

Petr Nečas

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

Your Excellency, archbishop Duka,
ladies and gentlemen,

We have commemorated the death of Saint Wenceslas, the patron saint of the Czech lands, on September 28 for more than a thousand years. We know very little about the real life of Duke Wenceslas, a ruler of the Přemyslid dynasty, who was soon also worshipped as a saint. He became an important part of our history and culture more because of his second – symbolic – life than by what he really achieved or was capable of achieving.

It remains a mystery whether his death was a cold-blooded murder or a tragic mistake, and whether he died because of his policy of peace, because of his younger brother Boleslav's desire for power, or because of his support of the Christian faith. However, we know for sure that, soon after his death, he was perceived as an ideal human being and ruler. He became an eternal ruler of the country, its patron saint, and the nation became his family – or as old chronicles say – his folk.

The worshipping of Saint Wenceslas is one of the oldest traditions of our history. Saint Wenceslas legends are connected with the beginning of Czech literature, and Wenceslas as a saint and a duke was a popular artistic subject from the Middle Ages to modern times. Moreover, all crucial events in the development of the Czech state can be viewed from the perspective of the Saint Wenceslas tradition. From time immemorial, the Saint Wenceslas tradition has particularly been professed by the nation in times of danger. However, we also remember this

tradition when we are spontaneously united by our collective successes and subsequent joys.

Duke Wenceslas was at the very beginning of the unifying process within the tribe of Czechs and its transformation into a solid state form. During Wenceslas's reign, neither legal nor power positions of Czechs were clearly defined. We can presume that this very question caused a conflict between Wenceslas and his brother Boleslav, which resulted in the tragic fratricide in Stará Boleslav in 935. The 400-year-long rule of the Přemyslid dynasty gave rise to one of the first European states, whose borders and capital city have been preserved to the present day. One reason why we commemorate the death of this ruler as a national holiday is the fact that Duke Wenceslas brought our country to the union of European Christian nations.

Both the thinking of the position of the Czech state within Europe and the effort to achieve an adequate place within this whole have been going on for more than a thousand years, and even today we, the people who have gathered here, are part of this historical process. Whereas some nations celebrate victorious warriors and battles, the peacemaking figure of Duke Wenceslas represents an effort to restore the cultural dimension of Czech national consciousness as an independent value within the unifying Europe.

The reconciling and pacifistic character of the tradition was emphasised by the authors of the first historical feature film *Saint Wenceslas*, whose renewed premiere with the original music is presented to us today, 80 years later, thanks to the support of Czech Radio, the National Film Archive, and Czech Television.

Let me finish my short speech with a petition: Saint Wenceslas, Duke of the Czech lands, we beseech you to help us in our deeds, to help the Czech lands to keep flourishing, and to help our nation to be happy and live with our neighbours in peace and friendship.

Petr Nečas

Prime Minister of the Czech Republic