



Podcast: Mindszenty and Keeping the Faith, 5th September 2021

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Journey of Faith - Life from Holy Mass - with Monsignor Daniel McHugh

Hello, I am Monsignor Daniel McHugh.

I am old enough to remember the days when we prayed for the Conversion of Russia: names like Mindszenty (Hungary), Stepinac (Croatia), and Beran (Czech Republic) were familiar to us as Church leaders, who stood up for the Catholic Faith in times of persecution. When we go on holiday to these countries today it is good to recall the history of the Church there.

As the International Eucharistic Congress begins in Hungary on 5th September 2021, I want to focus on the Venerable Cardinal Jozsef Mindszenty in this Podcast. Mindszenty was appointed to Bishop of Veszprem by Pope Pius XII in 1944. Protesting against the Nazi genocide, he was arrested in late 1944 and kept in prison in Sapronkohida by Hungary's fascist government. Following the Second World War, he was appointed to Archbishop of Esztergom (the historic Primatial See of Hungary about 60km from Budapest) then to Cardinal.

In late 1948 he was arrested by the Communist authorities (Russia was now the overlord) and sentenced to life imprisonment under false charges of conspiracy, espionage and financial abuse. The sentence bought protests from the Pope and leaders of western powers. In April 1949 it was also criticized by the UN General Assembly.

The physical and mental trials and tribulations of his prison years came to an end when the 1956 revolution in Hungary broke out. On November 4th, 1956, the first day of the Soviet intervention in it all, the Cardinal took refuge in the US Embassy in Budapest. Threatened with arrest, he could not leave the building until 1971.

Mindszenty was then allowed to leave Hungary under an agreement between Hungarian authorities and the Vatican. The Cardinal first went to Rome before settling in Vienna. He died in 1975 and was buried in Mariazell, Austria.

After Hungary's supreme court declared him innocent in May 1990, his remains were returned to Hungary and reburied in the Crypt of Esztergom Basilica.

You can imagine when I went to Hungary some years ago and visited the Basilica in Esztergom how pleased I was to visit the place of his tomb, and pray there.

The experience of the Church in Hungary under Communist domination was replicated in countries across Europe. It wasn't just individual leaders who were targeted, but Church Institutions too. In Hungary in 1950 religious orders were abolished; many

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priests and faithful were deported to labor camps or imprisoned. Catholics were continuously harassed and many of them were killed by the servants of atheist regimes. Hundreds of thousands of people fled abroad. Catholic schools were nationalized. Catholic people had to practice their Faith in secrecy. The Communist dictatorship lasted 40 years and the number of churchgoers reduced to a minimal level. This way two or three generations grew up without being educated in the Catholic Faith. Consequently, the majority of the population is ignorant of religion, indifferent towards the Faith and even hostile towards the Church, due to the anticlerical campaign carried out by the former regime.

After 1989 Hungary becomes free. Religious practice revives and many people return to the Churches. Kindergartens, elementary schools, high schools and universities of the Catholic Church and other Christian denominations are reopened. Christian values appear in politics and legislation, and faith and moral are introduced in public schools as subjects. New movements come to life and new communities appear. Many Churches are reconstructed and new ones are built. The different religious orders come out of hiding and reopen convents. More and more lay faithful join in the active community life of parishes.

However, a document produced by the Hungarian Theological Commission in 2018 “Hungary Towards the International Eucharistic Congress” points to how things have changed since 1989 too. Like many post-Communist countries certain phenomena have weakened practice of the Faith: secularization, the search for material wellbeing, relativism, the crisis in family life, the strong decline in the number of priestly and religious vocations, the decline in the practice of the Faith, the difficulty of reaching young people. We identify with it all in the UK.

The Congress – we read in the document – is an invitation and an opportunity for Catholics to strengthen in Faith.

As we celebrate the Faith and Endurance of the great Cardinal Mindszenty and pray for his Beatification, we ask his prayers for renewal of the Faith that is the most important treasure we can hand on to future generations.

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