

# Cardinal welcomes pope's pledge to visit Hungary for Eucharistic congress

VATICAN CITY (CNS) – The day Pope Francis announced his intention to travel to Budapest, Hungary, in September for the closing Mass of the International Eucharistic Congress, the country went back on a COVID-19 lockdown that included banning all public gatherings.

“Even if at this moment, public Masses in Budapest are suspended because of the pandemic, the churches are not closed, and people come to pray before the Blessed Sacrament. It is moving to see what hunger and thirst the people have for the Eucharist,” Cardinal Peter Erdo of Esztergom-Budapest told Vatican News on March 11.

The Hungarian government put the country back on a strict lockdown March 8 in response to a rapid rise in COVID-19 infections since mid-February. Schools, stores selling nonessential items, restaurants and gyms were all closed until April 7 and “all forms of assembly” were forbidden.

Returning to Rome from Iraq the same day, Pope Francis told reporters that his next trip would likely be to “Hungary for the final Mass of the International Eucharistic Congress – not a visit to the country, but for the Mass.”

After being postponed a year because of the coronavirus pandemic, the congress is scheduled for Budapest Sept. 5-12.

“The congress will take place,” the cardinal said. “There is no doubt about it,” he said, even if that has meant planning for a variety of scenarios in response to the health situation.

“We await the Holy Father as a witness of hope because his presence can give hope after so many months of darkness and pandemic,” the cardinal said. “We will take up our lives again, renewed thanks to the Spirit: that is the aim of the meeting. We hope we can encounter Christ in a solemn way in Budapest in September.”