



***We wish all our kind Readers a Merry Christmas!  
Minden kedves Olvasónknak áldott Karácsonyt kívánunk!***

## **How Much Is a Prayer Worth? - Mennyit ér az imádság?**

*Here is a heartwarming Christmas story from a very harsh time: the end of World War II in Hungary. The Russian occupying forces were rounding up people and sending them to Siberia, the country was still reeling from the effects of the war, and the food supply was limited.*

*It has been taken from *A Hajnal Szép Sugara, Szeretettláng.blog, december 23. 2015.**

It happened some days before the first peaceful Christmas following the war.

A broken, very tired woman stepped into a small grocery store and asked for some foodstuffs for Christmas dinner. The storekeeper did not care for beggars, nevertheless asked the woman patiently:

"And how much can you spend on it?"

The woman replied with embarrassed bitterness:

"My husband never returned from the war, my two little children are sick with fever, and I myself can only offer you a prayer."

"A prayer?" asked the dumbfounded shopkeeper. "And how much is that worth? Where can I possibly procure anything for that from the black marketeers?"

The woman said nothing, just stood there, with tears in her eyes. The shopkeeper was somewhat ashamed, and to play for time, said to the war widow:

"All right. Write down that prayer at home and bring it to me – we'll weigh it somehow."

To his surprise the woman took out a folded piece of paper from her pocket and said, apologetically: "I already wrote it down last night while I sat by their bed, watching over my sick children."

Meanwhile, the little shop filled up with people. To make a good impression on his customers, the shopkeeper snatched the paper from the woman's hand and, without reading it, threw it on the balance pan in place of the weights. Of course he already regretted having agreed to the game, so he sneered:

"Let's see now how much your prayer is worth?"

He then threw a bag made of twisted newspaper and filled with flour, some 10 ounces, on the scale. The pointer didn't budge. The shopkeeper just stared.

The customers also cast questioning glances at the shopkeeper. In confusion, he added a paper bag of sugar, half a loaf of bread, then some seven ounces of lard, but the scale did not move. Stunned, he kept piling on stuff, not knowing whether out of charity or anger, because the customers were watching. He tried to be firm then, red-faced, told the woman:

"Won't you finally pack it away? I have other customers too!" - while he himself was aware that he didn't know what he was saying.

The woman, embarrassed on account of her tears, quickly packed away the food and started to leave. But the shopkeeper called after her: "By golly, and you're leaving the eggs?" as he handed her two paper-wrapped eggs too. The woman only said, "God will bless you for all this!" and left.

As if waking from a dream, the shopkeeper immediately examined the scales and could only scratch his head as he saw that they were broken. In his anger or confusion, he pocketed the slip of paper.

Before Christmas Eve, the shopkeeper's two sons, of draftable age – who he had thought had disappeared – came home. They had been taken by the Russians from a train arriving from Austria, all of them to be sent to forced labor. These two escaped from the transport while still in Hungary.

He also received a message from his wife in the hospital, asking him to bring in a winter coat, because she had recovered from typhoid.

The shopkeeper, who was not a believer, felt that he had to thank God for the things that had happened to him, and he scrambled to find "the very valuable paper". Once he found the ragged slip, he read with amazement the short sentence: "Give us this day our daily bread. (Mt 6:11)"

He never forgot the episode, but instead was definitely grateful to the strange unknown woman, whom he never met again.

Over the passing decades, he almost believed the event had been a Christmas dream, but he was reminded every time by the yellowed "paper of worth" (this is a literal translation, meaning "stocks" in Hungarian) – framed as it was in a place of honor in the room, like some charter of privilege. Everyone in the family knew the story of the slip of paper and ever since then, when they gathered on Christmas Eve with the grandchildren, they would always recite the Our Father, and when they came to "our daily bread", tears would glisten in the eyes of each one of them.

## Mennyit ér az imádság?

A háborút követő első békés karácsony előtti napokban történt.

Egy megtört, igen fáradt asszony lépett be egy boltocskába és a karácsonyi vacsorához kért némi ételkészítést. A boltos nem szívlelte a kéregetőket, az asszonyhoz mégis türelmesen szólt:

„És mennyit tud rá költeni?” Az asszony szégyenlős keserűséggel azt felelte:

„Férjem nem jött haza a háborúból, a két kisgyermekem lázas beteg, én magam pedig csupán egy kis imádságot tudok önnek felajánlani.”

„Imádságot?” képedt el a kereskedő. „Aztán mennyit ér az? Hol tudok én azért bármit is beszerezni a feketézők-

től?”

Az asszony azonban nem szólt, csak könnyezve állt.

A kereskedő kissé elszégyellte magát, és hogy halogassa a dolgot, így szólt a hadiözvegyhez: „Na nem bánom! Írja le otthon azt az imát és hozza el nekem – majd megmérjük valahogy!” Legnagyobb meglepetésére azonban az asszony elővett zsebéből egy összehajtott papírost és mentegetőzve átadta:

„Már meg is írtam az éjszaka, amikor öröködtem beteg gyermekeim ágyánál!”

A kis üzlet közben megtelt emberekkel. A boltos, hogy valamiképp jól fessen vevői előtt kikapta az asszony kezéből a papírt és anélkül, hogy elolvasta volna – rádobta a mérlegsúlyok helyére. Persze már bánta, hogy belement a játékba, de azért így kájkodott: „Na lássuk, mennyit ér az imája?” Ezt követően a mérlegtálcára lökött egy sodort újságpapír stancilisztet, úgy 30 dekát. A mutató meg se mozdult. A kereskedő csak nézett. A vevők is kérdően tekintettek a boltosra. Ez zavarában rátett egy stancilicukrot is, meg egy fél vekni kenyeret, aztán 20 deka zsírt, de a mérleg meg se mozdult. Elképedve egyre csak pakolta, már azt se tudta, hogy zavarában, szeretetből vagy dühében, mert közben a vásárlók is figyelték. Próbált kemény lenni, aztán elvörösödött arccal odaszólt az asszonynak:

„Na pakolná már el végre? Más vevőm is van!” – miközben maga is észrevette, hogy nem is tudja, miket beszél.

Az asszony röstellve könnyeit, sebtében elpakolta az ételmezt és indulni készült. A boltos azonban utána szólt, „Ejnye, a tojásokat meg itt hagyja?” – és átadott még kettő, papírba göngyölt tojást is. Az asszony csak annyit mondott, hogy „Az Isten megáldja mindezért!” – és távozott.

A kereskedő – mint aki álomból ébredt – azonnal megvizsgálta a mérleget és csak a fejét vakarta, mert látnia kellett, hogy az eltörött. A cédulát mérlegében, vagy zavarában, zsebre vágta!



A boltosnak még Szenteste előtt hazajött két eltűntnek hitt leventekorú fia, akiket társaikkal együtt egy Ausztriából érkező vonatról szedtek le az oroszok, hogy kényszermunkára vigyék mindet. Ők ketten még Magyarországon megszöktek a transzportból. A feleségétől is üzenet jött a kórházból, hogy vinne be neki télikabátot, mert meggyógyult a tifusból.

A kereskedő, aki nem volt hívő ember érezte, hogy meg kell köszönnie Istennek a vele történeteket és összevissza kapkodva kereste a „sokat érő papírt”. Amint keze ügyébe került a viseletes cédula, elcsodálkozva olvasta a rövidke mondatot: „Mindennapi kenyereinket add meg nekünk ma.” (Mt 6,11)

Az esetet soha nem felejtette el, sőt kifejezetten hálát érzett a különös, ismeretlen asszony iránt, akivel azután soha többé nem találkozott.

Az évtizedek múltán már-már csak karácsonyi álomnak hitte volna a történetet, de az a megsárgult „értékpapír” – bekeretezve, mint valami kiváltságlevél – a szoba főhelyén emlékeztette. A cédula történetét a családban mindenki ismerte és azóta, ha Szentesténként összejöttek unokásként, mindannyiszor együtt imádkozták a Miatyánkot, s a „mindennapi kenyereink”-höz érve, valamennyiük szemében megcsillantak a könnyek!

*A Hajnal Szép Sugara  
Szeretletláng.blog, december 23. 2015*

## On the Christmastree market

By: Mihály László Barna

*Ezt a verset Mihály László Barna Hazavágyom című versesfüzetéből vettük, amit a SZEFE - Székely Egyetemi és Főiskolai Hallgatók Egyesületének - marosszéki csoportja adott ki Budapesten, 1926-ban. (Jellemző az akkori gazdasági helyzetre, hogy ennek a 80-oldalas kis füzetnek az ára 25.000 korona volt!)*

Én nem mehettem: messze úztek onnan,  
Szurony, kegyetlen önkény elhatárol.  
Én nem mehettem: utrakeltetek ti  
A hóbundás, mogorva Hargitáról.

Sudár fenyők, örökzöld drága galyak  
Bámultok ott a zajos Dunaparton.  
Amint hallom: alkuszna tireátok,  
Szemem könnyes lesz s a fejem le-  
hajtom.

Egyenkint kérdezlek halkán s felelek:  
Karácsony lesz otthon is, édes ünnep...  
Jaj! harmadszor talál már így magam-  
ban:  
Gyötrelmeim sohase szűnnek.

Én nem mehettem  
S imára csuklik szinte most a térdem:  
Én nem mehettem s zord hazám fenyői  
Meglátogattak, eljöttek értem.

*Mihály László Barna (1902-1977), poet, novelist and journalist, was born in Székelyudvarhely. Following World War I, he went to Budapest, where he obtained a teaching degree in Hungarian and history. He married Jánossy Margit, a writer. He was a contributor to many literary journals, including "Pásztortűz" and "Erdélyi Helikon". He wrote under the pseudonym "Pasquino". His poems are marked by Catholic ethics, love of his Székely homeland and homesickness. During World War II, Mihály was a press correspondent in Italy. After the war, he worked in the Szabó Ervin Könyvtár.*

## Betlehemezés in Debrecen

Karolina Tima Szabo

*International Bethlehem Reunion. We are coming up to the Advent Season, so let's talk about the Bethlehem Reunion.*

*Betlehemezés is a very popular, dramatic, peasant Christmas play, a re-enactment of the birth of Jesus. The name itself comes from the biblical city of Bethlehem. The players dress up as kings, or Mary and Joseph, but the most popular are the shepherds.*

*Betlehemezés, as we call it, is a very old*



*A group of betlehemezők*

tradition in Hungary. The oldest Bethlehem (Nativity) play's words were recorded by Liptai István, a priest of Ecseg, dated between 1684 and 1694, in Latin and in Hungarian. This tradition is so important and is so embedded in the heart of the Hungarian people that they carried it on, although secretly, even during the rule of Socialism.

According to popular folk custom, on the afternoon of Christmas Day, children and young ones go from house to house, with a Nativity set in the shape of a church in which the Holy Family can be seen. It is usually carried by two angels, as they sing and play out their skits. Some present Joseph and Mary arriving in Bethlehem and looking for a room. Others

dress as the three kings (wise men); but the shepherds' acts are the main feature of the *betlehemezés*.

Usually, there is a dialog between the three shepherds, one of whom is hard of hearing and misunderstands the others. The shepherds are simple but honest people who recognize the Son of God in the baby who lies in the manger, and they present symbolic gifts to him.

At the end they are invited into the house and receive gifts of fruit, some food or money.

For the last 28 years, Hungarians in the Carpathian Basin have been getting together on the second weekend in December for the Bethlehem Reunion; and since 2006, Debrecen is the venue.

Hungarian *betlehemezők* from the Carpathian Basin come together from *Erdély* (Transylvania), *Partium*, *Vajdaság* (Serbia), *Kárpátalja* (sub-Carpathia), *Felvidék* (Slovakia). A German-speaking group from Várdomb also participates.

This year, the Reunion will be held on December 8-10. More than 20 groups will arrive, and on Friday, around 5 PM, they will parade to the opening ceremony on Kossuth tér. On Saturday, from 9 AM to 8 PM, each individual group, one after another, will present their play at the Debrecen Cultural Center. Yearly, more than 10,000 people see these plays.

Many recordings of the events have been made. If one cannot attend in person, these can be purchased and shared with family and friends. The CD's also serve as fundraisers for the event.

On Sunday, the Reunion ends with a trade meeting.

The groups visit many areas in Debrecen and villages and towns around the city, and show their

plays in schools and cultural centers. The celebration continues until Christmas. The square in front of the *Nagy Templom* (Great Church) is the venue for folksongs and folk music presentations.

The purpose of the Reunion is to strengthen the relationship between the Hungarians who, thanks to the Treaty of Trianon, are now living in other national jurisdictions, and to help preserve their cultural identity as well as this most sacred heritage.

Debrecen city's mayor once stated that "Without traditions, we have neither present nor future".



## Magyar News Online

242 Kings Hwy Cut-off  
Fairfield, CT 06824  
[www.magyarnews.org](http://www.magyarnews.org)

Editor: Erika Papp Faber  
Founder, Editor and  
Publisher

Emeritus: Joseph F. Balogh

Editorial Board:  
Olga Vallay Szokolay,  
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Treasurer : Zita Balogh

Photographer:  
Debbie Wood Soos



# Saying Good-Bye to Joseph Balogh

EPF

*A memorial service was held on November 21st at the United Church of Christ on North Avenue, Bridgeport. Interment was in Mountain Grove Cemetery.*



*Joseph Balogh at his 95th birthday celebration*

After I met my husband-to-be in New York, he mentioned that there was a very active Hungarian community in Connecticut. He spoke about the Hubertus Ball, and that the main organizer among the Hungarians of Connecticut was Joseph Balogh.

I made a mental note of it, but we did not come to Connecticut in those days, so I did not meet Joseph at that time. By the time we moved to Connecticut years later, my husband was ill and so we did not participate immediately in the Hungarian social scene. But I did hear Claudia, as she read a piece of the "Hungarian Mosaic" on the radio. And I also heard the broadcast when they announced the station's immediate closing of the Hungarian program.

As I later learned, this was the motivation for Joseph to start Magyar News. Then I saw a copy of the paper, which aroused my interest. In time, I got to know Joseph and Claudia, and started sending articles for the paper. Only a writer can appreciate what it really meant to have Joseph publish them! I was fortunate to be able to visit Joseph at his home, where I could gain personal insight into the editing

of Magyar News. I admired his wide range of interest, his technical know-how and his persistent Hungarian spirit. Being a journalist myself, we spoke each other's language.

Every month I looked forward to the latest issue of Magyar News. When Joseph announced that he would no longer publish it, I could not accept that. Neither could others. With Bob Kranyik in the lead, several of us decided that we would continue, as far as we were able, what Joseph had started, even if in a different form.

We were aware that his were large shoes to fill. That is how, with some hesitation, Magyar News Online came into being in the summer of 2007, with Joseph Balogh as our Editor Emeritus. We tried to follow his example, providing news of Hungarian events in the Bridgeport-Fairfield area, to acquaint our readers with manifestations of Hungarian culture here and elsewhere around the world, and to keep track of cultural, scientific and sporting events in Hungary. This is what our enthusiastic Editorial Board has been working on for the past ten years, and hopes to continue to do for years to come.

Last April, together with several members of the Editorial Board, I was pleased to be able to congratulate Jóska on his 95<sup>th</sup> birthday – Jóska who for so many years had been the grand old man of the Bridgeport-Fairfield Hungarian community.

In the name of Magyar News Online, I would like to emphasize that we will greatly miss your creative inspiration and guidance, Jóska! We will, to the best of our ability, continue to cultivate your spiritual legacy!

May you rest in peace!



## Linzer Tarts

Karolina Tima Szabo

### Ingredients:

3 cups of flour (I use King Arthur's)  
1 cup sugar  
1 tsp baking powder  
1 cup butter  
2 egg yolks  
1/2 cup milk  
1 tsp vanilla extract  
Apricot and/or strawberry preserves  
Powdered sugar  
Ground walnuts or almonds optional.

### Directions:

Work butter with flour until crumbly. Add rest of the ingredients. Work dough with hand until smooth. Texture consistency should be so it can be rolled. If too hard, add a spoonful of sour cream.

Divide dough into two balls - one a bit larger than the other.

Roll out the larger ball to 3/8" thickness. Cut cookies with a flower-shaped cookie cutter and place them on a cookie sheet. Bake on 350° for 9 to 10 minutes.

Roll out the second ball of dough to the same thickness. Cut it with the same cutter and cut the middle with either a flower-, round or star-shaped small cutter and bake.

Cool cookies on a rack. When cooled, put preserves on the whole cookie and put the one with the hole on the top. Sprinkle the top with powdered sugar.

Bake cookies a day earlier to so they can soften.

### Top variations:

1. Instead of powdered sugar, melt chocolate and dribble on top with a fork.  
Before you bake the top cookies, dip your finger in egg whites, dab the tops, then turn the top of each cookie into chopped walnuts or almonds, and bake. (This is how the original linzer was made. Due to nut allergies, other

## Fr. Emeric Szlezak, OFM, to Celebrate His 100th Birthday

EPF

*Former Pastor of St. Emery Church, Fairfield, CT and long-time Pastor of the Hungarian community of St. Stephen of Hungary in New York City, Fr. Emeric Szlezak will be observing his 100<sup>th</sup> birthday on December 17<sup>th</sup>. We wish him God's continued blessing, as we fondly remember his 19-year tenure at St. Emery's, and 41-year long service at St. Stephen's in New York.*

*We will quote from the story of his life as he told it to The Anthonian ten years ago, in 2007.*

"How I became involved with Franciscanism is a long story. My father Kálmán Szlezák and my mother Elizabeth Beck were married in St. Francis Church in Budapest, Hungary, and I became their fourth child on December 17<sup>th</sup>, 1917.

"Our family lived in what was called the Francis district (Ferencváros) of Budapest, named after the former king of Hungary, Francis Joseph. In 1920, we moved into the inner city of Budapest, a few blocks from the Danube River. My parents became janitors of an apartment house. Around the corner from us was a Franciscan church administered by the friars of the Marian Province.

"After a few months of kindergarten, I left home with my father for America with the expectation that the rest of the family would follow a month later. On November 20<sup>th</sup>, 1923, we arrived at Cherbourg, France, where my father and I boarded the Leviathan, one of the largest ships of the United States Lines. We arrived at Ellis Island on Thanksgiving, and were escorted by an elderly couple, friends of a relative, to their apartment in lower Manhattan.

"On Christmas day, the rest of the family – my mother, sister, and two older brothers – arrived, and since there were now six of us in one room, we could not stay there very long. My



*Fr. Emeric Szlezak*

parents obtained jobs as janitors and an apartment in Brooklyn, and when they found out that they also had to pay rent, they obtained a second janitor's job and an apartment elsewhere. This lasted only a few months.

"Finally, my parents obtained a janitor's job in a larger apartment house in the Greenpoint section of Brooklyn. Meanwhile, after a year and a half in three public schools, in January 1925, I was enrolled in the second grade of St. Alphonsus School on the same street where we lived.

"In Greenpoint, there were other Hungarian families with whom we soon became acquainted. Through them, we learned about the Hungarian church of St. Stephen on East 82nd Street in New York. In 1928, we bought an old two-family house and renovated it from top to bottom.

"Next door to us was an Irish family that had a son called Fr. Cletus Hughes, a member of (the Franciscan) Holy Name Province, who in the autumn of 1932 went with other friars as missionaries to Shasi, China.

"In 1930, my older brother decided to enter St. Joseph Seraphic Seminary in Callicoon, N.Y. Often being his shadow, I followed him there in 1932. After four years, my brother changed the course of his life and entered an engineering school in New York City.

"In May of 1938, the novice master, Fr. Gerard McGlynn, interviewed our class in preparation for entrance into the novitiate. He inquired how I was doing with the Hungarian language

because, he said, the Province may need me at St. Stephen Church, New York. I responded that I could hardly read or write Hungarian, even though it was my spoken home language. He warned me to start doing something about it. How could I, I asked myself, with no books, no grammar, no vocabulary, and no dictionary?

"At the end of my third year of theology at Holy Name College, our class of 27 students was ordained on June 11, 1944 by Archbishop Cicognani. No sooner had I started my fourth year in September, when I was assigned by the Guardian to help out twice a month as a parochial assistant to the Hungarian-speaking parishioners of St. Stephen of Hungary Church. This meant that besides daily classes, I had to prepare sermons in the Hungarian language which I hardly knew. With the help of the Holy Spirit, I managed somehow until January 1945 when I left Holy Name College and was assigned full-time to St. Stephen of Hungary.

"For the next 40 years, I continued my primary ministry to the Hungarian-American community in New York and then did the same while serving at St. Emery Parish in Fairfield, CT for 19 years. In 2005, at the age of 88, I was told it was time to retire. I chose St. Anthony Friary in St. Petersburg, FL, a good choice, however, since I soon found out that my days of priestly activity were not over.

"I was contacted by Bishop Attila Miklos-házy, S.J., who had been appointed to minister to the spiritual needs of Hungarians living outside of Hungary. He asked me to celebrate Mass and the other sacraments for the Hungarians dispersed in the southwestern part of Florida, particularly in the Sarasota area."

In 2007, being a spry 90 years old, Fr. Szlezak was still active as a volunteer Chaplain (which he had been since 1956) of the Catholic War Veterans and Auxiliary, having served as County, State (N.Y.), and several times National Chaplain. He was also Chaplain of the local Knights of Columbus.

Eventually, he was told not to drive any more, and so could no longer offer his weekly Mass in Sarasota – a 36-mile drive each way!

As he said ten years ago: "When I dedicated my life to my Blessed Lord, to do with me what He wanted, I am sure His merciful providence has led me by the hand, and has often reminded me of what He told the Apostles: 'You did not choose me; I chose you and appointed you to go and bear much fruit, the kind of fruit that endures.'" (John 15:16)

On this venerable birthday, may we all wish you, Fr. Szlezak, God's abundant blessings! *Isten éltesse, Imre Atya!*

## St. Emery Celebrates 85th Anniversary

EPF

On November 5th, St. Emery Church in Fairfield celebrated its 85th anniversary on its patronal feast. Fr. Thomas Thorne, Dean of the newly established Deanery F within the Diocese of Bridgeport, was the main celebrant at the combined English-Hungarian 10 AM Mass.

Recalling the life of St. Imre, Fr. Thorne mentioned that his death on a wild boar hunt is questioned by some historians, who believe that he was really murdered by the still pagan faction. St. Imre (Emery) gave his name to the Americas, since the Italian version of his name is Amerigo, as in Amerigo Vespucci.

Returning to the present, Fr. Thorne mentioned that under the new administrative system, several parishes would be clustered together, but what this entails will become clear only as time goes on.

A delicious lunch followed the Mass in the hall downstairs, starting with stuffed cabbage and continuing with roasted pork loin. Scrumptious desserts closed the dinner "as a matter of course".

A raffle was held afterwards, with numerous bottles of wine among the prizes.

On the occasion of this milestone, it might be appropriate to recall some of the highlights of St. Emery's history. In the 1920's and '30's, Fr. István Csemitzky, Pastor of St. Stephen's Hungarian church in Bridgeport, found it increasingly difficult to serve the spiritual needs of the growing number of Hungarians scattered throughout Fairfield. Appealing to the bishop of Hartford (the diocese of Bridgeport was founded only in 1953), permission was granted for the erection of the new church of St. Emery (Imre) in Fairfield.

Appointed first Pastor, Franciscan Father Benedek Bíró said the first Mass in a temporary structure on January 1st, 1932, with 547 of the faithful in attendance at two Masses. Church societies mushroomed. By the end of February, plans were completed for the construction of a church, and ground was broken on Easter Sunday. The cornerstone was blessed on July 31st. Meanwhile, the faithful attended Mass at a temporary chapel erected across the street, on Hibiscus Street.

Work proceeded on the church at top speed. By St. Emery's Day in November, the church and the rectory were complete! They were blessed by the bishop on November 5th. Furnishings were still sparse, but the church was a monument to the work and sacrifice of those 80-100 families who constituted the parishioners and who, in the midst of the Depression, were able to produce the impossible. They were able to burn the 20-year mortgage several years ahead of time, on Labor Day of 1946.

At that time, there were four Sunday Masses, and the great number of children required religious instruction. In 1951, a two-classroom school was built, and Fr. Bíró invited the Daughters of Divine Charity to take over the school. A two-family house was transformed into a convent for them. Debts for those two projects were paid off in two and a half years.

Fr. Bíró died in January of 1952. A statue of St. Francis was set up in front of the church in his memory, and the street next to the church is now named Bíró Street. In 1956, students entered the new, expanded school, and seven years later, the Sisters found a new home in the new convent.



*St. Emery's statue*



*Fr. Thomas Thorne and Fr. Milan Domic at the luncheon*

In 1973, St. Emery merged with St. Stephen Church, which was demolished as part of the preparations for the construction of I-95.

The visit of József Cardinal Mindszenty in 1974 was a highlight in the history of St. Emery's. It is memorialized on a plaque in front of the church and at the street crossing at the end of the block which has been named Cardinal Joseph Mindszenty Square.

During the tenure of Friar Robert Németh, OFM, who was born in Fairfield

six beautiful stained glass windows were acquired from Immaculate Conception Seminary in Troy, NY, depicting various events in the life of St. Francis. Friar Louis Pintye, OFM, who passed away this August, had renovated the church in 2000, for the millennium. And in 2012, St. Emery Church was added to Connecticut's List of Historic Places.

Having been under Franciscan administration since its inception, St. Emery went over to diocesan administration in 2011. Today, the Pastor is Slovenian-born Fr. Milan Dimic.

## This Santa Won't Be Coming Down Your Chimney

*Erika Papp Faber and Éva Wajda*

*Before moving to Connecticut herself, Erika used to visit relatives here, and would see oil trucks with the name Sânta emblazoned on them. Even though the first "a" had a wave over it, instead of the "ékezet", it was obvious that this was a Hungarian name, and she determined that some day she would look into the story of Sânta.*

*That day finally came on a sunny morning at the end of September this year when, together with Editorial Board member Éva Wajda, she went to interview Mr. John S. Santa, Vice Chairman of Santa Energy at the firm's headquarters in Bridgeport.*

This Sânta story has nothing to do with reindeer or chimneys or HO-HO-HO. It is the story of a Hungarian immigrant family, of honest hard work, fair treatment of employees, and perseverance.

Grandpa Sânta was born in 1863, in the town of Janic which is now in the Slovak Republic (since WW I), and emigrated to the US around 1880. Grandma emigrated later, and they were married in the Hungarian St. Ladislaus Church in South Norwalk.

They had two daughters, Anna and Bertha. (Anna would later marry John Lesko, whose family to this day owns a prominent funeral home in Fairfield.)



In 1895, the Sânta family returned to Hungary, to Forró-Encs on the Hernád River. Reason for this may have been the depression of the time, or may have had something to do with a small inheritance. At any rate, that is where Stephen Sânta was born in 1896. Two years later, his family came back to the States, settling in Bridgeport's West End, which was the Hungarian section. That inheritance could not have been a large one, because Grandpa worked in a foundry here to support his family.

Steve attended St. Stephen School, graduating in 1909 or 1910. He then was hired by the Crane Company, a manufacturer of plumbing fixtures. He commuted there by walking or bicycling to its location on South Avenue, across the creek from the present Sânta headquarters. He was active in the Hungarian community, joining the Western Jacksons athletic club and becoming its football team manager. He also played in their band, on the banjo and the mandolin.

In the Pleasure Beach ballroom, Steve met a well-known Irish singer, Madelyn Farley and they were married in 1926. By that time, Stephen worked in the office of the Crane Company but the firm, as so many others, went bankrupt during the Depression. He then got work driving a bread truck; it seemed like a step backwards to go from clerical to manual labor.

A friend working for the Socony Vacuum Oil Company told him of a job opening in the West End. That is where he started running a gas station for that company, later known as Mobil (now Exxon Mobil). When an opening came up for a kerosene truck driver, he took it, delivering that product for the stoves that heated the cold-water flats.

Sometime later, Mobil was getting out of selling kerosene, and offered Stephen the option of buying the business, which he and Madelyn did, on November 4, 1940. By this time, he was 44 years old, had four children (three boys and a girl). His fourth son, John, was born in 1942.

Madelyn's brother George generously lent them three thousand dollars to buy their first fleet of new trucks, in 1947. In addition to transporting kerosene, they also then began delivering heating oil.

In 1957, Stephen came back to buy the building in which he had worked for Mobil on Admiral Street. It then became the headquarters for the Sânta enterprise.

Their three sons: Norman, George and Donald, and the parents were active in the business almost from the start. Then in 1957, Steve and Madelyn turned the business over to those sons with two simple provisions: They would provide lifetime care for their parents and they would make room for their youngest brother, John, if and when he came into the business after he was 30 years old. John finished college in 1964, did his stint in the military and then came into the business too.

In 1972, the Sânta company bought the terminal across the street, and went into wholesale business selling to other fuel dealers. They bought high quality oil from Mobil and many others. In 1983, they purchased Buckley Energy, a commercial industrial oil business also selling gasoline. By then, they were operating 70 or 80 oil trucks, in addition to service trucks. For the company's 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary in



*Left side:top: Santa brothers:John, George, Donald, Norman (seated). Center: the Santa wives. Bottom:Stephen and Madelyn Santa. Right side:top:kerosene truck. Center:part of the first truck fleet. Bottom: John Santa at entrance to Santa Energy headquarters*

1990, new colors were adopted. In the mid-nineties they purchased a large wholesale fuel terminal in Tiverton, Rhode Island. They are now doing business in all six New England States. For a while, they also dealt in natural gas but have now sold that portion of the company.

John was in partnership with his brothers until 1993 when he began to buy out their interest in the firm. By 2004, he in turn was bought out by his nephews. But the surviving brothers (Norman has died) all still retain a portion of the business. Today, three nephews, a great-nephew and a great-niece are working there. Lest anyone think this is nepotism, the firm is run on the merit basis: the philosophy that they all must earn their jobs. Today, Sânta Energy employs close to 200 people.

That's quite an achievement for the sons of a Hungarian immigrant who started with one kerosene truck! And it proves their motto, which they adopted in their 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary year: "You can believe in Sânta!"

*John S. Santa, K.M. is Vice Chairman of Santa Energy, and is also a member of the American Association of the Sovereign Military Order of Malta. Visiting a friend who had been incarcerated, he saw the unmet needs of inmates, particularly their need for spiritual support, addiction therapy, anger management, job training, and above all, the need for jobs upon their release. John Santa is responsible for the establishment of the Malta Prison Volunteers of Connecticut (MPVCT) – now called the Malta Justice Initiative – advocates who inform and educate the public of the opportunities in criminal justice reform. They train prison ministers, and have distributed over 100,000 copies of The Malta Bible and The Malta Prayer Book, in English and in Spanish. They have operated a resettlement program called New Life Ministries in New London, CT, and the Prodigal Project which aims to convince employers to hire the formerly incarcerated. John Santa and his brothers are all grateful to their Dad*

*for having taken them along to the West End in their youth and having introduced them to their Hungarian heritage.*

## Shoes on the Danube Promenade

*Allyson Mia Szabo*

*The unusual collection of metal shoes lined up along the Danube River bank is a sad memorial to the Jewish victims who were shot there by the members of the Arrow Cross militia at the end of World War II. A Catholic nun, Sister Salkaházy Sára, also suffered the same fate in December 1944, for having saved the lives of a hundred Jewish people. She has been beatified by the Catholic Church.*



Hungary was a rich country for a long time. A lot of gold was being found in the mines so obviously other countries including Russia, Turkey, and Germany wanted this wealth. To gain this wealth, they invaded. Due to the fact that Hungary is so old (over 1000 years), Hungary has been invaded and has gone through so many hardships. Even if people's plans weren't to destroy Hungary, Hungary and its citizens still suffered because Hungary is located in the center of Europe so

anyone passing through had to go through there first. However, Hungary pushed on even when they didn't have any help from surrounding countries and lost much of their wealth.

One of the invasions Hungary had was by the Germans in March 1944. In October, the Germans overthrew Horthy Miklós and brought Szálasi Ferenc to power along with his Arrow Cross militiamen. This introduced a reign of terror. The Arrow Cross ran through the streets and beat, plundered, and killed Hungarian Jews on the streets publicly. During the winter of 1944-1945, these militiamen rounded up Jews, forced them to strip naked along the banks of the Danube River, and face the water. Sometimes they took the laces out of children's shoes and tied the prisoners together. The firing squad shot the prisoners at close range so they would fall into the river and be conveniently carried away. If they didn't die immediately, the militiamen either shot them in the water or they later died from hypothermia because the water was bone chilling. Their clothes and shoes were taken by the firing squad so the German forces could use them or trade them on the black market. Shoes and clothing, after all, were very valuable during World War II. It didn't matter if you were a child, woman, or man... if you were Jewish and unlucky enough to be rounded up by this group, you would be shot. The Danube during this dark period was known as "The Jewish Cemetery."

Today, you can see a touching memorial for the men, women, and children who gave their lives during that grief-filled winter. Artists/sculptors Pauer Gyula and Can Togay János created "The Shoes on the Danube Promenade." In front of the Parliament building, lined up on the bank of the Danube are 60 rusted cast iron shoes from that period. They are all different sizes and styles that represent the people who were shot there. I myself found it extremely emotional to realize that no one was spared from the Arrow Cross' brutality. Behind this memorial, there are three plaques along

the walkway that are written in Hungarian, English, and Hebrew. They read: "To the memory of the victims shot into the Danube by Arrow Cross Militiamen in 1944-45. Erected 16<sup>th</sup> April, 2005." It is very common for people to lay down flowers, wreaths, or light candles to honor the victims.

The shooting of many innocent Hungarian Jews is one of many tragic events Hungary's citizens faced over the years. "The Shoes on the Danube Promenade" is a great place to visit to reflect on how fortunate we all are. Yes, Hungarians have faced more than their share of tragedies, but they are strong and continue to defend their country and I am one of them.

*Allyson Mia Szabo attends Trumbull (CT) High School, plays the flute and is a member of the school's marching band, which has been ranked second in the nation. She is the granddaughter of our webmaster Karolina Tima Szabo. Allyson wrote this piece following a trip to Hungary with her parents in 2016.*

## **The Last of the Bebeks / Az utolsó Bebek**

*Éva Wajda*

*First mention of Szádvár (located some 37+ miles north of Miskolc), was in a text dating back to 1268. The Bebek family played the most important part in the castle's history. Ferenc Bebek and his son György implemented significant constructions after the Battle of Mohács.*

*Szádvár suffered its heaviest siege in January 1567. The army of the German captain Lazar Schwendi surrounded the castle and demolished a part of the northern wall after a four day bombardment, forcing the heroic defender, Patócsy Zsófia, wife of György Bebek, to surrender.*

*After various other owners of Szádvár, the Habsburgs ordered the demolition of the castle in 1686 to*

*prevent it from becoming a rebel stronghold. Szádvár is today one of the largest ruined castles in Hungary, and is also the one at the highest elevation.*

*We are publishing this article to commemorate the 450th anniversary year of the fortress' defense – by a woman!*

Pelsőcsi Bebek György was one of the most famous and notorious characters who lived in the 16th century. He had a standing army, was the owner of vast estates in Hungary, in the Counties of Borsod, Torna, Gömör, and Abaúj that were amassed over hundreds of years by the Bebek family, including more than 30 castles and fortresses, among them Szádvár, Tornavár, Krasznahorka and Szendrő castles.

His wife, Patócsy Zsófia, was the daughter of Patócsy György, who was the captain of the border fortress (*végvár*) of Gyula and Lord Lieutenant (*főispán*) of Békés County, and who played an important part in defending the Hungarian border from the Turks.

Bebek György was fearless, brave and valiant, as sung by the minstrels and lutanists of his time. He enjoyed great dinners and banquets, and was one of the most famous drinkers of his time. A close friend, Tordai György noted that, as his guest, after four days and nights of eating and drinking tons of wine, the following morning Bebek said goodbye and rode home.

He loved hunting, kept a horde of hunting dogs, trained falcons for hunting. He kept a wildlife/game park that was renowned far and wide. Since he had no sons, his wife and four daughters accompanied him on his hunts and outdid the men in riding horseback and brandishing their weapons.

Bebek György had power and influence and had the political situations not been so entangled, he would have been given a dignified position,

as had his ancestors for several centuries.

The country was divided into three: to the north, Ferdinand the Habsburg king ruled; in Transylvania, it was János Zsigmond; and the middle of the country was under Turkish rule. Bebek would play one side against the other in order to save his estates that were located in the king's territory. He would undertake skirmishes, occupy castles, take prisoners for ransom. As a result of treachery in Fülek, he was caught by the Turks and taken to Constantinople. The distinguished prisoner represented great value because he could be traded for a very high ransom. Bebek György's imprisonment was quite bearable. Although under strict guard, he was favorably treated. He was allowed to write letters, receive ambassadors and friends. He took advantage of the opportunity to organize and procure his ransom, although that was not easy to do. The Sultan made him an offer: become a Muslim and everything will be returned to you. Bebek declined the offer.

While he was held hostage, his wife ran the affairs of the estates and did everything in her power to free her husband. With her two daughters, she traveled to Vienna to plead with the king, but they were arrested. In a handwritten letter, Bebek György begged the king for their release, and his request was granted.

Two forces were working hard to free him: one was János Zsigmond, the other, Ferdinand, who instructed his ambassador to Turkey to do everything in his power to have Bebek released, because this would secure Bebek's alliance to whoever was able to secure his freedom. After many years of negotiations, it was János Zsigmond who won his release and promised to put him under guard until the ransom was paid.

In March of 1565, Bebek György, in festive dress, appeared before the Divan, kissed the Sultan's hand, and he was free. He paid a high price for

his freedom – the promise to release most of his Turkish prisoners and the payment of 30,000 pieces of gold.

Bebek rode a beautiful steed, a gift from the Sultan, to reach János Zsigmond who put him under guard until the ransom was paid, while the Turks also kept an eye on him, and Ferdinand could hardly wait to set his soldiers on him.

Bebek wanted to return to his estates as soon as possible and the Prince asked that two Bebek daughters take his place. Zsófia organized the girls' trip to Transylvania, not an easy task in those dangerous times. She entrusted the valiant captain, Saffarits Péter, with the leadership of the escort team consisting of 30 brave soldiers. They departed Szendrő castle with minimal supplies and fast-paced horses. The girls were raised as boys by their father, nothing scared them, and they carried sabers. Lazar Schwendi, the Hungarian-hating German captain was informed by his spies and sent a mounted team to capture the Bebek girls at all costs. The Hungarian escorts and the two brave Amazons put up a fierce fight with death-defying bravery. They managed to escape with the remaining 14 valiant men to Gyulafehérvár, capital of Transylvania, their father leaving them in the care of the Prince; then he left with his brave men to return home. When Schwendi announced to his superiors that he had been unable to capture the girls, he offered to burn Bebek's estates and destroy his castles, but this barbaric plan was opposed by Archbishop Charles of Austria.

While Bebek was in Transylvania, Lazar Schwendi occupied Szendrő castle, while Patócsy Zsófia, Bebek's wife, was at nearby Szádvár to await the return of her husband. But fate intervened. Schwendi, under orders from the King, surrounded the castle with a huge army. He never dreamed that a castle under the command of a fragile woman would offer tremendous resistance. Szádvár stands on a high cliff surrounded by valleys, with its only entrance on one side; the rest



*Szádvár (rézkarc)*

is steep, almost impossible to climb. Schwendi ordered Patócsy Zsófia to give up the castle. Instead, the brave woman organized its defense. The attackers tried in vain the traditional form of siege, but did not succeed. Then they tried another way of attack, cannon fire from the mountain across from Szádvár. The unexpected response was cannon fire from Szádvár. The defenders put up a fierce fight, in the hope that Bebek would soon arrive with his army, but he was delayed. In spite of the lack of water – the supply had been cut off – the defenders fought back for several days, until part of the northern wall collapsed due to heavy bombardment, making it possible for the attackers to invade.

Zsófia negotiated and bargained for a peaceful departure with Schwendi, who must have been impressed by the courage of this woman. He allowed her free exit, and the defenders were allowed to take all movables,

treasures, horses, personal belongings, leaving only military equipment.

Bebek was near Szádvár with his army and when he learned that the fortress had fallen, he hurried after his wife. They settled in Transylvania with their daughters, but Bebek was restless; he retook several of his castles from the Germans. He died in 1567, the last male descendant of the Bebek line. This is symbolized by the re-

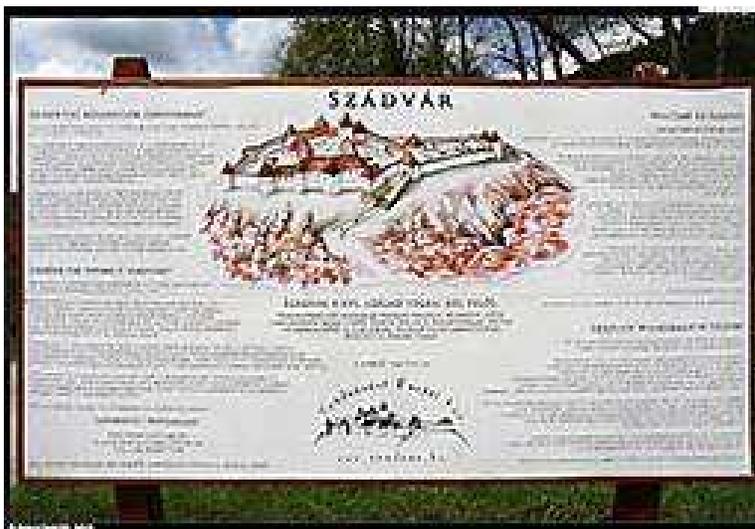
versed ancient coat of arms above the entrance to the family crypt.

As for the Bebek daughters, Zsuzsanna married a Báthory István, Sr. (not the prince of Transylvania); the other daughter, beautiful Judit, inspired Balassa Balint, the famous poet, to write a poem around 1579.

The Austrian ruler confiscated all of Bebek's fortune. His wife tried unsuccessfully to regain it, asserting that she and her daughters were not the cause of anything, and that even her dowry had been taken away with the rest.

*Source: "Szádvárért Baráti Kör", Fecske Csaba: "Az utolsó Bebek". – A historical 3-volume book by Péterfy Károly, published in 1877, also tells the story.*

*Éva Wajda is a member of Magyar News Online Editorial Board.*



# When Mikulás Came to Town

EPF

*In the 1930s, Mikulás – NOT Santa Claus! – routinely came to visit the children of Zebegény on the eve of his feast day, every December 5<sup>th</sup>. (Mikulás had nothing to do with Christmas, when the Christ Child – Jézuska – or the Angels would bring gifts to Hungarian children.)*

*It was arranged by Countess Károlyi Franciska, whose ingenious VirágEgylet Zebegény (Zebegény Flower Circle) provided the children of the village with a framework for games and sports, as well as nature walks and botanical knowledge, home ec training for the girls and cultural activities. (See this month's Classic elsewhere in this issue.)*

*The following has been excerpted from "Napraforgó emlékalbum – Gróf Károlyi Lászlóné és a VirágEgylet Zebegény" (Sunflower Memorial Album – Countess Károlyi Lászlóné and the Zebegény Flower Circle), by Paulisineczné Willem Vera.*

Among the activities organized by *Napraforgó* (Sunflower, the name by which Countess Károlyi Lászlóné insisted that she be called) was the annual visit by Mikulás on December 5<sup>th</sup>. The first time she did this, she revived the ancient custom of the town crier who beat his drum while making the announcement as he went, inviting the children to the Danube River bank. Not only the

children but the whole village gathered the next day to see what would happen.

At dusk, lights appeared on the Danube, and Mikulás, together with his accompanying *krampusz* (a small devil) drew near in a boat rowed by the village ferryman, decorated with lanterns and piled high with gifts, accompanied by fireworks.

The older members of the *VirágEgylet* – the Roses and the Tropical Trees – distributed chocolates and tropical fruits to the delighted children. (You have to remember that citrus fruits and bananas are not indigenous to Hungary, and were considered a rare treat. Ed.)

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It must have been quite a show! City children would have envied the lucky youngsters of Zebegény!



*Mikulás and krampusz arriving in Zebegény - 1931*

## It's a Small World! Kicsi a világ!

*Paul Soos*

I was watching my grandkids at the Stamford, CT Nature Center in the playground area, when I noticed a pretty little girl approximately six years old looking at

me. I was thinking about how much she resembled my granddaughters living in Germany, when she blurted out, "I speak German." A little startled, I really didn't know how to respond but I answered, "Do you live in Germany?"

"No," she said, "we live here." "Where are your Mom and Dad?" I continued. "Over there," she pointed.

I went over to them, introduced myself, and explained that, coincidentally, my son and his family live in Germany. I asked if they were visiting and they replied that they had recently moved here. Introducing themselves with a surname of "Szabó," you can imagine my surprise and curiosity! I had to learn more.

They were Germans and the Dad hardly knew any Hungarian, even though his father was Hungarian. After welcoming the family (they also had a little boy) to Stamford, I translated "*Kicsi a világ!*", and they agreed that it is, indeed, a Small World!

*Paul Soos is a member of the Editorial Board of Magyar News Online, a lay reader at St. Ladislaus R.C. Church in South Norwalk, CT, and a student at the Magyar Studies Hungarian School in Fairfield. He is a former U.S. Air Force Officer.*



## Did you know...

... that this time we have gleaned items dealing with wine, a new memorial, a child gymnast, and the relative difficulty of the Magyar language?

... that the Dereszla Winery *2009 őtputtonyos aszú* wine is on the top 100 list of the Wine Enthusiast's 2017 list? This is the third time the winery is on the top 100 list. But not only the Dereszla Winery, but the Tokaj Mountain wineries as a whole have been recognized.

....that the statue honoring József Cardinal Mindszenty was finally erected in Budapest on November 6<sup>th</sup>, 2017? Originally planned for two figures (see MNO May 2015), the memorial was to include Padre Pio. Because of a shortage of funds, however, sculptor Semjén Zsolt's work could only display Cardinal Mindszenty. Blessed by Péter Cardinal Erdő, Archbishop of Esztergom-Budapest, the statue was erected near one of the many prisons that confined Cardinal Mindszenty, and where, it is said, he was visited by Padre Pio through bilocation.

...that the Foreign Service Institute (FSI) has created five categories to show the approximate time you, as an English-speaker, need to learn a specific language? Cat I is the easiest and Cat V the most difficult; Hungarian is Cat IV. Category IV means it would take 44 weeks (1100 hours) of concentrated study to reach General Professional Proficiency in Speaking (S3) and Reading (R3). Hang in there!

... that Bede Réka, a very talented little girl from Csongrád won, for the second time, the Fit-Kid European Championship in Dublin? In her Hungarian motif-decorated outfit, she performed her routine to the Monti Csárdás, and included gymnastics, floor exercise, acrobatics, and dance. Our congratulations to Réka!

Her routine can be viewed on <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vdIEgQeLdOo>



*Statue of Cardinal Mindszenty*



*Bede Réka*