

SERMON FOR ST MARGARET, PRINCESS OF HUNGARY, 1991

World war marks the sanctification of Margaret, Princess of Hungary. She was born as Tartar mauraders threatened to execute the Magyar King Bela IV and his family. But his Greek Queen Maria Lascaris declared that, if the royal family escaped the fury of the Tartar chief Kadan, the child with which she was then pregnant would be dedicated to God and St Dominic as a testimony of thanksgiving to God and as a witness to the need for public penance. Circumstances in fact halted the barbarian raid on the then outskirts of civilized Europe, and Bela was able to return peacefully to the capitol city Buda.

Dominicans nuns already possessed two foundations in Hungary at the time of Margaret's birth, and so when she was only four years old, the Magyar King fulfilled his promise by confiding young Princess Margaret to the Dominican convent at Veszprim.

Later the King established a new convent on an island in the Danube which today still bears the name Margareten Insel. Margaret passed her twenty-eight years of life there and became known especially for her constancy and perseverance, even in face of several attempts by her father to go back on his vow and to force her into a political marriage. (Once he went as far as to obtain her dispensation from Rome.) Margaret's sanctity was also remarked by her contemporaries in the monastery, as well as by those outside.

One story suffices to make the point. A Friar named Romanus died shortly before Saint Margaret. Soon after her death he appeared to his Prior to beg the Friars to offer Masses for him, and to remember him in their prayers, for he was in Purgatory. The Prior said to him: "What is the state of the Lady Margaret who died three weeks ago?" "She has gone up to heaven," said the dead Romanus, "clothed in golden robes adorned with many jewels."

Because of repeated invasions, only the foundations of Margaret's monastery remain today, and her relics were destroyed in the 18th century during the course of political uprisings. Like St Albert the Great, Margaret of Hungary's canonization took a long time. Despite pleas from important

Churchmen, like Blessed John Dominic, and from devout Hungarian kings, like Mathias Corvinus, only in 1942, did Pius XII enroll her in the canon of the saints.

He did this, of course, in the midst of the Second World War. At that time, the Holy Father summarized Margaret's life as one of uninterrupted prayer, penance, and work for her country and the Church. In this testimony, we recognize that Pius XII sought to express a basic Gospel conviction, namely, that the God of peace accomplishes his great victory in hidden and little ways.

This year we celebrate the feast of our Dominican sister Margaret of Hungary during a time a international conflict. Her life reminds us to engage actively in the cause of peace and the promotion of a just international order. Her specifically Dominican witness, it seems to me, teaches us that prayer and penance remain real and powerful instruments in order to bring these goals to realization.