Hungarian Saints

Saint Stephen of the Arpad Dynasty (969–1038)

He was born under the name of Vajk as the only son of Prince Geza and Sarolt, the daughter of Gyula of Transylvania. After a childhood spent in paganism, he was baptised and took on the name of Stephen, the first Christian martyr. Stephen was appointed to succeed Geza, but had to fight for power with one of his relatives, Koppany, after his father's death. Meanwhile, his advisor Saint Astrik became the archbishop of Kalocsa, and Stephen used his mediation to request a crown and blessing from Pope Sylvester II in 1000. In all probability, he was crowned on 1 January 1001, in Esztergom.

His wife was Giselle, the daughter of the duke of Bavaria, and they had two sons, Otto and Imre. After Otto's early death, Imre became the successor to the throne. He was educated by his father and St. Gellert from a very young age, learning the skills of politics and diplomacy. He often participated in military campaigns as well. However, Stephen's wish was never fulfilled. Before he could pass on the throne to his son, Imre was fatally wounded by a boar, and died.

Stephen created the sovereign Hungarian State, and his people adopted Christianity under his leadership. On 20 August 1083 Stephen became one of the most popular saints in Hungary, and 20 August, which is also his feast day, is celebrated as a state holiday commemorating the foundation of the nation.