

Your Imperial and Royal Highness,

I met you on a resplendent October Sunday following the traditional Mass in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. I remain incredulous that I spoke to a relative of Blessed Charles, the last emperor of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. What a grace! Thank you for granting this interview. You are most generous.

I would like to start with your early life. Given that you were born on the Feast of the Immaculate Conception, do you believe that Our Lady has something special planned for you?

There are so many wonderful feasts throughout the liturgical calendar, but I admit that I am very honored and happy to be born on this special Feast of the Immaculate Conception. That means much to me, and that meaning is growing more with the time as I understand that this feast describes best who the Virgin Mary real is. I have no doubt that on the Feast of the Immaculate Conception, graces are pouring down on earth, and we all benefit from them in a very special way.

I do not know if being born on this day means something special was planned for me, but what I like to think is that maybe something special is delivered to me on December 8 every year. It is clear that we all have a mission on earth. We are not here by pure coincidence, and we all therefore have the duty to find out what God expects from us. The Blessed Mary is a wonderful example of this perfect fulfillment of God's call. Following that example, I would like to serve God in my daily life and find out the mission He assigned to me.

It is clear that Blessed Charles was a loyal son of the Church. Could you share what made him such a wonderful Catholic husband and father?

Blessed Charles was indeed a wonderful husband and father, but it is almost impossible to speak about Charles without speaking about Zita too, as they provide such an example of unity and mutual support in the pursuit of holiness.

I think that Karl understood that marriage was so important and beautiful that it could only be founded on a very strong basis, on a common faith shared by a man and a woman. Before the marriage, Karl took Zita to a place called Mariazell - a famous shrine in Austria where people from all over the ex-empire have a great devotion to the Virgin Mary. Together they put their engagement under the protection of the Virgin Mary, and the evening before the marriage, on October 21, 1911, Karl said to Zita, "now we have to help each other to get to Heaven!"

Blessed Karl and his wife - now Servant of God Zita - experienced wealth, honor, power, a high social position, admiration, etc. But they also experienced great suffering: poverty when they were sent to Madeira with nothing, separation from their children, hatred and treason from people who were supposed to be very close to them, abandonment from their friends, contempt and incomprehension... But how did the couple react? They moved steadily forward, because they had built their union on the Rock.

Karl and Zita had eight children and for them each life was sacred. Karl understood that very well and as he was praying with his children every evening, he used to mention the name of each child and include a prayer for the child expected in the womb of Zita. They also set an example of a joyful couple in front of their children, even in very hard moments. Although

they were very busy, they dedicated much time to their children and also special moments with each child personally. My father used to tell us how he remembered that during the numerous family reunions, along with his many cousins, his grandmother, Zita, always insisted on private time with her grandchildren.

In that sense, I believe Karl and Zita are wonderful examples for married couples striving to fully live their vocations and to assume the responsibility of education and personal development of their children. They also recall us the important and very actual task to defend constantly the institution of the family.

Were there any other Hapsburgs from history that were as devout as Charles?

Blessed Charles presents a unique personality among the Hapsburgs. He was the last Emperor and King of Austria-Hungary. He ruled over the whole empire in very difficult times and after the First World War he had to sustain his family in often very hard conditions, especially during the asylum in Madeira. Despite the circumstances, he kept faith and hope and chose to serve God in all matters.

Before him, Franz-Joseph was also known to be very devout and attended Mass every morning before starting the day. The family is known for having been very devout throughout history, and I like to think that this is still true today. As faithful supporter and defender of the pope and the Church for centuries, they strongly defended Christian values while respecting other beliefs. Most of the monarchs also had a clear understanding of their duty, and considered their position a commission from God. That did not mean of course in any way an authorization of the execution of power of any kind, but much more the absolute duty to follow and imitate the example of Jesus Christ.

A good example would be the strong devotion to the Eucharistic. After the institution of the feast of Corpus Christi in 1264 by Pope Urban IV, the Eucharistic procession in Vienna was always followed by the Emperor throughout the centuries, starting with Rudolph I. The family also had a great devotion towards the Statue of the *Infant Jesus of Prague* and the *Mary with bowed head*. Mariazell of course is one of the most significant places where the family often came to venerate the Blessed Virgin Mary to ask protection for their peoples. These devotions remain very important for us today.

Do you have the opportunity to integrate the Catholic faith in your work? Does your job frequently bring you to the United States?

I am actually working in a global youth organization that is committed to promoting the dignity of the person and building free and just societies through policy, education and culture. That is done through direct contact with policy-makers at the European Parliament and at the United Nations, but also through training of young people to work at regional and international levels to impact policy and culture.

Although the organization is not a religious one, the Faith always plays an important role for me personally. Nevertheless, Today's young people are often totally unfamiliar with or even reluctant to discuss religious elements, so we try to convey universal values (defense of human persons, family, solidarity, etc.) in ways they can understand. Some topics are of course very much linked to faith, so it is always a delicate but important task to constantly find the right balance between faith and reason.

I remember the wedding of Prince Charles and Lady Diana in 1981. Many Americans joined a worldwide audience of 750 million people to watch the union of a royal couple. Do you believe that such interest by the public revealed a yearning that people naturally have for royalty?

Together with the coronation ceremony of Queen Elisabeth in 1953, which was actually one of the first events transmitted live worldwide, the wedding of Prince Charles and Lady Diana was probably one of the most important royal event in Great Britain. The monarchy is part of a centuries-old tradition and is still considered as a very important institution in the mind of the British people.

As to whether this event reveals a “yearning that people naturally have for royalty”, I think that there are different ways to approach the subject.

On the one hand, we should be aware that many people assist or watch a royal wedding on their screen out of pure curiosity. Some people very much link it to fairy tales, they like to see how a royal wedding looks, how a royal couple behaves, etc. Others are happy to see that a royal family offers continuity and stability to the people by founding a new family and giving birth to a new generation.

But there is also another approach. Aristotle said it long ago: Man is a *social animal*. People usually live in societies because they can interact with one another and build relationships, but also because that society gives the people a framework and reference points. For centuries - or I should say even millennia – royalty assumed this role by giving the society an impetus, and through the person of a king or an emperor, people could identify themselves with the monarch and thus also to the country itself. Even though throughout history kings and emperors did not always play the role they should have, the principle stays the same: there is a natural yearning to look up to someone in order to find guidance. I think then that royalty can in fact fulfill this yearning, but only as long as the monarch sets a good example of service, incarnates good values and grants the country stability. History shows us that it does not last long otherwise.

Have you found that Americans and Europeans differ in how they react to royalty?

First, let me tell you that during my stay in the United States I was really impressed and touched by the way the people welcomed me. Whatever background, wherever I went, people greeted me very warmly, and this was extremely comforting as I came in this country without knowing anyone.

Americans reacted to royalty in a very positive way, they were always happy to meet. No doubt many of them might have been driven by pure curiosity to meet a member of a European royal family (and this is perfectly fine with me), but nevertheless true respect and kindness were always shown. On many occasions, people told me personally how much they loved the family and how important it was for them to see that the new generation sticks to the values the family stands for. Then, I was also impressed by the high interest many Americans have for European history. And as the Hapsburg played a major role in the Old Continent’s history, we often had long and very interesting conversations.

Although America does not really have a history involving royalty, reactions were in many ways very similar to Europe. What differs the most, I think, is the fact that the subject is much more politicized in Europe, as royalty represents an integrate part of the institutional framework of many countries. In European monarchic systems, the king plays an actual political role – although very limited – und therefore a royal family will very often be in the “sight” of the media. But more than a political role, monarchies represent a very strong symbol for a country. For example, who represent a country best than a king who stands above political parties and whose dynasty speaks for a country’s history and continuity in the future? Of course, royalty also speaks for values, and these can be subject to enthusiasm and commitment from part of the people, but also sometimes to critics. This has also an impact in the way the people react towards royalties.

Will you be attending the wedding of Prince William of Wales and Miss Catherine Middleton later this year?

No, but I wish them all the best and God’s blessing for their wedding. It is a very important step for the British Crown, as the stability and continuity of the monarchy will very much depend on their marriage.

This same weekend I will be in Rome, attending the beatification of Pope John-Paul II. I had the great honor of meeting him and I do not want to miss the occasion to pay homage to someone who did so much for humanity and especially for the youth, constantly promoting the values of love and respect, and encouraging the people to live their faith truly and act accordingly.

What do you believe is the role of the Hapsburg family in today's secular Europe?

The Austrian-Hungarian Empire is often described as a “European Union before its time”. For centuries, the Hapsburg family ruled over a vast empire that included 13 European countries - or parts of those countries -, about 70 million people representing 15 nationalities and 12 different official languages. This unique Empire with its mix of religions, languages and cultures, allowed the most diverse people to live together for six and half centuries. It was the role of the Hapsburg dynasty to make sure that all minorities were protected and that each people could use its language and worship according to its beliefs.

During that period, the role of Hapsburg monarchs was of course a political one, but not only. The Austrian-Hungarian monarchy was also called “a personal dynastic union between peoples and a family”. In that sense, it was a lot about a personal commitment towards the people. The dynasty was a symbol of unity and respect between the people.

As a ruling family, we had rights, but also duties. Now, we no longer have rights, but our duties remain. This is something that is very important to recall, as you *can* lose your rights, but not your duty, because the latter depends on you. Blessed Emperor and King Charles showed us that he considered his reign as a personal commitment to his people. And this commitment did not end after he left his country.

Our role today has not changed in the sense that the duties remain the same. In societies where relativism became a major ideology, the dramatic lack of guidance, of reference points, is an obvious result. It is our goal and our mission, for all of us, whatever position in society, to be these reference points, setting an example of respect, solidarity, and strong commitment

to defend the dignity of the person. Thank God the Hapsburgs are, of course, not alone in this mission, as we are all called to take part to this mission of *service*.

Have you found any evidence of a revival of the Christian faith taking place in Europe? What part is Pope Benedict XVI's motu proprio, *Summorum Pontificum*, playing in the revival of Catholicism?

In his apostolic letter, *Summorum Pontificum*, Pope Benedict XVI reaffirms the permission to use the extraordinary expression of the Roman Missal for all those who desire it. The Tridentine Mass is attracting a large and growing devotion, also among young people. One of the reasons for this is surely the search for greater beauty and reverence in general but in worship particularly. But there is also a yearning for solidarity among the people of God. The Tridentine Mass gives us an opportunity to assist at Holy Mass in the same manner as our ancestors, to worship and receive Our Lord in the same way, and this is a profound and moving experience that unifies the Church in a very special way.

The Pope reminds however that, whatever rite is used, the belief does not change and it should thus never become an element of division, but rather promote the unity of the great diversity of the Church. This decision of the Pope, along with his predecessor, certainly helped the faith to be practiced more deeply.

Nevertheless, the situation of the Catholic Faith in Europe is not easy right now. Many churches are nearly empty, fewer people practice their faith, and the Church is constantly criticized in the media. The popularity of the Church went down and recent scandals did certainly not help the situation. An obvious result is that fewer people actually dare consider themselves practicing Christians. Even Christianity itself starts to be a subject of shame.

One striking example in Europe is the recent denial of Europe's Christian roots in the new Lisbon Treaty. The latter can be considered a "constitution" for the European Union. This denial obviously reflects a shame that Europeans have (above all, politicians) in acknowledging their Christian tradition and history. This attitude explains in great part the lack of European identity that we are facing and that European politicians so desperately try to promote, and this in turn also leaves room for all sorts of ideologies.

I have no doubt that a revival of the Christian faith will take place in Europe and everywhere else, and it is actually already on its way. But this will only really be the case when Christians finally dare to affirm – always with respect towards others' beliefs and cultures - their Faith and their roots.

The Church has a fundamental role to play as the institution that delivers the sacraments to the faithful, but also because She represents the mystical body of Christ and thus only in her can we all be united. It is through the Church that we can walk towards the real finality of our lives. Christians need to re-discover the wonderful and rich message of love that the Church wants to deliver.

Thank you once again for agreeing to this interview. May Our Lord, through the intercession of Our Lady, grant you many blessings!