

*Byzantine divine liturgy*  
*homily of Fülöp Kocsis archbishop-metropolitan*  
*of Hajdúdorog (Hungary)*



*This is the Lord's Day, O people, be filled with gladness! Behold! The bridal chamber of the Light and the book of the Word of Life has come forth from the womb. The Temple Gate that faces east has been born, and she awaits the entry of the Great High Priest. She alone introduces the only Christ to the world, for the salvation of our souls.*

Brothers and sisters in Christ,

On the feast day of the Nativity of the Theotokos, the Blessed Virgin Mary, we sing this hymn on two occasions: first, during the Vespers, the previous evening – which we are going to pray in Gödöllő this year besides the flock of worshippers, also alongside several of my brothers and fellow-bishops of the Byzantine Rite. Second, we pray it during the Orthos, as the completion stichera.

*This is the Lord's Day, O people, be filled with gladness!*

The proclamation of the first great feast day of the Church Year sets the tone for the entire year. The year abounding in feasts will give us plenty of reasons to rejoice. If now, at its outset, *the source of all light, the book of the life-giving Word appears to us, and the doorway to sunrise is born*, then not only the feasts but also opportunities to rejoice will open up to us, at least if we regard this new year in the same way as the Theotokos, the Virgin Mary, looked upon her own life: *awaiting the entry of the great High Priest*. Even though she is unique *as the only one who brings into the world Christ to the salvation of our souls*, in her footsteps, we can also await that the great High Priest, Jesus Christ entering our lives also this year and writing his life-giving Word in the book of our hearts to shine over our entire lives, our entire being as the source of all lights. He certainly wants to shine over the year that is beginning now. We must, therefore, be very attentive to how we start it and what we need to do to help God fulfil this desire of His in our lives.

Thanks to the Providing God, we have indeed received all that is necessary to celebrate this day as a worthy outset of a joyful new year. The Melkite Greek Catholic Patriarch, Joseph, is celebrating with us the Divine and Holy Liturgy. He comes to us from a Syria that has undergone immense suffering and pain. A number of bishops, priests and worshippers of the Byzantine and other rites will celebrate alongside him, so that we can experience the joy of the nativity of the Theotokos awaiting the entry of the great High Priest as a community and proclaiming his message to the whole world: *O people, be filled with gladness! With his presence, the message of the feast will become even more authentic: people, be filled with gladness!*

The Holy Spirit encourages us to do the same in the concluding line of the feast's gospel reading. A woman in the crowd called out, "*Blessed is the mother who gave you birth and nursed you.*"

She was prophesying without knowing it in her womanly enthusiasm and foretold that we would call Mary the Blessed Lady, the Theotokos, who nursed and raised Jesus. And we know too that there was another woman who saluted her with similarly great joy: as the pregnant Elizabeth cried out when she met the mother of the yet unborn Jesus, "*Blessed is she who has believed...*" In fact, Mary herself accepted this salutation when she, the daughter of Sion, prophesied herself: "*From now on, all generations will call me blessed.*" All is fulfilled that the Holy Spirit promised to and about her: we salute her as the Blessed Lady. Yet, her holy Son extends the scope of the salutation when he completes the words of the above-cited woman in the Gospel: "*Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it.*"

Dear Brothers and Sisters, we are here in Saint Stephen's Basilica at this special event of the Eucharistic Congress. In these multitudinously feastly circumstances, the Good News addressed to everyone – that God calls us to this world to be happy – can penetrate our souls even more profoundly than ever before. We are created for happiness, and those will find happiness prepared by God "*who hear the word of God and obey it*". I sincerely trust, and I pray from the bottom of my heart that all those who go home after this Holy Liturgy will obey the Word of God.

Of course, it does matter how you, how we hear it. Martha must have picked up a few thoughts from Jesus's teaching while she was busy preparing everything in the house. She was paying attention, but she had to pay attention to several other things too, so it is quite understandable that she couldn't get engaged in the teaching wholeheartedly. Will those who listen to the teaching with just half an ear and half a heart be able to keep it fully? Mary chose what is better, in fact, what is best, as Jesus himself attested to it and added: *"and it will not be taken away from her"*.

With what chance can those who pick up only a few fragments from God's Word set off towards the promised happiness which has an essential element: it has to be kept?

Our Church is quite familiar with this human weakness, which isn't only characteristic of Martha. It is no coincidence that we are called to sing together the holy warning with the angels in the Holy Liturgy right after the Bible readings and the sermon: *"Let us put aside all now all earthly care!"* Today, we are going to speak these words in Ancient Slavic, in fact with a melody noted several centuries ago in the Sajópálfalva Irmologion, which is, however, just as relevant today for all of us. The Divine and Holy Liturgy means to elevate us into a perfect attentiveness to God, where nothing and no one matters. The extraordinary guests, the numerous foreign brothers and sisters present, and the unusually great number of worshippers do not matter either. Let us now put aside all earthly care, for the great High Priest is to enter our lives.

We call him the great High Priest who, according to the hymn cited in the Letter to the Philippians, *"humbled himself by becoming obedient to death – even death on a cross!"*

Perhaps this can also prevent us from believing that the feast and the entire Gospel are indeed Good News, a message calling us to happiness. We might be intimidated by the path of life Mary's Son had to take. And for this reason, we might regard Mary much rather as a woman in agony – to whom, a young mother, Simeon prophesied that *"a sword will pierce your own soul too"* – than a Blessed Lady.

We may be prevented from believing by several things. We might be distracted by a number of factors and disturbances from the Good News. The feast is dedicated to lifting us out of these. This doesn't apply exclusively to the calendar feasts. We celebrate the Eucharist at each

Holy Liturgy. We are in the spotlight during these days because we are celebrating the Eucharist at a week-long international congress. But each and every time we take the Communion is an event of the same, global importance and dynamic relevance. The Eucharist cannot be more, as, in it, the entire Holy Trinity gives itself to us each and every time. In each Holy Communion, we receive an infinite gift. This special event series makes us focus on this message. The celebration of the Eucharist is not only one of the Christian virtues; it is the source of all our resources. It is the source and climax of our entire lives. We live, move and exist only through it. Keeping God's Word is experiencing the Eucharist in a special way, the incarnation of God's Word in our lives.

However, we can only live on the Eucharist if we live with the Eucharist. This is what can change our paths. This is the turn that the Eucharistic Congress can bring about in our lives, in the life of the Church: even if we have been turning away from it without paying much attention, even if we have been distracted by the abundance of our daily tasks, even if we have been intimidated by the demanding standards that should characterise our Christian faith, we have found the solution! We have actually found the inexhaustible source, the climax of our earthly life that is worth living for and for which it is worth taking upon ourselves all hardships and struggles.

Jesus didn't only promise happiness to us but, in fact, brought it to us in the form of his own body. His mother is blessed because she believed in him, lived with him, with Jesus himself. The Virgin Mary had the closest, the most intimate relationship with Jesus, as she carried him in her womb, nursed him, would lead him by the hand and teach him herself. Mary is a blessed and happy woman. But even happier and more blessed are those who, by listening to and keeping the Word, get even closer to God. Is that possible at all? It is a great mystery. An unresolvable mystery that, nevertheless, needs to be illuminated and elucidated. Perhaps, now, we can get closer to this Mystery, to the Eucharist. At this pontifical Liturgy, we can experience the entry of the great High Priest, who is eager to take the first and foremost place in our lives and hearts. Therefore, the invocation is rightly proclaimed at this feast: *"This is the Lord's Day, O people, be filled with gladness!"*