

Monsignor Dominik Duka

Speech on the occasion of the renewed premiere of the film *Saint Wenceslas*, September 28, 2010

I consider the premiere of the film about Saint Wenceslas from the anniversary year of 1929 to be a certain sign of both our country and the Czech nation returning to the Saint Wenceslas tradition, or as people often say, to the roots of our religious and political history. We could repeat the words used by the founder of the modern Czech state, Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk, in his foreword to the Saint Wenceslas anniversary collection: It is a return to ideas.

The return of pilgrimages to Stará Boleslav after November 1989 culminated with the Pope's visit last year. However, the beginning of the Saint Wenceslas tradition is not conceivable without the life story of Saint Wenceslas. This story soon became part of a certain saga that entered the narrative history of the Czech state, which had decided to join the European Christian community. Within this area, formed by Christian rulers, Christianity could create an environment for the rise of a new culture and civilization. And this is how Saint Wenceslas's life story became part of our culture and civilization.

It is clear that this ruler was regarded as a true ideal and model. This cannot be unequivocally said about the Christian rulers who co-created the future picture of Christian Europe. The life stories of all of these figures – Charlemagne, Sigismund of Burgundy, Clovis I, Saint Stephen, Vladimir the Great – became legends in the Middle Ages, but none of them became such an ideal model of a Christian ruler and a pious, educated, fair-minded, peaceful man with a deep sympathy for the people. Moreover, none of them became a model of a ruler who is peaceful, but not cowardly, and who prefers diplomacy and compromises in order to ensure peace, economic development, and social order.

I leave it to historians to deal with these issues more deeply, and to give their final verdict. Nevertheless, the spiritual roots of Saint Wenceslas as a ruler lead unequivocally to the figure of Christ Pantocrator, who does not win on the bloody battlefield, but dies on the cross. This is also the meaning of martyrdom, the culmination of Wenceslas's life, which enters the history of this country, and which is described by Paul Claudel, a French diplomat and poet, in his ode to a ruler whose blood was drunk by his own country. And this source gives rise to the ideal ruler or rule in this country.

The Přemyslid dynasty enabled the growth of the Saint Wenceslas tradition, which was then transformed within the subsequent religious and cultural development. During the reign of the Luxembourg dynasty, Saint Wenceslas was highly visible in both religion and culture. Charles IV, father of the country, built the Czech kingdom on his legacy, but the Saint Wenceslas ideal also became the ideal of the Holy Roman Emperor, i.e. the ruler of the empire later called *corpus christianorum* by historians. When making Prague the centre of the empire, Charles IV entrusted Duke Wenceslas not only with the reign, but also with the protection of the university. The builder of the Saint Vitus cathedral and the founder of the university viewed Saint Wenceslas and his story as the fulfilment of the Christian Western civilization, the civilization of cathedrals and universities.

Undoubtedly, Saint Wenceslas was followed by the Hussite tradition, too. The part of the tradition which respected the basic foundations of the Czech state was able to seek understanding both within the Czech lands and abroad. However, at the Council of Basel, Saint Wenceslas was refused by radicals, Taborites, and Orphans, who, due to the military strength and a fanatic inability to reach a compromise, led the country to the Battle of Lipany which introduced

peace and order to the country, and which enabled the Jagiellon dynasty to continue the Saint Wenceslas tradition. It was Władysław II Jagiełło who created the basic form of the Saint Wenceslas chapel. This chapel, Stará Boleslav, and the Saint Wenceslas legacy were accepted by the subsequent Habsburg dynasty in the figure of the unanimously elected Ferdinand I, the ruler who, in the spirit of this tradition, wrote his *liber reformationis*, a proposal of religious peace intended for the Council of Trent, and supported by the then state secretary, Saint Charles Borromeo. This is one of the reasons why the saint was so popular in the Czech lands during the Baroque period, and why he was portrayed in numerous pictures in churches and in sculptural groups of the Cult of the Virgin Mary. This respect was certainly in part caused by the sympathy for all people expressed by Saint Charles Borromeo, who died during a plague epidemic in Milan when he was helping the sick – but didn't this well-known Roman prelate, in a way, resemble Saint Wenceslas?

Even the Prague of Rudolf II, again the centre of the Roman Empire, was a Saint Wenceslas city. The Czech nation came to Saint Wenceslas to seek help during the "Spring of Nations" in 1848, and it was called to Saint Wenceslas by the poet František Halas during the Munich betrayal. Jan Palach expressed his desperate cry by the Saint Wenceslas's statue. And Wenceslas square became the decisive scene of November 1989.

I believe that Saint Wenceslas, as portrayed in Saint Wenceslas legends – a pious, humble, educated, and peaceful ruler – is the founder of the ideal Czech state where everyone can feel at home. Everyone is given not only freedom, but also a certain degree of social solidarity and security.

Saint Wenceslas, do not let us or our descendants perish.

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