

Laudation

on the occasion of bestowing the JUSTITIA REGNORUM FUNDAMENTUM AWARD

on Brother Csaba Bőjte

If we could, we would hand over the Justitia Regnorum Fundamentum Award without saying a word, only with a blank sheet of paper, to Franciscan monk Csaba Bőjte, founding Chairman of the Saint Francis Foundation of Déva (Deva, Romania). Mere words are unworthy of praising the work of Brother Csaba.

Brother Csaba is a charismatic man, an embodiment of divine simplicity. His name has become a synonym for love in action. It would not be appropriate to praise him. By his own admission, he does not like to be praised. Once he wrote the following: "... it was a wonderful experience to take in children in God's name; doing good selflessly gives joy that cannot be compared to anything. That is the true face of man. I would not give up this joy, this feeling of decency for the finest dinner or any award. I do not mean to say that one does not have to eat or can get by without material goods or occasionally being patted on the back. All I want to say is that there is no greater joy than to do good, be good, be kind."

Csaba Bőjte was born in Kolozsvár (Cluj, Romania), and grew up as a half-orphan himself. His father was sentenced to six years in prison for public provocation in 1959 and he would be freed after four years; however, he died one and a half months after his release, as a result of having been tortured in the prison. It was by his father's grave where Brother Csaba first realized that he was in dialog not only with his dead birthfather, but also with the Father in Heaven. In his book "Window to Infinity", he wrote the following: "... If I had to single out the greatest experience, the greatest joy of my life, I dare say it would be this dialog which has been going on, to some degree, ever since... In His presence, one seems to be standing in the light, everything becomes simpler, clearer."

He completed his secular education in Csíkszereda (Miercurea Ciuc, Romania), and then worked for five years at various places, including a mine. He applied—in secret—to the Franciscan Order in 1982. Upon completing his theological studies in Gyulafehérvár (Alba Iulia, Romania) and Esztergom, he was ordained in 1989, then he returned to Transylvania, where he became priest of the Diocese of Gyulafehérvár. After several transfers, in 1992 he was posted to Déva, which became a turning point in his life. As he has recalled on several occasions, one day, just before the mass, a woman with two shabby children came to see him. They were not hers, she had found them at the railway station trying to subsist as beggars. She asked him to take them in. He refused and left to say mass. During that day's Gospel reading, he arrived at the part when Jesus says: anyone who welcomes a little child such as this in my name, welcomes me. Then he saw the two orphan girls opposite him, sitting in the pew. That was the moment that made Brother Csaba take the road of love in action; nowadays, he and his colleagues operate daycare centers or residential homes in more than 80 settlements, and carry

out their work of saving, educating, nourishing the body and soul of abandoned or impoverished children.

Up to this day, more than 5,000 children have been given home, food and faith in the institutions operated by the Saint Francis Foundation of Déva. They support children who have been abandoned by their parents or whose material conditions do not allow them a decent living. In the homes operated by the Foundation, Brother Csaba and his colleagues try to hold together families living in poverty, or to make up to children for the family they do not have.

His serenity, optimism and humbleness, with which he approaches to the children, take their source from the Living God. He speaks the language of the people, the common folk, he wants everybody to understand the message he is conveying. “What is admirable in Brother Csaba is his ability to find the common voice with anyone. He treats everyone as his equal.” “He has an unbelievably strong, personal nexus with all his children”, say those who know him well.

Brother Csaba’s faith is based on experiencing the joy of existence. He firmly believes that “God does not create rejects”: all we have to do is try and see the good in all of His creations, including the abandoned, dirty street urchins – the warm rays of love “turn even the ugliest ducklings into swans”. Every child is a miracle; however, it requires a lot of patience to transform them into useful members of society. When he sees such children, in their torn, shabby clothes, for the first time, he cannot help thinking that they might turn out to be the Attila József of the 21st Century. And what a feeling it is that he could be the one giving them the pen with which they would write their immortal masterpieces. Most of the children brought up in the homes operated by the Saint Francis Foundation graduate from high school, even from college or university; some of the former residents of these homes work now as caretakers, or even principals of these homes.

His activities, highly successful and recognized irrespective of the difficulties, are exemplary. His work has been recognized with dozens of awards, his thoughts are preserved in numerous books. For him, however, the greatest recognition is when his former foster children inform him that they have graduated from university, started a family: with the assistance of Brother Csaba and his colleagues, they have completed their intended mission.

The message of his work is that there always is hope and there is no situation that cannot be overcome.

This award, established by the ombudsmen in 2007, is awarded every year, on the anniversary of the institution’s establishment, as recognition of outstanding efforts and professional activities carried out in the interest and for the benefit of society’s most vulnerable groups. Through bestowing the *Justitia Regnorum Fundamentum Award*, the Commissioner for Fundamental Rights, in addition to expressing his personal appreciation, would like to recognize the tireless and selfless work carried out by Csaba Bőjte and his colleagues for a quarter of century in order build the Kingdom of God and the society of today through embracing abandoned and impoverished children.

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