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## International Eucharistic Congress. Card. Erd?: “The Pope encourages us to build living fraternity.”

“The event is already in full swing. The first participants have already arrived. The theological symposium is underway, from September 2 to 5. The atmosphere is one of great anticipation, not least because preparations for the event have been ongoing for years, and it was eventually postponed because of the pandemic. Thus everyone is looking forward to this event with a feeling of celebration”, said Cardinal Péter Erd?, Archbishop of Esztergom-Budapest and Primate of the Catholic Church of Hungary, contacted by SIR who asked him describe the atmosphere in the city as the opening of the International Eucharistic Congress to be held in Budapest from 5 to 12 September draws near. The meeting was originally scheduled for September 2020 but the outbreak of the pandemic forced the organisers to postpone it by a year. As the number of cases in the region declined, coupled by a constant increase in vaccinations, the Congress will at last open in Heroes' Square on 5 September, with a solemn celebration presided over by Cardinal Angelo Bagnasco and attended by ecumenical dignitaries. From September 6 to 10," said Cardinal Erd?, "the HungExpo in Pest will be the main venue with special exhibitions and displays." “A rich programme of testimonies, lectures, afternoon religious services and cultural events will be offered every day. On Saturday, September 11, the “Family Festival” will be hosted on the suggestive “Margaret Island” on the Danube River. In the afternoon, in Kossuth Square, Card. **Péter Erd?** will celebrate Holy Mass followed by a candlelight procession to Heroes' Square. “Patriarch Bartholomew will be present as Ecumenical guest of honour and will deliver a speech”, the Cardinal said. “The Patriarch canonised our first Christian king, St Stephen, in the year 2000, venerated as a saint also by the Orthodox Church. St Stephen died in 1038 when the Eastern and Western Churches were still united. He thus stands as a very beautiful ecumenical symbol.” “We will look forward to the Holy Father's arrival on Sunday September 12.”

**What is the situation in the country that will reunite the participants and Pope Francis?** Our country is starting to recover after a year and a half of pandemic, during which most activities had to be suspended. *Life is now returning to normal, teaching is resuming in schools, and children can finally return to their classrooms and meet their classmates.* In short, we are slowly returning to normal, although concerns remain about the so-called fourth wave. A rather large part of the population has been vaccinated, so hopefully the next wave will not be as severe. **In this unusual and difficult moment in history for Europe and the world, what is the message of the Eucharistic Congress?** We are not alone. God created our world on which he pours out His infinite love. However, precisely because our world is so precious, man must respect Creation. As the Holy Father explains in the Encyclical *Laudato Si'*, faith also invites us to assume our responsibility for the Care of Creation. A second message that this Congress wants to send out is that humanity has a purpose, it cannot live without meaning and content. *God has a purpose and a plan for each and every one of us, and it is a benevolent plan. God wants us to be happy. We were created to eternal life and happiness.* In the course of humanity's journey throughout history and in our personal lives, Jesus is always with us. For us Catholics, this is expressed most powerfully in Adoration and in the celebration of the Eucharist. **Our world is crying. Old and new conflicts are severely affecting entire populations. From Myanmar to Afghanistan. Several representatives of the Churches of these hurting countries will be present in Budapest for the meeting. What is the responsibility of our wealthy Europe towards these regions marked by conflict and suffering?** Europe is unevenly wealthy. There are significant differences from the Balkans to Ireland. Yet, Europe is able to help many countries affected by conflict and poverty. Even the small Church in Hungary is trying to help Nigeria, whose population struggles with drought and disease, where the Christian minority is at risk. For the past years we have been supporting a diocese challenged by famine, where farming was extremely difficult, if not impossible. We sent them aid and the response of our faithful was extensive, immediate and generous. So I believe there is a responsibility of international justice. But today we

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are facing another threat. Only 7% of the Nigerian population has been vaccinated *International solidarity is also needed for a fair distribution of vaccines. In this area too, Europe can contribute by showing a new level of generosity.* Economic experts are warning us that long-term neglect of developing countries faced with the threat of the epidemic could lead to economic damage, with a fallout on the so-called rich countries. Solidarity is therefore necessary from every point of view.

**Pope Francis will be arriving on September 12 to celebrate the closing Mass. Which "words" do people expect from the Holy Father?** The Pope will surely speak about Christ's presence in the Eucharist, the great Mystery that is central to our faith and to our lives. *He will also mention the responsibility to work towards a rebirth of the Church and the willingness to establish forms of living fraternity, also in the light of the challenges mentioned earlier. I firmly believe that the Holy Father will bring immense encouragement.* **But in a secularised world, which finds it hard to believe in God, how do we reach out to people's hearts?** *Everyone thirsts and yearns for an encounter with Jesus. It was evident even during the lockdown period, when no public liturgies could be celebrated.* Our rebirth can be fully accomplished in Jesus. Jesus is always young. It is He who makes us young, as communities, as Church. We should not be afraid if in some periods in history we might appear to be physically weak. We experienced extreme weakness in the former communist countries, but the grace of God brought us the possibility of rebirth. Hence there is always a possibility. But possibility demands responsibility. Let us then ask for the strength to respond to challenges.

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