

Ladies and gentlemen,

Czech Statehood Day is, along with the Day of the Establishment of an Independent Czechoslovak State, the most important public holiday. It is a reminder of our thousand-year tradition and that we belong to western civilisation. It is a fixed point in our identity. It tells us that we are Czechs and also that we are Europeans.

Whereas 28 October is a celebration of our republican tradition, an expression of the continuity of the republican establishment, 28 September refers to older and deeper sources of our state's existence. To put it symbolically, without Saint Wenceslas there would not have been an October 1918. This is because there would not be a strong national consciousness, an awareness of our own identity and a desire for the values to again be formally expressed in an independent state. Or, at the least, the formal statement would not be that natural.

Thanks to the tradition of Saint Wenceslas, our state is not an artificial state. It is not a state arising from an administrative decision or as a consequence of some sort of historical tremor. It did not arise ad hoc, thanks to a fortunate or unfortunate chance. It has its natural, centuries-old boundaries, and not just geographical boundaries, but, in particular, cultural boundaries, boundaries that define every old European nation. By this I obviously mean a nation in the political sense, a national of people that identify with the Czech basin, with its history and with all the ethnic groups and cultural influences that formed it.

Especially strong emphasis should be placed on the word political. This was not always the case. Ethnic definitions often had priority. True, sometimes for reasons understandable and excusable, in particular when it was a reaction to nationally motivated oppression. Nevertheless, it is necessary to say clearly that the happiest periods of our national life are linked with national and cultural diversity and tolerance. In the sense of the famous liberal motto: "Unity in diversity." Which both America and the European Union profess.

This is another reason to remember Saint Wenceslas. For he is a symbol of our tradition of plurality. A tradition that is not built on national self-definition, but, on the contrary, on co-operation, a tradition that does not divide, but unites, a tradition that is a western tradition in the best sense of the word. A tradition that, together with pluralism, brings faithfulness to common fundamental values. Values that are even higher than national

society, because they guarantee respect for every individual to which they allocate the same, natural rights.

Saint Wenceslas is an ideal national saint. On the one hand, his personality perfectly defines our national and state identity. Perfectly because he defines it without words, defines it on the basis of consistent and generally perceived instincts. On the other hand, Saint Wenceslas in no way divides us from the family of proud and free European nations. On the contrary, his legacy confirms that we have been part of it for a thousand years.

We are the nation of Saint Wenceslas, we are his heirs. The Saint Wenceslas Chorale is rightly our second national anthem. For centuries before the establishment of the republic, it was even our first national anthem. It was the key stone and expression of the idea of Czech statehood. We can turn to it even today. Its words, "Do not let us or our descendents perish," are not subject to the erosion of time. They reflection a link between the past, present and future. The same as the life of Saint Wenceslas, they reflect the link between our national and European identity. It is good to remind ourselves of this at least once a year, on this day.

Thank you for your attention!