

The International Eucharistic Congress from a Greek Catholic point of view

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This illustrious event of the Catholic Church was certainly of great relevance for the Greek Catholics living in Hungary and the Carpathian Basin. For many of us, the events of the Congress held in 1938, their Greek Catholic aspects, the remaining memories as well as the recollections of the faithful, have had a lasting impact on our religious life, influencing our present life, even though over eight decades passed.

In this respect, bearing in mind when the event took place, the Greek Catholic Metropolia announced a three-year phase of preparation, during which the central theme of the journals and publications they supervise as well as the programmes and activities they organise, of course, strongly focused on the Eucharist, the eucharistic approach of the church and the associated characteristics of the church's vision of God, the world, society, and humanity. One of the tangible signs of this was reflecting upon the theological and spiritual question of the simultaneous administration of the so-called Sacraments of Initiation, i.e. the "infant baptism". Certainly, the Greek Catholic community also made an active contribution to the nation-wide preparations, which were visited by the missionary cross of the Eucharistic Congress in all three dioceses as a true spiritual renewal. It was quite uplifting to experience the "encounter" between the relics of the martyrs and saints, highly important in the tradition of Eastern Christianity, and the living liturgical, pastoral and faith life of both smaller and larger communities of our church.

European Eastern Catholic Churches, with their peculiar historical, cultural, pastoral and sometimes theological qualities, constitute a very colourful world of the Catholic Church. Leaders of these churches have been holding annual meetings in an organisational framework since 1996. This year, we were given the opportunity by the International Eucharistic Congress to hold this meeting in Budapest as part of the congress, representing nearly twenty Eastern Catholic Churches, with the Byzantine Rite and the leaders of the European Armenian, Syriac and Melkite Greek Catholic Churches present. The meeting, which always offers a spiritual, theological, and cultural exchange and re-affirmation, opened new perspectives, even in its scope of topics (Eucharist and Synodality), e.g., the present commencement of the synod's journey, which will have a significant impact on the life of the universal church. In his lecture, the renowned ecclesio­logist Professor Roberto Repole, clearly pointed out the analogy between the community of the Eucharist and that of the synod experienced at any level of the church, with both being the fruit of the Holy Spirit.

The Greek Catholic bishops' meeting was honoured with the continuous presence and attention of Melkite Patriarch Youssef Absi I and Cardinal Angelo Bagnasco, President of the Council of the Bishops' Conferences of Europe (CCEE). The international significance of the meeting was augmented by their active participation which integrated the meeting into the harmonious unity of the Eucharistic Congress, where the joint complementary paths of Western and Eastern Christianity seek to convey the ability of experiencing the self-revelatory but always mysterious God.

On 8 September, the feast of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary, St. Stephen's Basilica in Budapest was filled to capacity, where Patriarch Youssef celebrated the Holy Liturgy, during which the bishops participating prayed together the most sacred Act in "their own language". The Heavenly Church became almost tangible, despite our earthly imperfections. The patriarch, coming from Syria, a country "loud" with the Christians' suffering, described it as perhaps

the most beautiful and moving liturgy of his life. After a few months passing, I feel that it will be remembered by many even after over eight decades, because this prayer was sanctified by the Spirit.

Our bishops, our priests and crowd of the faithful were present at almost all the events of the Eucharistic Congress. It was inspiring to be together and constantly experience the church breathing with two lungs, where pure air could be felt as a gift of the Holy Spirit, permeating the church and the people of the Eucharist. Thus, we were present at the opening Holy Mass, listening to the testimonies and getting richer through the abundance of cultural events. It was uplifting to pray together in the procession and we were delighted to see the openness of the leaders of the Orthodox Churches, and, for all of us, it was an encounter of standing value to see the Holy Father in Heroes' Square and to pray with him.

Yes. For Greek Catholic eyes, heart and soul, the Eucharistic Congress, including the Greek Catholic bishops' meeting, was such a harmonious event, where the experience of the love of the Word, incarnated for us and for our salvation, primarily in the Eucharist, but also in the tangibility of the mere encounter, participation and presence, proved very real, affirming and uplifting.