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DECRETAL LETTER ON SAINT MARGARET OF HUNGARY

Blessed Margaret a Virgin, of the Royal Hungarian Family of the Arphads, Nun of the Order of Saint Dominic, is Enrolled in the Calendar of the Saints.

Pius Bishop, Servant of the Servants of God for a Perpetual Remembrance.



MONG the highest duties, which We have striven to fulfill in the Apostolic ministry divinely committed to Us, despite our unworthiness, there is truly none weightier, none sweeter, none which, amid the manifold cares and anxieties wherewith We are now oppressed, affords Us more consolation than to decree the supreme honors of a sacred cult for those of the faithful who, while they were living, were conspicuous for every kind of virtue even to the degree of perfection; who shone with the glory of miracles wrought by the omnipotent God through their intercession, especially after their death; and who justly achieved a lasting renown for their holiness. And this duty, by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and with the approval of the whole Catholic world, the Roman Pontiffs even to our time have performed with so much the greater solicitude as the Christian people seemed to need more numerous intercessors before God and outstanding exemplars of virtue.

We have judged that among these there should now deservedly be ranked that Blessed Virgin Margaret, a glory of the Catholic Hungarian nation, a daughter of King Bela IV, a nun of the illustrious Order of St. Dominic, who "since she is in longstanding possession of a cult, and since the universal attestation of trustworthy historians is consistent regarding her heroic virtues and miracles, and

since the uninterrupted fame of her prodigies is not lacking," certainly seems worthy that, although not by the formal and customary canonization, we should declare her nevertheless by Our supreme judgment to be a Saint, and decree that she be enrolled in the calendar of the Saints.

Margaret was born of that royal Hungarian family of the Arphads, the family which alone in one and the same century, the thirteenth, brought forth to the Church of God four other women remarkable for holiness of life: namely, St. Elizabeth, whom Our Predecessor, Gregory IX of happy memory enrolled among the Saints in the year 1242; Blessed Agnes of Prague, her cousin; and Kinga and Jolenta, also daughters of King Bela IV, whose cults were confirmed by the Apostolic See. About the year 1242, when the Tartars under the leadership of Batu were laying waste Poland and Pannonia with fire and sword, and Hungary, bathed in the blood of so many Christians, was laid open to their barbarous ravages, Margaret was born of the pious parents, Bela IV, King of Hungary and Queen Maria Lascaris, while they were in retirement in the citadel of Dalmatia. When the child was conceived, if perchance a daughter were born, the parents vowed to consecrate her to God, as a kind of expiatory sacrifice for the liberation of the kingdom and for their own safety. And indeed their prayers and desires were heard; for, universal peace being restored unexpectedly, they were able to return to Buda with the recently born Margaret. Her splendid mother, mindful of her promise and of the benefit received, brought her, who was now to become from her mother's womb the guardian of the ancestral Kingdom, to the monastery (dedicated to St. Catherine the Virgin and Martyr) of the Dominican nuns at Veszprem, before the fourth year of her age, so that from her earliest childhood she might become imbued with regular observance and might more fittingly serve God. There she became a heartfelt disciple of the Cross; forgetting entirely her royal home, Margaret so flourished in the spirit of docility and obedience that the nuns treated her with the tenderest affection. She cherished towards Jesus Christ and the Virgin Mother of God an angelic devotion far beyond her age; she gave evidence of noble characteristics and innocence of soul, and forthwith merited that the King of kings should desire her beauty.

When scarcely five years old, she expressed a desire to receive the discipline with her sisters, to fast and wear the hairshirt: Therefore her father the king, after strengthening the Hungarian nation against the assaults of the Tartars, that he might the more securely and efficaciously gain divine aid for his kingdom and himself, built a

monastery in honor of the Blessed Virgin Mary on an island in the Danube, which was once called the Island of Leporum and is now called that of St. Margaret. He took care not only that there should be installed therein pious and consecrated virgins who, as living victims, would devote themselves solely to God, and sing His praises and those of God's Mother, but his own daughter Margaret as well, "whom of all his children he loved with a more tender affection, because he beheld in her more evident principles of a life pleasing to God."

Meanwhile Margaret, who seemed to have made her own the words of the Apostle: "I count all things to be but loss for the excellent knowledge of Jesus Christ my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as but dung, that I may gain Christ," after rejecting a noble marriage with a certain prince of Poland, pronounced her solemn vows at the age of twelve before the venerable Humbert, Master General of her Order. But inasmuch as she was still sought after seriously by Ottaker, King of Bohemia, in order that she might preserve intact her fidelity given to her Divine Spouse with all her strength, and that she might remove this and every other occasion of an importune solicitation of marriage, she desired to declare publicly that she was espoused to Christ, and asked earnestly for the holy veil. On the 4th day of June in the year 1261 she received it with great joy from the Archbishop of Gran, in the presence of the Bishops of Vacz and Nitra, and many ecclesiastics, at the altar of St. Elizabeth, her aunt. Being thus consecrated to the Spouse of Virgins, she strove tirelessly to be like to the King of Martyrs by her contempt of the world and herself, and by mortification of the flesh. Vested always in the poorest of raiment, and eager for the lowly duties, she found her pleasure in sweeping the house, washing the soiled clothes, preparing the food, being burdened often with the heavy toil. She served the sick sisters and servants—of whom the other sisters feared to become infected with disease—with such charity and desire for humiliation, that she claimed for herself alone all the onerous and lowly offices in their regard.

Counting as nothing the fact that her hands and forearms and knees were cut and swollen because of the cold and adhesion to the ground, she sharply harassed her body, worn out with much fasting, and her hairshirt, and her scourgings, and her sleepless nights, not only and chiefly on Fridays and the vigils of the festivals of the Lord Christ and the Virgin Mother of God, but also on the fifteen days preceding her Paschal Communion. She likewise recalled tear-

fully the mysteries of the Passion, and burned with a thirst for martyrdom. While she poured forth her heart freely and for many hours each day before Christ Jesus hidden under the Eucharistic veils or depicted on the Cross, yet she prayed everywhere and almost without interruption, frequently adding the entire Psalter to the prescribed divine praises, in her prayers to God the Father or to the Holy Spirit or in her salutations to the Virgin Mother of God most beloved by her. It is reported that she practised all the virtues, and especially the theological virtues, in heroic degree and with fervent zeal, and that she persevered in their practise constantly even to her death, so that she was the greatest incentive to virtue for the others.

The virtue of Margaret seems to have shone greatly during the time of the most bitter war, which began and endured for fourteen years, between her father King Bela IV and her brother Stephen, anent the government of the kingdom and succession to it. In this war, "the whole order of justice was disrupted, and the fear of God set aside both among the prelates and the barons, and many thousands of innocent people perished without the equity of justice."

So unfortunate a calamity tortured the soul of Margaret in such wise that "tears were her bread day and night," for she witnessed her father's family so sharply torn asunder with hatreds and dissensions, the oppressed people endangered without regard to sex or age, holy Mother Church also, not only in this but in other parts of Christianity as well, being trodden upon and rent by tyranny, the cloisters and places of religion made desolate and without an inhabitant, all the divine and human laws wickedly brought to confusion. In order to please the wrath of Almighty God and obtain divine clemency for her people, "she wept more profusely, and, having donned the hairshirt, she afflicted her body with fasts, as one lamenting the sins of all those who acted so wickedly against God, and bewailing the calamities of the oppressed, and she wholly persevered in her prayers to God, that the Lord Jesus Christ, by the might of His power, having obstructed and restrained the power of the evil ones, would defend the innocent and holy Mother Church which had been brought together by His precious Blood."

Furthermore, Margaret did not confine her action simply to burning prayers to God and the most severe penance, but did not hesitate to reprove openly the iniquity wrought by anyone, even one marked by the highest authority and dignity; and this brought it about that she turned upon herself the wrath of her father, the king, and, after first spurning his flatteries, had to suffer his persecution also. This persecution, however, she did not in the least fear and

endured it dauntlessly, without interrupting her work of reproving human perversity and pacifying at the same time the souls of her adversaries.

Her prayers, poured forth most abundantly to God, united with the chastisement of her virginal body, were heard at last by the most High; peace between her father and brother was restored, and the peace was solemnly ratified in the year of our Lord 1226 on the Island of Leporum in the very monastery made holy by Margaret.

That he might strengthen more and more the tranquillity of the kingdom, King Bela resolved to unite his family by affinity to Charles, Count of Anjou, who in the year 1266 was made King of Naples. And so he proposed a marriage between him and his daughter Margaret, adding that he would easily obtain for her from Pope Clement IV a dispensation from the vows of religion. And Margaret for this the third time rejected without hesitation the proposal of marriage, answering freely that she wished to preserve her virginity for the Lord Jesus Christ. And this Divine Spouse, always faithful and even more generous, set up in the heart of His handmaid a sweet dwelling-place, adorned it most lavishly with heavenly gifts, and made her an associate of His Passion and a partaker of His consolation and power during life and after death as well.

For it is related that she, prophesying even from childhood, and wont to be called away from the things of sense to holy things, knew the secrets of hearts and wrought by divine aid many wonders and cures.

At last conscious of the proximity of her death, she asked for, and, as she had desired, received several times the last Sacraments of the Church; and having received them with angelic piety, on the Feast of St. Prisca in the year 1270, before the completion of her thirtieth year, joined to the diadem of Christ, Margaret entered heaven. Her virginal body, indicating by a sweet fragrance a certain beauty of her future resurrection, was borne to the sepulchre with solemn ceremony, and became, so it is related, a remedy for the ailments of her suppliants: for many prodigies and graces are said to have been granted, when the intercession of the Servant of God was invoked, even to the present time.

It is no wonder, then, that the name of Margaret is highly esteemed in the region of Hungary, and glorious in other regions. For she has given honor to her fatherland on earth by the sweetness of her heroic virtues, and the light of holiness, and the fame of miracles; and likewise beyond the confines of her native land, chiefly through the illustrious Order of Preachers, which glories that it has

been augmented by the singular protection of the Blessed, her name has become distinguished either by means of legends of Margaret, as of a saint, which circulated immediately after her death, or especially because of the process set up by Apostolic authority six years after the death of the royal virgin, in which process the title of "Blessed" or "Saint" is bestowed on Margaret by the witnesses, a title sanctioned even by the supreme ecclesiastical authority.

The cult shown to this Servant of God, began immediately after her precious death and, resplendent always with new light, has come down even to our own times. For it is called forth more clearly by the light derived partly from the biographical histories written in various languages; and partly from the memorials, among which there is the priceless mantle donated, as is reported, by Queen Elizabeth of Hungary to Our Basilica of St. Peter in the year 1343, on which mantle, together with images of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the holy Apostles Peter and Paul, and the four Saints of the royal Hungarian family, there is also seen the image of Margaret, daughter of the King of Hungary, and to her also was attributed the title of "Saint"; partly from the veneration of the faithful towards the sepulchre and relics of the Servant of God; partly from the many pictures of the Blessed, increased with the passing of time, where-with the public cult of veneration is manifested; partly from the festival, wherein the Hungarian people recall the memory of the Blessed and give evidence of their ardent devotion to her.

The cult is called forth most of all from the indult granted by the Apostolic See of reciting the Office and of celebrating Mass in honor of this Blessed. This indult was first granted to the Diocese of Transylvania in the year 1789 by Our Predecessor, Pope Pius VI, and extended in the year 1804 by Pope Pius VII to the universal Order of Preachers; whereupon the feast of the Blessed was celebrated for the first time with great solemnity by this same Order in this Our City in the Basilica of Santa Maria sopra Minerva on the 26th day of January in the following year.

Since, therefore, according to the norms of Our most learned Predecessor, Pope Benedict XIV, the requisite conditions for decreeing the equivalent canonization of Blessed Margaret seemed to concur, Our beloved Son, Justin Cardinal Seredi, of the Holy Roman Church, Primate of Hungary and Archbishop of Gran, in the name also of all the Bishops of Hungary, Our beloved Sons, the Princes and moderators of the Hungarian Kingdom and almost the entire Hungarian Nation, together with the Master General of the Order of Preachers, and countless Cardinals, Bishops and religious com-

munities of the Catholic world, have offered Us their suppliant wishes, postulating most earnestly that We, by the plenitude of Our Apostolic power, deign to enroll Blessed Margaret the Virgin in the calendar of the Saints.

We, therefore, favorably receiving these wishes, most gladly commissioned the Sacred Congregation of Rites to study fully and expedite the matter; the more so since We saw that these wishes correspond with Our own desire which We, then the Legate a Latere of Pope Pius XI of happy memory, willed to express from Our heart during the magnificent Thirty-fourth International Eucharistic Congress held at Budapest, the most pleasant memory of which will never depart from Our soul.

Accordingly, the Sacred Congregation of Rites, through its Historical Division, sifted with the utmost diligence and according to the norms of critical science all the documents brought forward by Our beloved Son, Benedict Lenzetti, Postulator General of the Order of Preachers and most zealous Promoter of this Cause, and declared the same to have probative force; and it also most fully investigated and gave approval concerning the life of Blessed Margaret, and the fame of her sanctity, and her public and liturgical cult through the course of the centuries.

When all these things were accomplished, at the meeting of the Sacred Congregation on the 13th day of July this year, Our Venerable Brothers of the Holy Roman Church, the Cardinals who preside over the same Congregation, heard the report of Our beloved Son, Raphael Charles Cardinal Rossi of the Same Holy Roman Church, the Ponente of the Cause. In this report he most amply showed that it was evident concerning the holiness of the life of Blessed Margaret; and concerning the virtues practised by her in a heroic degree, of which virtues her charity and love of prayer and severe penance were conspicuous; concerning the cult shown to the Blessed either by the people from the day of her death even to our own time or the liturgical cult approved by the Apostolic See; concerning also the fame of the miracles, whereby she is honored. Having likewise heard the opinions of the Prelatial Officials of the same Sacred Congregation, and having maturely weighed and considered everything, they thought to suggest to Us to receive the petitions offered.

On the twenty-third day of that month, when the report on all these things was made to Us by Our venerable Brother Charles Cardinal Salotti of the Holy Roman Church, Bishop of Palestrina and Prefect of the Congregation of Sacred Rites, We decided to receive

with a willing mind the judgment of the same Sacred Congregation. Wherefore, after maturely considering all things, with certain knowledge, by the plenitude of Our Apostolic Power, by the tenor of these Letters, We solemnly decree: That the Blessed Virgin Margaret, of the royal family of the Arphads, a nun of the Order of St. Dominic, is a Saint, and is to be enrolled in the calendar of the Saints, prescribing a memory of her in the Roman Martyrology annually on the day of her birth, namely, the 18th day of January, and that she would be honored among the Holy Virgins with pious devotion.

So, therefore, the memory of this newly admitted Saint having been consecrated by Us, We trust that she will indeed resume her mission of propitiatory victim before God, not only for her beloved native land which is deservedly held to be a bulwark of the Catholic faith and the Christian name, but also for all the nations at present waging war so bitterly among themselves; and that by her continual and potent prayers she may obtain from the most loving Lord "the Father of mercies and the God of all consolations," for mankind drawn to the sweet yoke of the Gospel, a tranquillity and a peace founded firmly on the justice and the charity of Christ.

Therefore, having well considered everything that had to be examined, with certain knowledge and by the fullness of Our Apostolic Authority, We confirm, ratify, and again declare and order all that We have said above; and We publish it to the whole Catholic Church.

And We wish the same faith to be held for the transcripts or excerpts, even printed, of these Decretal Letters, which We order to be expedited in a duplicate original, provided they are sealed and signed by some Notary Apostolic, as is held for these present Decretal Letters, if they should be exhibited or shown.

And if anyone shall presume to infringe or rashly attempt to contradict these Letters of Our declaration, decree, command, and will, let him know that he will incur the anger of Almighty God and of the Blessed Apostles Peter and Paul.

Given at Rome, in St. Peter's, in the year 1943, on the 19th day of the month of November, on the feast of St. Elizabeth, in the fifth year of Our Pontificate.

I, PIUS,

Bishop of the Catholic Church.