find its true fulfillment without the others.

As the apostle confesses, we pray and give thanks-for you, who are here with us at the moment and for all those who belong to this community. We are a community, whose faith, love and labor is continually blessed by our Father and we acknowledge this with a “grateful heart” and thankful happiness.

Finally, we need to be grateful for being the children of our heavenly Father-and this is the gratitude which really weighs on us, as our love and work is a pallid reflection of all that He continually gives to

us. But this is a weight which cannot shatter or diminish us, as we know that it can be eased through love and through our everyday service toward each other.

Thanksgiving is about our life as human beings and children of God, as disciples of Jesus and members of a community united in gratitude and a wish to serve. According to Jesus, the only mark of discipleship is the love towards each other. Let us pray in the gratefulness of our existence, in the acknowledgement of our gifts, in the assuredness of our Father’s love and in our true wish to serve.

Let us give thanks and pray that this community might continue to work in faith, to labor prompted by love and to grow in hope and happiness.

Amen

*Mária Pap*

## COMMEMORATING FRANCIS DÁVID - ON NOVEMBER 15

### Francis Dávid the Good Steward

*"As every man hath received the gift, even so minister  
the same one to another, as good stewards  
of the manifold grace of God."*

1Pet 4,10

#### **Celebrating Congregation!**

This year none of us went to the pilgrimage in Déva. It seems that the time was not suitable for anybody, nobody was in the mood, or had the opportunity to go.

I am disappointed because I would have liked to be there, among those several hundred people starting their journey early in the morning, then climbing the mountain together, praying, singing and lighting their candles, and placing flowers on the monument. I would have liked to be there in the house of the congregation and in the church and muse again on how difficult yet glorious God's paths can be. A century has passed since our community has been dreaming to build a church in Déva, which could have been erected in the 1910s if the war had not come, if there had not been so much suffering in the past century.

Remember, soar, love! – the stimulating invitation of the youth minister sounded. And as I enter into the spirit of the Déva pilgrimage, all of a sudden my disappointment is gone. I only feel grateful: how good that all this could happen! Hundreds of young people go on a pilgrimage to Déva, we have got youth ministers and we have got schools, and here, today, in this congregation we have got children to make this anniversary sublime! How good that we exist! After five hundred years, we bow our heads in front of the great apostle, Francis Dávid, and we summarize: it was not in vain.

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Our church founder, prophet and apostle! Your fights, struggles, religious disputes, perseverance and finally your death – were not in vain. You have taken good care of the spiritual gift given to you, Francis Dávid, by God. You have been a good steward of faith, and of free conscience!

What a strange term steward is! Perhaps it is best known from the biblical story of the good steward. As Jesus teaches us: God gave spiritual gifts, talents to all of us. The creative God endowed us with talents, which may be different, yet their root is the same. The root of our spiritual gifts is the good that pleases God. God therefore gave us good talents, yet we have also got our share of work in creation. God wants us to be good stewards of these talents – manage them, take good care of them, develop them.

In the parable told by Jesus, a master delivered his goods (his talents) to three of his servants. One of them – the one receiving the least – decides not to use them. He does not choose “work”. He chooses passiveness and helplessness; he thinks that he has no time, strength or disposition to act. And he puts his talent in a hole in the earth, and when the time of rendering the accounts comes, he gives back only what he had received, nothing more. God, the master, becomes indignant and while he praises and rewards the first two servants: “well done, good and true servant: you have been true in a small thing, I will give you control over great things”, he “punishes” the lazy servant by taking away his talent.

Jesus summarizes the moral of the parable in the following way: “For to everyone who has will be given, but from him who has not, even what he has will be taken away.”

Harsh words! They set a mirror in front of us. What kind of stewards are we? What can we see in the mirror? How do we value the spiritual gifts we had received from God? Sisters and brothers, I am convinced that the mirror shows our beautiful ego at this festive time. It reflects the ego that had accepted a long series of gifts from God, the ego that firmly trusts and believes in God, that loves its neighbor and accepts differing opinions.



Yet our non-festive ego is often discontented. We are desirous of other talents, rather than making use of, caring for, or nurturing the ones that we have. We keep peeping over to our neighbors' lives and think: "The neighbor's children are pretty and clever, his father is rich and left him a big fortune" and so on... "I wish I had all the things he has got!" We often neglect what we are given – "just like that", at no cost –; that is not what we would like to make use of. It seems that the road to envy is shorter and less exhausting than the one leading to a self-respecting and collected life. My self-respecting and collected outlook upon life is rooted in solid faith. In the faith that God has created us, and blessed us all. In the faith that God will help us even if we suffer, and even if at times it may seem that we are left alone.

Our Jesus-spirited church founder, Francis Dávid firmly trusted God. He was self-confident and although he often struggled within himself, he succeeded to carry out his struggles with self-control. He was satisfied with the talents he had received from God, and he had the determination to make good use of them. He did not dig the gift into the ground. He did not say, "I don't care that some clergymen mislead the people and put up the remission of sins for sale!" He did not say that "I am interested in successful preferment or advance on the social ladder, so that I can get a better paying office". This was not his attitude towards life or towards providing God! He understood that so much immorality and unbelief couldn't stand in front of God; that changes were needed; that evil was to be defeated, "must be ousted" from the communities and, to the best extent possible, from people, too.

Francis Dávid did not have a fortune or armed power with which he could have easily defeated his adversaries. He did not triumph over his enemies with the help of ordinary weapons. A greater power, the Everlasting God gave him the talents to show the way to his friends and his adversaries. Francis Dávid rendered the talents received from God into the service of his fellow-beings. Living faith gave him the courage to declare the

truth he had found. In an age when the air of Europe was full of the ashes of people burnt at stakes, even a simple debate or criticism needed outstanding determination and death defying courage. But his unshakable faith was also not only paired by determination, but also by a strong intellect, which prevented him from becoming a fanatic. He did not “use” faith and religion to shackle, terrify or exploit others, but rather to wake up people’s conscience, to polish their judgment and nurture compassion. By his talents received from God he could convince his audience, the people. He could show them the way about which the psalmist sings that: “It is your path, my God...”

Those stepping inside the Unitarian church of downtown Kolozsvár through its left side-door, see a large round stone. According to the legend, Francis Dávid stood on that stone and preached to the people of Kolozsvár with such devotion and deep spirit, that the people felt: here is a man talking to our hearts, someone preaching to us but also for us! They simply accepted what he had said and promised to follow him as their spiritual leader. The legend may obviously not be entirely trustworthy. Perhaps it is too beautiful, or much too simple. But even if we do not believe all the episodes, still we feel the magic of sincere preaching, the convincing power of spiritual vibrations and sensible arguments. Francis Dávid was able to convince his contemporaries, the people of his town. Without threats and without promises. Only with spiritual gifts: with faith, reason, love and conscience. People could feel the strength of faith emanating from his soul, could see the reason in his eyes, hear the love in his voice and feel the conscience echoed by their everyday lives.

By his gifts received from God he could address the people and they impressed in their hearts that faith was a gift from God, and therefore one must accept that different people believe differently in the same God.

He was an authentic man, and authentic preacher and minister, and authentic spiritual leader. His authenticity, sincerity and the divine roots of his talents truly showed when

he arrived at crossroads in his life. When he had not yet been a court preacher and when he was no longer a court preacher.

The same plain speech, the same conscientiousness, the same commitment to the divine path characterized him when he could not yet shine. And he maintained the same features when his shining was forced into darkness, when he was no longer celebrated and powerful, only small and despised.

When do we realize that the authenticity, faith and trustworthiness preached every day are true indeed? – When we have to suffer for their sake. When we stick to our values and the truth, even at times of intimidation and humiliation.

Francis Dávid hung on to his spiritual talents. He was a good steward because he still had them when many considered him poor and unneeded. He must have suffered a lot. Finally he became a martyr. Yet his spirit did not die. His spirit continues to live forever. We are the proof for that. This is why we go in a pilgrimage to Déva, this is why our children learn poems, songs and legends about him. We compare our simple human lives with his great spirit, and we make an attempt to reach up to him. Standing up for freedom, the freedom of conscience, and an authentic way of living that is liked by God. We try to preserve, enrich and pass on the values received.

My sisters and brothers let us be good stewards of our talents! Let everyone, according to their abilities, make an attempt to grow up to the spiritual heritage of Francis Dávid! I encourage you with the message of one of our hymns praising Francis Dávid: “Let everything offered by the past shine in us, so that we can discover ourselves at the light of the past – at the light of the past.”

Let us discover ourselves! Let us take notice again of our spiritual treasures! Let us serve each other with these spiritual gifts, as good stewards. Let us allow the past to shine, shine upon our present, its values showing us the path toward the future – for the glory of God, and for the peace of our soul!

Amen.

*Kinga Réka Székely*

## AT CHRISTMAS

### Ease Your Fears, Love Harder

*And there were in the same country shepherds abiding  
in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night.*

*And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them,  
and the glory of the Lord shone round about them:  
and they were sore afraid. And the angel said unto  
them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of  
great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is  
born this day in the city of David a Saviour,  
which is Christ the Lord.*

Luke 2, 8-11

#### **Dear brothers and sisters!**

We live our lives with the polarity of love and fear. These two major forces have an eternal fight in our soul. There are times when fear puts us down, numbs us. There are times when love lifts us up and makes us feel grand. Thank God, fear can be controlled by love, and ultimately we can all agree that love is stronger than fear. We would face the biggest monster ever in order to save someone we truly love, to save our partner, our children, our parents and our true friend.

Of course it's always easier when we receive help. The Christmas story says that the shepherds were helped by angels, sent by God. To me this story is a nice metaphor saying that humans can rely on God. It's a lovely story about faith and courage. The Christmas story tells us that God sent Jesus to people to be their saviour, and to help them-us- control the fear.

Salvation isn't an easy story. It requires faith, or at least it requires stopping the denial of transcendental. We say Jesus is our Saviour. He saves us through his teachings and life model not through crucifixion. We can read about his teachings in the gospels, in the Bible, but reading the Bible isn't an easy story

either. As we know the Bible of today is the result of century long disputes and many synodal agreements. The stories of those funding assemblies and synods aren't easy stories either, because many of them ended with the death of those believers who formed a minority. The majority always declared itself as the legitimate holder of the truth.

We belong to the protestant branch of Christianity; the Bible we use is different than the Bible used by the Roman Catholics and the Greek Orthodox. This whole story with the formation and reformation of the Bible might seem a little bit confusing, but the hardest item has yet to come: the story of Jesus, the understanding of his life, his deeds and his teachings. He is the person whose birthday we celebrate today. He has managed to set many generations against each other. We, all, call him the Saviour, but our presumptions are very different. There are some who worship him as a pure divine person. There are some who worship him as a perfect human and as a perfect divine person; there are some who believe that through his crucifixion he saved the humankind from its sins. Different denominations believe different ideas.

We believe that Jesus has been created by God, as all of us were, because we are all children of God, made of dirt and soul. He is our Saviour because his life model and his teachings are for us the way, the truth and life. Saying this, spreading this belief doesn't make us Christians, nor followers of Jesus. We have to show our believes through our deeds, we have to live out our religion in our ordinary life. Salvation, with other words the ultimate peace of our soul, the transcendental feeling of belonging to eternity- yet still being interconnected with the whole universe, hopefully will unfold when living a spiritual life. We believe that Jesus interprets God's message to us by saying that the essence of religion is love, and that the most important human act is loving.

Loving isn't easy either. Our yet to unfold wishes, our expectations, our prejudgments turn this act in a complicated and bizarre happening even with those we say we love, let alone those we scorn. I myself can confess that I rarely reach

the top moral requirement of Jesus that requests to love thy enemy. Sometimes there are waves of forgiveness that reach my soul and I can imagine for a few seconds that I'm standing face to face with my enemies and I offer them my understanding and my love. These seconds are very transient. However, at least, I manage to be less and less prejudiced, and I'm working on building trust so I can approach the aliens, the unknown human beings with a sense of openness.

Let's get back to the Christmas story. The shepherds saw a strange light and fear penetrated into their soul. I can hear with my ears their frustrated monologues. Don't we have enough trouble, oh God, in our lives? Isn't it hard enough to watch the livestock, to be outside day and night and face the extremities of the weather? Isn't it enough trouble to fight the wild animals who attack our flock regularly, isn't it enough trouble to chase away the robbers, to pay the taxes and support our families? Our whole life is so unsettled and heavy why do we have to bother with a messenger of God? We don't need another challenge. But the messenger said to them: Don't be afraid! God doesn't want you to be afraid. Go and find the child who is going to become your Saviour. So the shepherds went away and found Jesus, the baby, with his parents, Maria and Joseph.

Dear sisters and brothers! There are some challenges in our lives that make us become stronger. We like those challenges. Yet, some of them block us, and they generate fear and frustration. Sometimes we are open to meet the Saviour, a Saviour. Other times we think this salvation issue is ridiculous. One has to experience being saved, or being the Saviour in order to become open and accept this reality.

In our family we watch action movies on some weekends. In general the story is very predictable, there is one positive figure and one or more negative figures. The positive figure always dominates the end of the story and lets the movie watchers find relief through a happy ending.

One evening as I entered the house my husband told me: we can stop watching action movies because there is plenty of

action in our house. What happened?-I asked. He started out: an hour ago a fifteen year old girl rushed into our house asking for shelter. She was crying, she was shaking, she was so afraid. She was picked up by three men in the city two hours away from our village. In other words she was kidnapped. The men asked her to show them a nice hotel saying they are new to the town. She was in a hurry because she had to give a piano performance, and she got in the car thinking that the hotel is in the same direction as the school where she had to go. Soon she has realized that she was trapped. She could not get out of the car, plus she has been threatened by the three men. After two hours of driving they reached our village and the men wanted to buy alcohol, so they stopped by the pub. The girl said she had to go to the restroom, so she was pushed in the restroom by the two men who entered the pub. The third one was sitting in the car. When the girl came out from the restroom she told the two men that she is going to get in the car, but as she stepped out from the pub she started to run away. She saw our house where the gate was wide open, the lights were on, and the door was open. In a few hours we reached her parents and the officials took her home. Everything seemed to be so unreal, so out of the movies, yet when we looked at the shaking girl we had to realize that we were part of a real story. Our home became a shelter for somebody in need, and we felt blessed that we could live out our faith through our deeds.

There are many people who have bad intentions, who think that other human beings are only objects. The three men turned out to be illegal merchants who used to visit our region with the purpose of buying and selling, and sometimes stealing, livestock. Apparently they thought that a girl can be an object of their business.

The girl said we saved Christmas for her. If she wouldn't found shelter that evening she would have lost her faith in people, in religion, in moral values, and in herself. If she wouldn't found shelter that evening fear would have become the core of her life. Controlled by fear she wouldn't be capable of love.

## II. SERMONS

This girl became the symbol of our Christmas. She had the courage to run away. She had the courage of trusting even though her trust was put to trial. She met this awful challenge and still she was able to control her fear and look for help.

At Christmas we say we are ready again to follow Jesus's teachings, and we are ready to focus on our own salvation. We yearn for the peace of our soul. We wish to experience the hug of God that gives us the sense of being nurtured and being embraced by love.

Let us become true followers of Jesus. Don't worship him, but imitate his deeds, learn his teachings. Let us be the good shepherds, let our homes become shelters for each other. Let us join our forces in the face of many known and unknown sources of fears. Let us believe, let us prove, and let us witness the always glorious strength of love.

Amen.

*Kinga Réka Székely*



### III. COMMUNION HOMILIES

#### The Holy Rogue

*And one of the malefactors which were hanged railed on him, saying, If thou be Christ, save thyself and us. But the other answering rebuked him, saying, Dost not thou fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation? And we indeed justly; for we receive the due reward of our deeds: but this man hath done nothing amiss. And he said unto Jesus, Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom. And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, To day shalt thou be with me in paradise.*

Luke 23,39-43

#### Dear Friends,

I perceive with sadness that consumed by the preparations for Easter, we are bound to neglect and forget Good Friday. Looking back I see that on Good Friday we have time for almost everything except remembrance. Though the bells summon us, though we know it is a holy day, consciously or unconsciously we ignore it and find other things to do.

I wonder why this is so.

One reason may be that Good Friday is a solemn and sad day, when we remember not just the death of Jesus but inevitably the losses we have suffered. Perhaps we do not want to remember the pain, the helplessness, the void, so we busy ourselves with the preparation for Easter and turn away from its antecedents.

Yes, it is far easier and humanly understandable to shy away from the pain of remembrance and get right on to the

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triumphant celebration of Easter. But is this possible? Can we have Easter without Good Friday?

I personally think it cannot be done. Easter is rooted in Good Friday, as the message of light shines brightly against the blackness, as life becomes full and precious in the shadow of death.

This is why this Easter I am taking you back to Good Friday, to those final moments when beginning and end converge, when on the threshold of life and death we see three human beings hanging on the cross: Jesus and two malefactors, two rogues. The Christian tradition later on gave them names, so on the left we have Gestas, on the right we have Dismas.

According to the gospel both of them are thieves and murderers, malefactors, who deserve to die. They hang on their crosses at Jesus' side. They don't know much about him. They have made together the journey to Calvary, have gathered that he is an itinerant prophet and for some unknown reason his cross bears the inscription: The king of the Jews.

There are the three crosses on the Place of the Skull, with three bodies hanging from them: three human beings outwardly alike in the grip of pain, flies, despair and mortification.

Three crosses, simple, plain pieces of wood but one with the mock engraving: "KING".

King? What a jest!

Gestas would laugh at it, but here and right now this is deadly serious. Torn between his pain and the specter of approaching death, Gestas yells his affliction and despair. His bitter cries are not directed against the Roman soldiers, against his executioners, but against Jesus and his mighty title.

King? If he is a king, where is his power? Why does he not save himself and his fellow sufferers?

Gestas foams at the mouth, berating and slandering, because this inscription flashes for a moment in his mind's

eye, that which he needs most: hope. Hope that there might be a power which could unbind him, a power which could override the human justice, a power which could save him from the clutches of death.

But all this is just delusion and Gestas knows it quite well. That's why he swears, blames and fulminates. He is aware that his life is drawing to a close, and there is no earthly or heavenly power which could save him.

On the other side of Jesus we find Dismas; Dismas, whose agony is as painful as his fellow sufferer's, whose soul is equally full of despair, rage and hopelessness, but who, at the same time, displays two sentiments, which are missing in Gestas: repentance and compassion.

Repentance- Dismas knows that his sentence is just. We do not know of what crimes was he accused but in these last moments of his life, Dismas acknowledges his guilt and comprehends the wasteful squandering of his life. He repents and tries to face death with all the courage he could muster.

He is a repentant sinner, even if this repentance takes place in the imminence of death, yet, he is a bit more than that. He is more, because at this distressing time of remorse and reckoning with his own life and deeds, he has the power to look beyond himself, to notice Jesus. This man, who had been doing his dastardly deeds with no qualms, turns with compassion toward Jesus and defends him.

Out of this sense of compassion, his soul is filled with love and hope. He feels love for Jesus, whom everyone left behind, whose innocence and vulnerability cannot save him from this crude fate. Compassion invades his soul for his fellow sufferer, though he never met him before. Dismas did not see him stoop to the level of outlaws of his sort, to the hopeless sinners and outcasts. He did not know, he could not know that Jesus had preached that divine love and forgiveness for which his soul has been searching thirstily. He could not know but intuitively something and some new hope awakens in him; a hope and faith yet vague and confusing- a hope about another life and place where there are no sufferings and sins

are forgiven; another place, where this gentle prophet could be king and might welcome him. This nebulous hope makes him turn to Jesus with a request.

During his lifetime many people turned to Jesus with different requests: some wanted healing, some teaching, some reassurance, some forgiveness, some rewards or the hope of eternal life. There was hardly any encounter of Jesus without some request. In this long line of supplicants, Dismas is the last one and his request is perhaps the most touching and humble of them all:

“...remember me...”

He does not ask Jesus to save him from his suffering, punishment and the forthcoming death, he just asks to be remembered in his kingdom. He knows that at present this kingdom is not of this earth, that it lies beyond his death- but he hopes that if Jesus remembers him, this will be the possibility of a new life. He hopes for a life, where his sins would be forgiven, when instead of hatred, anger and violence, he will experience love and peace.

On the cross, in the last conscious moments of his agony, with the certitude of his loving God, Jesus answers:

„Verily I say unto thee, Today shalt thou be with me in paradise.”

In this promise there is forgiveness, in this promise there is the plenitude of love, in this promise there is Easter and the hope of eternal life.

To have Jesus as a constant companion, to live according to his teachings, to rise above our failures and conquer our shortcomings, to believe, to hope, to love- this is the resurrection and eternal life. This could and should be our life.

Pilinszky János, a Hungarian poet, writes in one of his poems that on this earth human beings are not so much journeying one step at a time, as flying from one cross to the other.

If we consider our life, we might be able to discover the truth of this image. We fly from cross to cross but it is

not a matter of small consequence knowing which cross is ours: that of Gestas or that of Dimas. It is not irrelevant what kind of cross we carry: the cross of hatred, pain, anger, disillusionment or that of repentance, forgiveness, love and hope. It is not irrelevant with what kind of cross are we struggling to stay upright as human beings, as Christians, as God's children. It is not irrelevant how we see the world, our fellow beings and our life: through the eyes of Gestas, when everything revolves around me and my world, or through the eyes of Dismas, who sees not just his own life and struggle but has love and compassion to spare for others, too.

"Remember me"- was Dismas's humble request and for two thousand years we continue to remember him, to remember the malefactor on the right side of Jesus, to remember this "holy rogue".

Let us remember Dismas, later on the patron saint of the dying, who in this earthly life had just one fleeting moment of glory, but acquired eternal life through his love.

Dear friends, it is undeniable that each of us has a cross to bear- but whether this cross is on the left or right side of Jesus is completely up to us. If in our daily life we strive to be patient, compassionate and kind, if we struggle to keep the path of love and understanding between each other, then there is still hope.

There is still hope to remember and be remembered, there is still hope for a new life, a new beginning for ourselves and our communities.

This Easter, let us remember Jesus and let us remember this holy rogue and all who had touched our life and by these memories let us gather strength for a faithful, loving, compassionate life, for peace within us and around us.

Amen.

*Mária Pap*

## Living Stones

*“You also, like living stones, are being built  
into a spiritual house...”*

1Pet 2,5/a

My husband, besides being an avid photographer, has caught the stone-collecting bug: small ones and big ones, ordinary ones and colored ones, stones in different shapes and sizes. Wherever we go, he brings back stones. He doesn't think about the inconvenience of it-especially when we travel by plane and the weight is monitored and when the women in the family had some important shopping to do.

We are the proud owners of a big collection of stones-from pebbles to big boulders, which were carted to the garden by well-meaning parishioners. In our collection we have stones from the village, the county, different parts of Transylvania and then from all the places we have ever visited abroad from Hungary to France, from California to Colorado or Michigan.

He never labels these stones, so the pebbles live in bowls around the house, the stones in mounds in the flower beds and the boulders in the middle of the garden. I have a firm suspicion that after a while he forgets which stone comes from where-although he affirms the contrary. But I don't think this matters really much-the stone-collecting is a harmless occupation, so I try to humor him. Besides it is quite wonderful to pick up a stone from presumably California and with it all the fond memories you have of people and places.

Human beings have always been fascinated by stones-they have played and continue to play an important part in our life. They were tools of our survival, either for building or harming, as weapons or as implements. We built houses and catapults, fortresses and walls for keeping in, keeping out, for gathering and sheltering, for fighting and dividing. We admire the architectural splendors built by our ancestors and sometimes we exclaim: “If these walls could talk, what wonderful stories we would hear”. But they do talk! According to scientists, the

inanimate surfaces reflect the feelings of those around them. Although this might seem farfetched, our everyday life gives plenty of examples.

Let us consider our abode. What does it take to make a house?

Stone, wood, tiles, mortar and many other materials. How long does it take to build a house? Well, that depends on your budget but from a couple of weeks to a couple of years.

What does it take to make a home?

Love. Love and the presence of our beloved ones—patience and understanding, shared sadness and joys, cherished memories.

How long does it take to build a home?

Forever and a day as the Hungarian fairy tales say. Our home is a continuous construction site with all the mess and inconvenience but at the same time with all the joys and hopes of the unexpected.

As our bodies need the shelter and comfort of the house, so is our mind and spirit in need of a home.

A home which you can find it here, in this congregation. You have the buildings, you have the space and you have the great possibility of making it a home. It is true that you have to share it with a couple of hundred other people but that just adds to the challenge.

As the apostle writes, you are the living stones which build a spiritual house, which could make this place a home. You are the living stones of this place, the living stones of God's house.

Sometimes this house is comfortable and warm, other times austere and cold. Sometimes it gives shelter from the wounds you receive in the world; sometimes it pushes you out in the open harshly. Sometimes it soothes your intellect and feelings, sometimes it challenges you and angers and frustrate you. But it is yours and it is, or it could become, what you want it to be.

The stones of the house are kept together by mortar. Our life's mortar is love. Love that keeps us together against all

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differences of life, hope, understanding, imagination. Love that keeps us together even when we fight, we disagree, we hurt each other and ourselves. Love which goes beyond the surface of our life, reaching that deep common layer of our human fragility in which we recognize each other for what we are-individual miracles of God's love.

We gathered together today to celebrate this home we offer and build for ourselves and each other. To celebrate the love which unites us even in our differences, to celebrate and reinforce our community with each other, our commitment to continue being the living stones of faith, love and hope in the world.

We share with each other the wine and bread to honor those who laid the foundation of our house and to strengthen our resolve in working and serving each other towards making our community the home of love.

We are all stone gatherers in a way-physically or just symbolically-so let's put together the precious stones of our lives to make the house of our spirit an enduring home. May our life and service find its place and fulfillment in the never ending construction of God's house.

Amen.

*Mária Pap*



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