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Messages

BLESSED JÁNOS BRENNER AND DANIJEL HALAS, SERVANT OF GOD

their lives and martyrdom

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Introduction

This comprehensive collection of material presents the lives and memories of the martyred priests Blessed János Brenner (1931, Szombathely - 1957 Szentgotthárd-Zsida) and Danijel Halas (1903, Črenšovci - 1945, Hotiza), as well as the places associated with them. The collection includes a summary of the works, historical sources, research results and some personal recollections. Through the story of the two martyrs, their sacrifices and the events that followed their murders, the reality of the historical period - Yugoslavia in the 1940s and Hungary in the 1950s - and the specific relations between the border region are revealed. At the same time, their lives serve as an example of how to live everyday life serenely and without fear, under any political system or independently of it, and to stand up for our faith to the end.

The aim of the collection is to present the lives and legacies of the martyrs and the materials that elaborate on them in a comprehensive, informative and well-organised way. This document in itself is a record of the lives and memories of the martyrs, but we hope that it will also help those who wish to learn more about their story. It also provides a useful basis for the professional organisation of pilgrimages and youth programmes in the region.

The collection has been prepared in the framework of the project *Untold Stories - Pilgrimages in the Slovenian-Hungarian Borderlands*, in order to provide a professional basis for the project. The project, known as MESSAGES, aims to preserve and present the common religious, historical and spiritual heritage of the border region. It focuses on the lives and memories of two martyrs, Blessed János Brenner and Danijel Halas, whose life and martyrdom provide an opportunity to explore the local events of the underlying historical period

The project will pay particular attention to involving young people and the local community, creating a living link between the past and the present, helping to preserve and pass on a shared cultural heritage.

Through the exploration of martyrs' memorials and the creation of new pilgrimage routes, the MESSAGES project will help the Hungarian-Slovenian border region to find its place on the map of religious tourism.

The MESSAGES project is implemented in the framework of the Interreg VI-A Slovenia-Hungary Programme, co-financed by the European Regional Development Fund. The project is implemented jointly by the Muraba ETT, the Vas Vármegyei Municipality and the Municipality of Lendva. In the following document, the section on Blessed John Brenner was prepared by the Muraba EGTC, while the section on the Servant of God Danijel Halas was prepared by the Municipality of Lendava. The document has been prepared in Hungarian, Slovenian and English versions, and in each version, except for the most important works, only the material available in the respective language or easily readable through online translation tools has been published.



In the service of faith: the sacrifice of two young priests

There are many parallels between the lives of Blessed János Brenner and Danijel Halas. Both of their lives were marked by the political changes of their times; they were active at a time when the Church was under intense pressure and persecution, and both became martyrs as young priests.

Through their community activities, they have had a significant impact on their followers, especially young people, which has made them a target for anti-clerical political forces.

János Brenner served their communities with strong commitment in the Hungarian border area of Rábakethely, and Danijel Halas around Lendva, where occupying powers and political forces alternated. Brenner stood out for his directness and love of young people, while Halas stood out for his community-building work and openness to the Hungarian national community. Their popularity, however, aroused fear in the oppressive powers, as their activities strengthened religious and community life.

Both consciously took the risk to fulfil their calling, and both died tragic martyrdoms. Their deaths were a sad consequence of anti-church reprisals aimed at reducing the role of the Church and intimidating believers. Their communities knew from the beginning that they had been martyred. Their story could not be told for many decades, yet their memory was preserved.

The lives and sacrifices of these two martyrs remain a reminder today of how faith, love and commitment can be a powerful moral example and a threat to oppressive regimes. Their stories continue to connect their communities today, bridging past and present.



JÁNOS BRENNER

János Brenner was born on 27 December 1931 in Szombathely into a deeply religious family. Three of them were brothers and sisters, all three of them later chose the priesthood, as did two of their cousins.

In 1940, his father was transferred to Pécs, so János Brenner started his secondary school education at the Nagy Lajos Nagy Gymnasium of the Cistercian Order. It was here that his monastic vocation matured. In 1948, with the nationalisation of the schools - by then he was already studying in Szombathely, at the Saint Norbert Gymnasium of the Premonstratensian Order - the atmosphere at his school changed. So János Brenner went to study in his last year at Zirc, where dismissed monastic teachers taught young people with a monastic vocation.¹ By this decision, he had already accepted that he would not be able to obtain a state-recognised school leaving certificate. On 19 August 1950, he was tonsured as a novice, where he was given the name Anastas. Less than three weeks later, the monastic orders in Hungary were dissolved. János Brenner then moved to Budapest, where he became a student at the Academy of Theology and secretly continued his novitiate life under the guidance of his spiritual director, Father Lóránt Sigmónd². In 1951 he applied for admission as a minor priest of the diocese of Szombathely, and after the dissolution of the seminar in Szombathely he finished his studies in Győr.



As his first chaplaincy, he was assigned to Rábakethely, next to the parish priest Dr. Ferenc Kozma³, where he was in charge of four villages (Máriaújfalu, Magyarlak, Zsida, Farkasfa). As part of Szentgotthárd, the village - close to the Austrian border - was a strictly guarded border zone, where entry was only possible with special permission. The parishioners quickly took a liking to him - he was a direct, friendly father who had a kind word for everyone. He was popular with the young people: he spent a lot of time with the children outside of the Sunday school hours, playing games and sports. This

1 He writes about the contemporary history of the Cistercian Order of Zirc, the circumstances of its dissolution and the subsequent possibilities for the monks:

Ágnes Turócziné Pesty (Ed., 2017) *Cistercian witness in the communist dictatorship*. Cistercian Student and Scout Foundation, Budapest.

Cúthné Gyóni Eszter (2018) "We don't fight, but we don't say goodbye either..." *The History of the Cistercian Order of Zirc Abbey from the End of the Second World War to the Death of Abbot Vendel Endrédy*, Zirc Cistercian Abbey, Budapest.

2 'László Lóránt Sigmónd László (1911-1964): the governor of the Abbey of Zirc. From 1946, he was the new Master of Zirc Abbey. Before the dissolution of the Order, he was commissioned by Abbot Vendel Endrédy to take over the leadership of the Order in case of his incapacity. In 1961, he was arrested in the "Black Ravens" case, the biggest anti-Catholic police operation of the Kádár era, and sentenced to ten years in prison, or seven years in second instance, for conspiracy against the state (his role in the leadership of the Cistercian Order, illegal management of the Order, training of the Order's cadets, "elite training"), economic and moral crimes and treason. (Source. In Rubicon Online. <https://rubicon.hu/cikkek/az-utcan-setalva-tartotta-hittanorait?rovat=keresztény-hosok>).

3 It is the most authentic contemporary historical document of the parish of Rábakethely, of the daily struggles of the parish priest, his chaplain and his parishioners:

Dr. Ferenc Kozma (Ed. Zsuzsanna Horváth, 2021) *Historia Domus*. The history of the parish of Rábakethely (1945-1956). Szentgotthárd City Municipality.



did not please the communist leadership and he received several threats. In late autumn 1957, on his way to Farkasfa on his motorbike, he was attacked and had wooden sticks thrown at him, but he escaped with a lucky escape. Then, under pressure from the State Commissioner for Church Affairs, Bishop Sándor Kovács offered him a transfer, but he replied, "I'm not afraid, I'm happy to stay."

On the night of December 14, 1957, he was called in sick to Zsida. He took the Blessed Sacrament in the church and set off for the patient through the woods and meadows on the so-called "mass road" connecting the two villages. On the way he was attacked and killed with brutal cruelty. The exact circumstances of the murder are still unclear: the investigative material in the archives is incomplete, the investigation was unprofessional and the conceptual nature of criminal trials means that the judicial authorities have not sought to uncover the truth. In the first case, a man from the village with no criminal record was sentenced to death for manslaughter in connection with robbery, but was later acquitted of the charge and its consequences for lack of evidence. Eight years after the murder, the man who had lured the chaplain from the parish as a juvenile was convicted of manslaughter for profit. However, subsequent reconstruction of the events suggests that several people attacked and killed the chaplain a premeditated manner.

The attack that preceded his death, and the way in which the investigation and justice were carried out, suggest a public belief that the murder of János Brenner was part of a wave of reprisals against the church after 1956, aimed at discouraging young people from religious education.



DANIJEL HALAS

Danijel Halas was born to Martin and Katarina from Črenšovci. He was baptised on the day after his birth, 25 June 1908, in the parish church of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross in Črenšovci. He finished primary school in his hometown, then went to grammar school in Murska Sobota (Muraszombat), and later lived in a boarding school in Martinišče run by Salesians. Since the upper classes were abolished, he completed his secondary education in Ljubljana and graduated there. After high school, he entered the Theological Seminary in Maribor, where he was ordained a priest by Bishop Tomažič in 1933. He celebrated his New Mass on 16 July in the parish church of his birthplace. He chose the retired parish priest and Catholic newspaper editor József Klek Sr. as his handler, who played an important role in the national awakening and spiritual leadership of the Slovenes in the Mura region. József Klek lived in Črenšovci and was a good friend and supporter of the Halas family.



He worked as a chaplain in Ljutomer until the New Year, after which the bishop sent him to Lendava. He was introduced to the pastoral work by the parish priest, later dean and vicar general, Ivan Jerič and parish priest Stefan Bakan. He led the Society of Mary, encouraging the veneration of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and the Virgin Mary, Mother of Heaven. He provided a religious newspaper in Hungarian for the Hungarian parishioners. During his vacation, he visited Szombathely to improve his Hungarian language skills so that he could preach the Gospel more effectively. He was very popular. The believers respected him and followed his instructions.

In 1939 he became parish priest of Velika Polana, where he continued his enthusiastic and successful pastoral work. He encouraged the people to worship the Sacred Heart of Jesus and the Blessed Virgin Mary. He led the Girls and Boys Society of Mary, which was a support for young people in keeping the faith. She also distributed religious magazines and took care of the cultural life of the parish, organising or helping to organise plays. For a short time he was deputy editor of the monthly Marijin list and Novine. He also wrote. His writings were collected and printed in a book entitled Grains of Wheat from Polana.

Shortly after his arrival in Velika Polana, when the Kingdom of Hungary occupied the Muravian region during the Second World War, he was arrested at the end of October 1941 on charges of collaborating with the Slovenian communists and spent seven months in Budapest prisons along with Muravian priests Ivan Camplin and Mihael Jerič. From prison, he wrote a letter to the Bishop of Szombathely, explaining that his "collaboration with the Communists" was only a matter of his refusal to denounce them. "Can a priest who has denounced someone expect that others can turn to him for advice? Perhaps the faithful will no longer come to him for confession". After nine months, his sentence was suspended and he returned to his parish, but he was not safe for a minute.

The priest's brother Štefan, who lives in Ljubljana, invited him to come to his home where he would be safe. On 28 February 1945, Danijel Halas wrote him a letter in reply. Whatever must happen - let it happen! I have full confidence in God!"



On 16 March 1945, Daniel Halas went to Lendava to confess. The bishop appointed him confessor to the nuns of Lendava. Late in the evening, on his way home, he was stopped by unknown persons at Hotiza, taken to the Mura and shot. His body was thrown into the Mura, as was his bicycle. Three days later, Marija Kocet from Kot near Lendava saw his body in the water. When she was pulled from the water, she recognised Halas.

His funeral took place on 21 March in Velika Polana, attended by a large number of believers from all over the area. Many wreaths were laid on the grave. One of them was brought by the Žižki Žerdin family, who wrote on the ribbon: "Glory to the martyr". The parishioners and priests were already convinced that the parish priest Danijel Halas had been martyred. In 1958, the Organizational Bulletin of the Cyril and Methodius Priests was published, which reported that during the war, the partisans were held responsible for Halas's death. Meanwhile, priest Ivan Jerič claimed that he was killed by the communists because he had too much influence over local youth, which allegedly hindered the resistance movement's intention to set up the SKOJ (Communist Youth Organisation of the Young). The Catholic press, however, mentions that Halas had talked the youth out of the alliance of progressive peasant boys and girls, and that Miško Kranjec may have resented him for this, but there is no evidence that Kranjec was responsible for the priest's death.



The memory of the martyrs

BLESSED JÁNOS BRENNER - REMEMBERING BEFORE AND AFTER THE REGIME CHANGE

The tragic death of János Brenner could not be spoken about openly for decades. Until the change of regime, his family members and local residents were forced into silence. At the same time, the "priest murder" almost always came up in the more intimate conversations between the people. Everyone in Rábakethely had a story to tell about this tragic event: *what did they experience in the days before the murder? Who did they meet on the streets of Szentgotthárd on the Saturday evening or night of the murder and how could this be related to what happened? how was the investigation? how did the accused of the murder later act out what happened? who could have been the murderer? and who was not?* Much information has been preserved through word of mouth. But at the same time, many were so intimidated that even after the political changes, they did not dare to share the details of the case, keeping their memories silent until today or for the rest of their lives.

Despite all this, the fame of János Brenner began almost the day after his death. His photograph was reproduced by the parishioners and distributed with the images of saints to support the building of the church in Magyarlak, despite raids by the authorities. Many people from the villages went to Szombathely to attend his funeral, and they even tried to postpone it because of the crowds.

Already in the month following Brenner's death, the parish priest Dr. Ferenc Kozma approached the bishop and asked for permission to establish a memorial in the parish of Rábakethely.⁴ János Brenner's photograph was placed in the corridor of the seminary in Győr, but had to be removed under pressure from the State Ecclesiastical Office. Father Ferenc Kozma had a statue of the Virgin Mary of Sorrows carved in memory of his chaplain, which was to be placed in the church in Magyarlak, but was eventually erected as a tomb in the cemetery in Rábakethely - no permission was needed. A candle was always lit in front of the statue. For many years, on the anniversary of the night of the murder of János Brenner, someone always placed a candle on the Zsida side of the place where the murdered priest was found. Although the authorities have done much to expose the "perpetrators", they have failed.

In 1959 Bishop Sándor Kovács mentioned János Brenner as a martyr at the first communion in Rábakethely. In the Rábakethely church, the third pink candle of the Advent wreath was changed to a red one, so that it symbolized the martyrdom of János Brenner instead of joy. Although no Advent wreaths were made in homes at that time, the local community later took the custom home. These small acts kept his memory alive for over thirty years.

After the change of regime, János Brenner's case was first published publicly in 1990 in a series of articles in Vasvármegye magazine⁵. After the regime change, the first official commemoration took



1. figure Pieta in the cemetery of Rábakethely

4 Kahler Frigyes (2005): a priest murder through the eyes of a legal historian

5 Péter L. Csala: Someone always lit a candle... Who was the priest murderer? Vasvármegye 23 September 1990; Péter L. Csala. I did not kill the chaplain - says Tibor Kóczán. Vasvármegye 16 December 1990.



place in 1992, on the anniversary of his death, when a memorial cross was erected at the Zsida school chapel near the site of his martyrdom. In 1993, the János Brenner Memorial Foundation was established, with the aim of preserving the memory of János Brenner: to build a memorial chapel, to maintain memorials and to support his beatification. The Chapel of the Good Shepherd, erected in honour of János Brenner, was consecrated by the Bishop of the County, Dr. István Konkoly, on 25 August 1996.

Since 2010, the Association for Christian Movements Szentgotthárd organises every year, on the Saturday before the third Sunday of Advent, a pilgrimage on foot from Szentgotthárd⁶. The pilgrims start from the church in Rábakethely and follow the path that János Brenner also travelled to the place of his death.

The desire for beatification - according to secret service opinions - was already expressed in 1958 by Bishop Sándor Kovács. The diocese of Szombathely officially started the beatification procedure on 3



October 1999. Afterwards, in Rábakethely, and from 2004 onwards in the whole diocese, until his beatification, a prayer for the beatification of János Brenner and for the priestly vocations was said at the end of every Holy Mass

Almighty and eternal God, who gave your servant John the grace of the priestly vocation and found him worthy of the great gift of martyrdom, we beseech you to glorify him in your Church.

May his faithful and exemplary life, and his martyr's death in the service of his priestly vocation, be a means of grace for us to be strengthened in our holy faith, and may we also undertake the struggle and suffering for you, for the coming of your kingdom. Through Christ our Lord. Amen

2. fig. the funeral of János Brenner

In 2008, the diocesan college in the building of the former seminary was named after the martyr (today, by merging several institutions, it is called the János Brenner Nursery School, Primary School, Secondary School and College), and in 2019 the Győr College of Theology took the name of his former student.

The memory of John Brenner has become a spiritual movement proclaiming the eternal values of the Christian faith, transcending time, political systems and geographical boundaries. It is a movement based on the Catholic faith and is manifested in the communities brought to life by the joining together of people of good will. His beatification proves that his memory and the message of his sacrifice are still alive today, bringing communities together.⁷

6 Night pilgrimage in memory of János Brenner - Association for Christian Movements Szentgotthárd

7 Treasury - The greats of Szentgotthárd - In memory of János Brenner (1931-1957) - Szentgotthárd Heritage Club



RESEARCH ON THE LIFE AND MARTYRDOM OF JÁNOS BRENNER

After the change of regime, János Brenner's case was first published publicly in 1990 in a series of articles in *Vasvármegye* magazine⁸. The research of his biography was first initiated by the János Brenner Memorial Foundation on the initiative of József Brenner. They published the first important biographical books - *The Hungarian Tarzicius* and *A Priest's Murder through the Eyes of a Legal Historian*, and the details of the investigation became known.

Researching the history of János Brenner was also difficult because archival material is difficult to find and incomplete, and many people did not dare to comment on the case after the change of regime. This is well illustrated by the speakers and silents in the documentary film *Pogányok idején - Anatomy of a priest murder*, made in the late 1990s.

The researchers were greatly assisted by Grand Provost József Brenner, retired episcopal vicar and younger brother of Blessed János Brenner. Father József was not only able to provide information on their family background, but as they had mostly attended school together with his brother, he was also able to provide information on their school years. He made János Brenner's personal belongings and correspondence, including items related to the murder, available to researchers, but he is also responsible for many of the surviving photographs of the child and young János.

Research was given a new impetus with the availability of archival material and the start of the beatification process. The members of the Historical Committee were Dr. Frigyes Kahler, Dr. Viktor Attila Soós and Father Gyula Perger. An interview with Dr Viktor Attila Soós will be published in the next chapter.

⁸ Péter L. Csala: Someone always lit a candle... Who was the priest murderer? *Vasvármegye* 23 September 1990; Péter L. Csala. I did not kill the chaplain - says Tibor Kóczán. *Vasvármegye* 16 December 1990.



IN MEMORY OF DANIJEL HALAS

For decades, the tragic death of Danijel Halas could not be spoken about openly. Although little was known about the case until the change of regime, every resident of Lendava, Ljutomer, Hotiza and Velika Polana had a story, some connection to this tragic event. Much information has been passed down by word of mouth. However, many were so afraid that even after the political changes they did not dare to share the details of the case and kept their memories silent until today or for the rest of their lives.

Although it was already risky to show any interest in the case at the time of Halas's death, despite the fear, many people attended his funeral. The Žižki Žerdin family also laid a wreath on the grave of Danijel Halas at the funeral, with the inscription "Glory to the martyr", so there was a belief from the beginning that Danijel Halas had been martyred.

In 1961, a monument was erected on the tomb, which was carefully tended, as the faithful were convinced that their parish priest was already in heaven because of his holy life and martyrdom.

In 1972 a memorial chapel was built at the former house of Danijel Halas in Črenšovci. The marble plaque reads.

In 1987, a church nursing home was built in Velika Polana, named after Danijel Halas, and in 2001 the Halas Road was built, connecting the places where Danijel Halas worked.

In memory of Danijel Halas, a memorial room has been set up in Velika Polana, where an exhibition has been set up containing many of his artefacts. In the church in Črenšovci, his bicycle is on display and a wooden mosaic has been created.

Danijel Halas's greatest researcher is certainly Alojzij Kozar Jr, who has been researching everything about Danijel Halas for nearly 30 years. Kozar has published several publications and books on the subject.

Every year, all parishes connected to the life and work of Danijel Halas organise commemorations, excursions and meetings in memory of the martyr Danijel Halas.

The real killers of Daniel Halas are still unknown, despite the wealth of information we have. Fortunately, every year, more and more is known about Danijel Halas, and interest in his story grows. In 2002, the diocesan process for the beatification of Danijel Halas was launched. During the beatification process, a wealth of material on the life and work of the parish priest was collected and more than 60 witnesses were heard. A rich prayer life is taking place in parallel with the process. The faithful gather monthly in prayer meetings, make a pilgrimage to the tomb of Halas and offer themselves to his mercy along his pilgrimage route.

The procedure is in its final stages in Rome.



ON BEATIFICATION PROCEDURES

Beatification is an official procedure (beatificatio) of the Catholic Church, whereby a person who has lived an exemplary Christian life is declared "blessed". This ecclesiastical recognition is given to those who have practised heroic virtues - and their intercession is accompanied by a miraculous act - or who have suffered martyrdom for their faith. The purpose of beatification is to set the person up as a role model and intercessor for the faithful - someone who can intercede for the faithful before God.

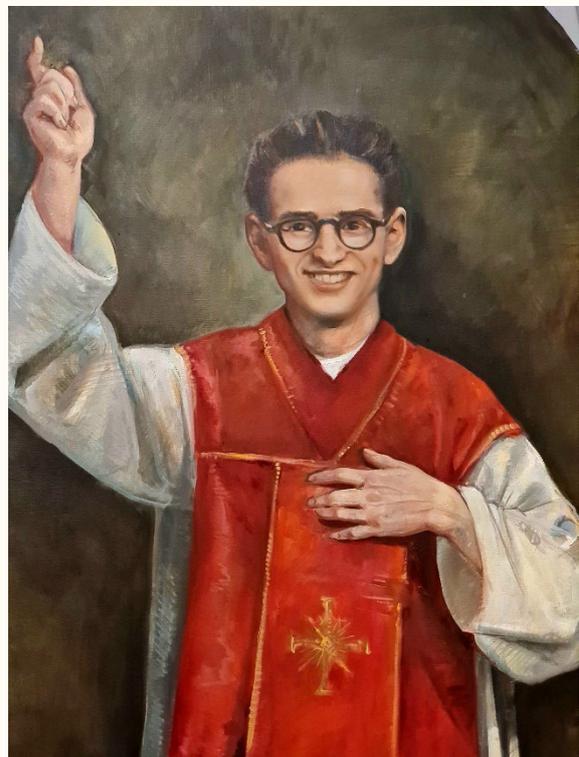
The beatification process is usually initiated locally. It can be initiated by a private person or by the bishop himself, but the initiative carries financial and moral responsibility. The initiator appoints a postulator to represent the cause of beatification. The bishop sets up a commission of historians and theologians to collect and examine documents and testimonies that point to sainthood or martyrdom. From the moment of the bishop's decision ordering the investigation, the candidate is called a Servant of God.

After the diocesan phase, the documents and evidence are sent to Rome, where the new postulator and experts appointed by the Congregation prepare a summary document called the *Positio*, which contains a presentation of the candidate's life and the results of a thorough examination of his or her virtues. The case is again analysed by a commission of historians and theologians. In the case of confessors of faith, a medical commission verifies the authenticity of the miraculous act, while for martyrs, the attestation of a miracle is not required for beatification.

If the case is approved by the Congregation for the Causes of Saints and the Pope, the beatification can take place and the blessed person can be officially venerated as a saint by the local community and his or her day of remembrance can be included in the local liturgical calendar.

BEATIFICATION OF JÁNOS BRENNER

In the case of János Brenner, the beatification process was initiated on 3 October 1999 at the request of his community and the faithful by the then Bishop of Szombathely, István Konkoly. Dr. László Gyürki was appointed postulator of the case. The theological committee examined the surviving writings of János Brenner. On the basis of these and questions drawn up on the basis of the results of seven years of research by historians, the three-member tribunal - which heard a total of 34 witnesses - gave their personal experiences, some of them on the life and martyrdom of János Brenner, others on the living memory of martyrdom. Following the diocesan process, the Roman phase of the beatification procedure was launched in 2008. On 8 November 2017, the case was submitted to the Holy Father, who approved and ordered the beatification of János Brenner. beatification took place on 1 May 2018 in Szombathely.



During the beatification process, the Catholic Church recognised János Brenner as a martyr, meaning that he suffered martyrdom for his faith.



THE BEATIFICATION PROCESS OF DANIEL HALAS

In 2002, the diocesan process for the martyrdom of Danijel Halas, Servant of God, began. To commemorate the 60th anniversary of his martyrdom, 2005 was declared the Year of Halas. The diocesan process of beatification of Danijel Halas was completed on 19 February 2014.

"Let us give thanks to God" - These were the most frequently uttered words at the ceremony that concluded the diocesan process of beatification of the Servant of God Danijel Halas. The ceremony began with the closing meeting of the committee, led by Bishop Dr Peter Štumpf in the diocesan building. The programme continued in the cathedral with a prayer service entitled *Let us kneel together with Halas*, and concluded with a Holy Mass and the sealing of the documents.

After the welcoming and opening prayer, the Bishop presented the report of the postulator, Dr. Vinko Škafar, and the members of the committee signed the necessary documents and took the oath.

Representatives from all three Murska Sobota localities attended the prayer meeting. The first part was a thanksgiving for the events of the life of Danijel Halas, the Servant of God, which testify to the great love of God and the great love of Danijel Halas for God and his neighbours. The second part was a thanksgiving to God for the events that took place during the process, which strengthened faith, hope and love. In the third part, the faithful looked to the future and prayed for the successful completion of the process and for the candidates for beatification.

At the beginning of the Holy Mass, Cathedral parish priest Goran Kuhar greeted Bishop Dr. Peter Štumpf, Bishop Dr. Jožef Smej, the priests, nuns and the crowds of faithful who gathered for prayer and Holy Mass and participated in prayer and singing. In his homily, Bishop Dr. Peter Štumpf spoke about the four places associated with Danijel Halas and the four tasks that are also our tasks. The places and the tasks are.

The Holy Mass was attended by the faithful of the parishes related to the life and ministry of the Servant of God. They read the Word of God, made petitions and brought gifts of thanksgiving (wafers and wine, a baptismal candle, a Bible, a prayer book in Hungarian, a picture of the Society of Mary and a model of the sign of the Stations of the Cross in Hotiza). The Hail Mary prayer was led by Dr Stanislav Zver, followed by the postulator, Dr Vinko Škafar, who invited the faithful to a prayer of peace. In closing, Bishop Dr. Jožef Smej, who personally met the Servant of God, spoke. He stressed the virtue of faith that enabled Daniel Halas to give his life for Christ and for people, even in his best years.

This is followed by the ceremony of sealing the documents, which are handed over to the Congregation for the Beatification of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Rome. Bishop Dr. Peter Štumpf sealed the two boxes of documents, completing the diocesan part of the process. Dr Franc Zorec, the head of the pastoral ministry, asked everyone to continue to pray for the beatification of Halas, so that the process in Rome can be completed as soon as possible and that we may receive a martyr, a blessed one, from our own ranks. For the work of the diocesan process and for all the graces we have received during this time, the crowd from all parts of the diocese enthusiastically sang a hymn of thanksgiving to the Eternal God. The thousands of bells with which the altar was decorated seemed to join in this song, just as the tomb of Danijel Halas the Servant of God in Velika Polana was decorated every spring for the years since his martyrdom.

It is difficult to predict the length of the beatification process. However, it is expected that it will be completed and Danijel Halas will be beatified in around 2026.

Note: Most of the data were taken from the sources indicated on pages 12 and 13 of this paper.



Keeping their memory alive

REMEMBRANCES OF BLESSED JÁNOS BRENNER

In the autumn of 2024, we published an appeal asking for the help of the residents of Szentgotthárd and all those who knew Blessed János Brenner personally, or remember the stories often told by their parents or grandparents, as personal stories help to connect our past and present and keep the common memory alive. Given the importance of this, we continue to welcome⁹ memories, experiences, photos of former children and young people about János Brenner; or family stories.

Most of the memories are preserved by Mrs Ferenc Tóth, who knew Father János personally as a relative of the housekeeper, Aunt Málcsi, from Rábakethely. Her memories are published in black, without any further indication. The recollections of others are in blue.

Memoirs of Mrs Ferenc Tóth, December 2024:

In the summer of 1957 I spent a month in the parish of Rábakethely. My godmother was the Málcsi¹⁰ aunt, who was then already the parish housekeeper. I came there because I was very fond of a sandal. In order to buy it, I wanted to go to the border to work, to do some mowing, and I wanted to ask my godmother for her bicycle. *She said, "Son, you're not going anywhere. Come up here to the parish, you'll be here for the summer. You'll help me what you can and we'll get along.* I was 13 at the time. That's how I came into daily contact with Reverend János Brenner, and I have many memories of him. We were together practically from morning till night, my godmother and I going home to sleep at his house.

Many times we went somewhere - I remember his Csepel motorbike - we went for a swim in the Rába when it was so hot. There was a quiet part of the Rába behind the barracks, we used to go there to swim. He taught me to swim.

We went on motorbikes several times, I definitely remember this one trip, he said, *Annika, will you come with me to Zsida?* I jumped on his bike and we went. We took the dirt road to Zsida that was later killed on. He always went that way. I remember we went to the school. There were some kids there, but it wasn't a religion class, because it was summer vacation.



1. picture: father János Brenner in front of the church in Rábakethely

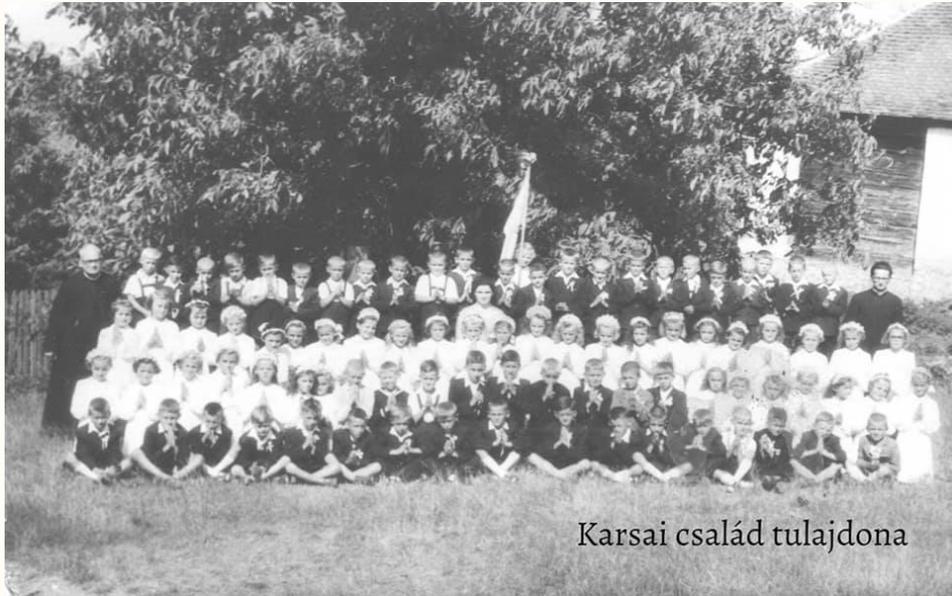
⁹ info@muraba.hu

¹⁰ Amália Tauszer, or Auntie Málcsi as she was known to the villagers, was a former tobacco factory worker, who made her living sewing after the factory closed in 1948, and helped her sister, Piroska Kozma, the sister of Dr. Ferenc Kozma, deacon of the parish. When she became ill, Aunt Málcsi took over the parish housekeeping. She accompanied Father Kozma to Osko when he was hospitalized and only moved home after his death.

Auntie Málcsi never married, but she was not a nun either, as you can read in several places.



It wasn't like a priest, the children were coming, now let's pray - there was a place for that - he played with them, they played football. The parish had a lower and upper courtyard, he played football with the boys there when they came. Sometimes girls would come and play.



2. photo: children from Zsida, Magyarlak and Kethely taking their first communion. May 1957.

Once in the autumn of 1957, János Brenner came to Rábafüzes to substitute for Father Antal Wéber in our Sunday school class. I was ten years old. We used to play soccer before every liturgy near the church, and one of us would enter the sacristy with the ball in his hand. Father János asked: what's up with you? Do you play football? "Every afternoon!" we replied. Father János cut his Bible study short and then came to play football with us. I remember that all the children wanted to pass the ball to him - the boys boasted about it afterwards. No wonder, he was cheerful, kind, his pictures reflect his personality well.

Although I only met him once, I could never forget Father János. I remembered him every Christmas.

Recollection of Géza Páli, November 2024

Once, I don't know where the deacon was, three of us had dinner in the parish. The dining room windows faced west. It rained all day, it was overcast, and in the evening, about seven o'clock, the sun came out. It shone beautifully through the window - when I think of an evening like that, I always think of János Brenner. I was 13 years old, I don't know what I was thinking at the time, but I spoke. *Golden evening, shitty morning.* The godmother was already crossing herself. There was *Jesus Christ. You child. How can you say that? Have you no shame?* I apologized immediately. There was János Brenner sitting next to me. I sit with my head bowed and somehow I look over at him and see him clenching his jaw, trying to hold back his laughter, I suppose. Suddenly he spoke, loudly. *Leave the poor child alone. He's done nothing wrong. He didn't say anything wrong. Why? Isn't that what they call that particular thing?* - He says - *it's a saying, otherwise I'd have heard it.* So he protected me. He was such a people person. Afterwards, my mama even punished me. But he really protected me. He protected me in a way that I'll never forget.



Father János did a lot of photography. I think he took the pictures himself. There was a dark room off the kitchen, which was perfect for this purpose - perhaps a pantry with no windows. The rolls of film hung there in rows, hung up with clothespins until they dried.



**3. picture: aunt Málcsi and János Tóka. 1957. 07. 10.
Photo by János Brenner. Property of Mrs. Ferenc Tóth**

This photo was also taken by him, it could be a photo of eternal value... Godmother and János Tóka. They wanted to pin the murder on his brother, Tóka Ferenc, with the motive that János Brenner wanted to make his brother a priest. They were friends, he used to come to the parish a lot. He was a very sweet young man. And they were friends. Godmother told me later that he really did become a priest - *one priest was murdered, one was replaced* - so she said. I think he hadn't graduated from high school at that time, so he could only go to seminary later.

It also happened that summer that Father János came down from the church and said that he had gone mad during mass, there was a flea in front of the altar and it had bitten me all the time, he couldn't have scratched it. I remember there was a platform, and on it was a thick, beautiful carpet. He got a vacuum cleaner from somewhere and he cleaned it himself with his own hands. He vacuumed the whole area.

I loved both of them (Dr. Ferenc Kozma and Father János Brenner - ed.) very much, they were very human, adorable priests.



4. photo: When Deacon Kozma had everything in order, he bought the godmother an electric stove so that she wouldn't have to make a fire. "Auntie Malcsi to make cooking easier."

Parish priest János Brenner taught the catechism in the parish of Rábakethely for two years together with deacon Kozma. The council had ruled that state care patients were not allowed to attend religious education



So they also prepared me and my brother for our first communion.

I really liked going there, I always took my red dot ball with me so that after the lesson we could walk around the garden and play ball. To this day, whenever I pick up a ball, I think of it. And the vicar's laughter...

Sometimes we would walk through the cemetery and read the inscriptions on the graves. Since then, I have never been afraid to go to the cemetery, even alone.

So the two-hour lesson became three or four hours.

We also went for a walk in the meadow and picked wild flowers. There was an underground store where vegetables and fruit were stored for the parish. Well, that was very exciting. It was like a bunker. My brother was very fond of it!

At Christmas and on major holidays, we had a delicious lunch after Mass.

I remember that the parish priest taught me to set the table, with great patience!

God bless you! Their kindness and empathy towards us will never be forgotten.

Katalin Tóth's memoir - October 2024

I think that's why János Brenner had to die. Here, as I heard it with half an ear as a child, it was because everyone loved him, adored him and he was able to bring the youth together. The children loved him, they didn't come to the parish to pray - he had time for that - but to play and he played with them.

In December, my mother either went to the shop or took milk to the hall, and on her way back she told me that the priest from Rábakethely had been killed. The news devastated the whole family. I remember a picture of a flashlight with a long handle. As children we were not told much, but there were all sorts of rumours. My mother-in-law used to say that he must have been killed for the money. Money was being raised for the construction of the church in Magyarlak at the time, my mother-in-law's brother from Canada also contributed a lot of money to the construction.

Recollection of Géza Páli, November 2024

But they didn't want to talk in front of us children. When I was older, the godmother told me that the deacon had been slapped so hard that the blood had come out of his nose and his clothes were covered with blood, so that he would confess that he had not been in Farkasfa, but had killed the priest.

The deacon had left for Farkasfa in the afternoon, when he held a mass there the next day. I once asked him how he was going already? The factory bus went to Farkasfa. My godmother told me that he was walking through the woods, the walk was so good for him. I found out from the film that they wouldn't let us on the bus, they wouldn't tell us things like that.

I was up there in the parish after the deacon's interrogation, and I remember that he had what looked like a bruise on his cheekbone, and it was swollen. I did not dare ask him what had happened.





5. picture: father Kozma, aunt Malcsi and the cantor from Oszko. Oszkó, December 1966. Tót

Godmother went to Oszko with the deacon, and lived there until the deacon's death, even though the bathroom was already finished, and there was no electricity. That was later, she was already living at home in her house and was hospitalized.

I thought that by the time the godmother came home, I would have the whole house cleaned. I did a mad clean-up and found a big brown suitcase on top of the cupboard in the upstairs mansard room. I shook it, there was something loose inside. When I looked inside it, I was almost in shock. As soon as I opened it, I knew what it was. It had his armband in it, but it was brown with dried blood. There was hardly any white on it, I

hardly dared touch it. Where there was white on it, I picked it out. By then my hands and feet were shaking. There were 3-4 centimetre wide slits... had they stabbed me with a pig-killing knife? I couldn't count because I didn't want to touch where it was brown.... I folded and sealed the suitcase as neatly as I could with the white part. When the godmother came home, she entered the apartment and immediately asked, *what were you doing here? The brown suitcase in the mansard room, I hope you didn't throw it out?*" was her first thought. *Did you look inside?* I said. But we never spoke of it again. He kept it for all these years, and I suppose after that his godmother gave it to Bözsi Kurucz to keep.

"He had a certain charisma that can't be described in words. People loved him and they tried to go where he was and listen to what he had to say. There was something about him that attracted people. That was his main sin: he was loved by the young, loved by the old. He won a lot of people to the faith, to the church.

He could not pass a man without stopping and saying two words to him. That perpetual sweet smile on his face... He earnestly preached the word of God, witnessing to his faith at every moment. It was good to go to confession with him, because he could give you a sign of the way."¹¹

11 A believer's recollection. Source: the website of the "A" class of the Pannonhalma Benedictine High School, graduated in 1974 the website of the 4th A class of the Pannonhalma Benedictine High School, graduated in 1974 - G-Portal





**Picture 6: My baptismal canon from János Brenner. "Dear and invaluable to me"
Property of Mrs József Jandrasits**

INTERVIEW WITH DR. VIKTOR ATTILA SOÓS, RESEARCHER ON THE LIFE OF BLESSED JÁNOS BRENNER

5 December 2024.

Dr. Viktor Attila Soós, historian, church historian, member of the Committee of National Remembrance. As a renowned researcher of 20th century Hungarian church history, he has made significant achievements in the exploration of the relationship between the church and state power between 1945 and 1990. As an employee of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, he achieved the declassification of the Foreign Ministry's archival documents relating to the Church, allowing the wider context of the persecution of the Church in the 1950s to be explored.¹² He is also responsible for many of the publications on the life of János Brenner, including books for the general public that are easier to understand and in-depth, professional studies. He has researched and analysed valuable archival material both on the investigation and justice of János Brenner's death and its historical background, and on his studies in Zurich and his secret novitiate.

You started working on the history of János Brenner while you were still in high school, and it was you and Father István Császár who went to see those who knew him personally. Where did this interest come from?

I was born in Körmend, where I studied at the Kölcsey Ferenc High School. Dr. László Gyürki was the parish priest and István Császár the chaplain when I mentioned to them that I was interested in the recent history of the church. They said they would introduce me to someone. We spoke to Father József Brenner at the time, and an interview was made. This must have been around 1996-1997. After that we also went to Sister Erzsébet Kurucz Vincenza in Máriaújfalu, and she and Father László, another

¹² "There's more to write, there's plenty more to research..." - interview with Viktor Attila Soós - Ujkor.hu



brother of János Brenner, told us a lot about Father János. Father István, who was born in Vasszentmihály, knew many people, we could talk to many people. We also wanted to do research in the archives in Szombathely, but at that time we were driven away. All this motivated me to apply to Pázmány Péter Catholic University to study history.

I continued my research as a student, conducting more than 80 interviews between 1999 and 2002. I also submitted my paper on Father János to the OTDK, and in 2003 I wrote a book on the Hungarian Tarzicius, while still at university. The late nineties and early twenties were a period of grace for research, as many of Father János's contemporaries were still alive and many of them still talked about him.

When you were very, very young, you were already a member of the committee of historians involved in the process of the beatification of János Brenner. What did the invitation mean to you?

Father Gyürki also spoke a lot about Dr. László Batthyány-Strattmann, and he is also from Körmend, the role models came close to me. I owe my whole professional vocation to Father János Brenner, because of him I chose the history faculty, I started to deal with church history, that's why I chose Pázmány University. Through his life, a historical period unfolds, with its legal history, the relationship between church and state - he made me want to understand it all.

At the beginning of the beatification process, we didn't know exactly what we were getting into. We knew the procedure, but we didn't know in detail what we were undertaking. It was a martyrdom, so it made the process a bit easier, and we had the support of Father Joseph and the diocese.

The process gained momentum when András Veres was appointed head of the Diocese of Szombathely. It was a gift that at that time, after university, I was working at the Hungarian National Archives in the Department of Political Government Bodies after 1945 - so I had a lot of material locally. I was able to get to know the workings of the archives, and it helped me to find related material.

In the end, the historical expertise was well done, comprehensive and thorough, and by then we had 15 years of experience of all kinds behind us.

What was the discovery or document that touched you most about the life of János Brenner?

Diaries, spiritual diaries, which I could read in his handwriting. Reading them, you can really feel how much he was preparing for the priesthood.

Professionally, it was a very big deal when the more than 1000 pages of investigative material - from the Budapest Archives - were found. But what really touches me is how much information about him is found - in a metaphorical way - in so many places; and you can find sources for almost every biographical data and information. You just have to be persistent.

In my research on Blessed János Brenner, I experienced providence on several occasions: for example, I found out that he and Mrs. Dalma Mádl played together in Pécs, and when Ferenc Mádl became President of the Republic, Mrs. Dalma was willing and able to help us. Our contemporaries and fellow Baptists were also there and wanted to help.

What message does the story of János Brenner have for the world today?

One of its mottos is: *"All things work together for good to those who love God"*. He chose a motto at his ordination as a young man. It is a thought that was important to him at the time and would later shape his life. When he chose it, he was not sure what its significance would be for the rest of his life.



"Do not be afraid". The story of Father János proves that it is possible, if not easy, to live without fear, whatever is happening around us, whatever difficulties we are going through.

Can the same be relevant for young people? As a teacher of the faith, I also ask how can the memory and example of János Brenner be made more tangible for the younger generation?

János Brenner's personal directness, youthful verve and courageous stand are still inspiring in all times. The fact that he remained cheerful and open-minded in spite of everything can still be an example to young and old alike. His cheerfulness still resonates today, and his smiling photographs convey this well.

The story of Father János is proof that a young 26-year-old life can be a journey to the finish line. Apart from his martyrdom, he did not do anything very extraordinary, but his whole life was round and full. What is attractive about his story is that he stepped in and did his job, even in a situation that was not easy. It may not have been easy, but he did what he had to do, what his mission was.

What could be the significance of János Brenner's life and martyrdom for the people of Szentgotthárd and the region? What would you highlight about him to visitors and pilgrims?

Szentgotthárd, or its wider region up to Körmend, this corner of Western Hungary, has much more tourism potential than it shows. The battle of Szentgotthárd is well known, the Órség is close by, but Father János can draw attention to the region. In particular, the Be With Love series moves many, reaches many, could reach many. Many more people are paying attention to Szentgotthárd, but also to the wider region, to the whole diocese.

The memory of Father János is still alive in Szentgotthárd, and during the filming of the series, for example, the locals were moved to be part of the production, which pays tribute to Father János, as extras or logistical supporters. This love must be shown.

What is an area that you have been working on for a very long time in relation to János Brenner, but you have not yet found any documents?

I think it can be written down somewhere who the perpetrators were.

Missing pages from the investigation are the testimonies of Father Ferenc Kozma and Amália Tauszer, the housekeeper of the parish. It would be good to find them.

After 1956 a lot of things disappeared, materials were destroyed, but it would be interesting to read about the workings of the surveillance networks, even how they operated around the parish. Similarly, it would be good to know more about how the Cistercian Order operated illegally after the dissolution in 1950, how the expelled monks lived, but then almost nothing was written down for security reasons.

Information still comes out, a diary, a sentence, an entry that we can link to a piece of Father János's life. But all this also shows that in a dictatorship everything is connected, everything and everyone is connected.

I have to say that the whole thing is not human, but divinely guided, and the respect of John Brenner, it seems that everything has its time, it happens when it happens, it is in vain to rush it.



INTERVIEW WITH JANEZ MAGYAR, MAYOR OF LENDVA MUNICIPALITY, WHO WAS PERSONALLY INVOLVED IN THE LAST DAYS OF DANIEL HALAS

1. What made you decide to get involved in the Messages project?

The death of Halas is somehow connected to my family. That's why I decided at the time that we should be involved in this project, and I was the initiator. I wanted the public to know everything about Danijel Halas.

2. How are you related to Danijel Halas?

I have a personal connection with Danijel Halas, or more precisely my family and my grandfather, who was the local magistrate at the time. The gendarmes came to my grandfather and told him to go and identify the body that had been pulled out of the Mura River. My grandfather went and was saddened to find that it was the body of Danijel Halas. This event was a great shock to my family, especially to my grandfather. Shortly after the event, my grandfather was approached by unknown persons in plain clothes who did not introduce themselves and behaved very strangely. My grandfather immediately thought of a ruse and told these people that he was going to the cellar to buy wine. Grandpa, of course, did not go to the cellar, but went under the window and listened to these people talking. One person said why did he have to go for wine, he knew where we were taking it. Grandpa left because of this and did not come home for a long time. The probable reason for Grandpa's persecution was that when the body was identified, he folded his hands and said, "Jesus Mary, dear God, what wrong has this good man done to anyone". The gendarme then hit him with his rifle butt, because he thought that my grandfather was also a defender of the faith, or was of the same mind as Danijel Halas was at that time. My grandfather didn't like the fact that the communists had already included children in the "Sokol", the so-called youth association, where communist ideology was forced upon them. Thank God, after a while, thanks to various contacts, my grandfather was able to return home and resume his life as normal.

3. What have you done to make Danijel Halas as widely known as possible?

Hopefully a lot, although we still have a long way to go. In any case, I think the Messages project is a great stepping stone to raise the profile of Danijel Halas. I believe that my small contribution to this story will help to create excellent pilgrimages and pilgrimage tourism. I will certainly do my best to contribute to the development of the above.

4. What are your future plans for Danijel Halas?

Be sure to get more actively involved. I would like to involve as many people as possible in the pilgrimage, not only the faithful, but also other people who would like to get to know Danijel Halas, and above all I would like young people to participate. The project is well formulated, it has good objectives and I believe it will be an excellent one. I am also very pleased that Alojzij Kozar Jr. and Dr. Zoltán Lendvai Kepe are also involved in the project, as their knowledge of Danijel Halas is invaluable.



INTERVIEW WITH MSGR. ALOJZIJ KOZAR

10 October 2024.

An interview with Msgr. Alojzij Kozar Jr, Vicar General and Chancellor of the Diocese of Murska Sobota and member of the Messages project working group.

1. What made you decide to be part of the Messages project working group?

Originally held in Szentgotthárd I was invited to a conference in Szentgotthárd, where I was introduced to the Messages project and its purpose. There was no specific mention of whether I would be part of the working group. Later I was visited by Metka Sabo Gerenčer and Robert Törnár, with whom we had a very fruitful discussion and came to the conclusion that it would be very good if I could be part of the working group. I took up the challenge.

2. How are you related to Danijel Halas?

My attachment to Danijel Halas goes back a long time, as I have been researching his life and death for many years, some three decades. I was also impressed by his extraordinary heroism, a model of a zealous priest, who, with his strong spiritual personality, stood in his time as a pillar among the people entrusted to him by God. Because he was upright, patriotic and, above all, a priest, he became too much of a nuisance as such, and as a result his life was attempted, and in a very terrible way.

3. What have you done to make Danijel Halas as widely known as possible?

It's difficult to talk about this, because I'm always trying to make Danijel Halas as well known as possible, not only among the faithful, but also among the wider public, so that people can find out who he really was. More than twenty years ago, I wrote a Pilgrim's Notebook, which contains nine so-called stages in the life and death of Danijel Halas. Since then I have been researching his life's journey even more actively. During this time I have written several books and booklets. Both the diocese and the parishes are taking care of the items related to him. Thus, in the surrounding churches, especially those where he was active, we also organise a kind of memorial room or exhibition of these objects. Everything we have has also been forwarded to Rome, where the beatification of Danijel Halas is under way. This is a lengthy process, as the authorities carefully check and weigh up all the information. We sincerely hope that the authorities will see Danijel Halas in the same light as we do and beatify him.

4. What are your future plans for Danijel Halas?

It is essential to continue along this path, not only among the faithful, but also to make his life and his terrible death known to a wider public. The Messages project is, of course, a great starting point for the development of pilgrimage tourism that includes the memory of Danijel Halas, and I am convinced that it will help to make him better known in the Muravian region, in Slovenia and even in the world. I am happy to be part of the working group because together we can develop a wonderful pilgrimage tourism.



Material collection

BLESSED JÁNOS BRENNER

COMPREHENSIVE BIOGRAPHICAL WORKS ON BLESSED JÁNOS BRENNER

Comprehensive materials that present the whole life and personality in a comprehensible way.

István Császár - Viktor Attila Soós (2003) Hungarian Tarzicius - The life and martyrdom of János Brenner 1931-1957. [Available online](#)

The Hungarian Tarzicius¹³ is the first major biographical publication that enabled a wider audience to learn about the martyr's life and helped to spread his veneration.

The book describes János Brenner's childhood, his student years, the development of his priestly vocation and his time as a chaplain. We learn about the night of his murder and the events of the investigation. The biographical descriptions are enriched by the recollections and comments of acquaintances, family members, parishioners and villagers. Selections from the sermons of János Brenner and excerpts from his spiritual diary, as well as recollections by fellow priests, help the reader to better understand the faith and spirituality of the martyr.

The book includes full-text excerpts from a video film made to commemorate the 40th anniversary of János Brenner's death¹⁴ and the documentary film *In the Time of the Pagans*, as well as a collection of poems written in his honour. In addition, the authors describe the results of the historical research carried out as part of the beatification process and the limitations of archival research.

Dr. János Székely, Dr. Gyula Perger (2024) *Message of Blessed János Brenner Martyr*. Szombathely, Martinus Book and Journal Publishing House. Second, enlarged edition.

Through his complete spiritual diary, his sermon notes, and his spiritual reflections, this volume helps us to get to know the personality, profound faith and principles of Blessed John Brenner. Through the memoirs of his brother, retired bishop and Grand Prelate József Brenner, and a photo album, we gain insight into their childhood and the everyday life of the Brenner family. The volume is also supplemented by the speeches of Cardinal Péter Erdő, Bishop János Székely of Szombathely and Cardinal Angelo Amato at the beatification ceremony.

István Császár, Viktor Attila Soós (2018) *I am not afraid. János Brenner (1931-1957)*. [Also available online](#)

The book presents the life of János Brenner in a short, accessible way, illustrated with family photos. It traces his childhood, his studies, the beginning of his Cistercian vocation and his years as a chaplain in

13 Saint Tarzicius (d 257): under Emperor Valerian, probably as a child, he was bringing the Blessed Sacrament to Christians in prison when he was attacked and beaten to death with stones and sticks. All the time, he defended the Blessed Sacrament with his body. However, it was not found on him, it was placed in his heart. He is the patron saint of altar boys. It is said that John Brenner played the role of Tarzicius in a performance as a child.

14 Gerse Károly, Süveges Antal (1997) Video film for the 40th anniversary of the death of János Brenner; Kocsis L. Mihály, Kovács Péter (2000) *Pogányok idején* (In memoriam BRENNER JÁNOS 1931-1957) - also presented in this collection.



Rábakethely. The book also devotes a special chapter to the details of his tragic death and the subsequent investigation.

Fancsali Andrásné (ed.) (2018) *Akin "whose soul was dear to God". Boldog Brenner János 1931-1957* Martinus Könyv- és Folyóirat Kiadó, Szombathely.

The book is based on the biography of the Hungarian Tarzicius, but it takes into account the latest research results and the beatification process. The publication also gives an insight into the life of Blessed János Brenner, the circumstances of his murder and the course of the investigation. Details of his spiritual diary and the recollections of former parishioners contribute to an understanding of the personality of Father János and the love and respect that surrounded him.

István Sándor Horváth (2017) *The follower of the good shepherd. The life of János Brenner.* Evangéliumi Kiadó, Tótszentmárton.

Aimed at 10-18 year olds, this book presents the life of the martyr in 14 symbolic chapters. The author's aim is to present János 's life story in an understandable way, inspiring young readers on a journey of faith and commitment. The book is enriched by beautiful illustrations by Krisztina Magyar

Farkasfalvy Dénes (2018) *The continuing legacy of his sacrifice - On the sixtieth anniversary of the martyrdom of our Cistercian comrade János Brenner.* Vigilia, Volume 83 (2018/2) p. 147 [Vigilia2018/02](#)

Dénes Farkasfalvy, a Cistercian monk living in Dallas, recounts the life of János Brenner from 1949-1952. We can read about his time in Zirc, his secret vows and his novitiate, which he undertook despite the ban on monastic orders. We learn how Father Lóránt Sigmond tried to maintain the training of novices and keep the Cistercian community together in Hungary after 1950, and the significance of the blood sacrifice of János Anastasius Brenner for his fellow friars abroad

Kocsis L. Mihály (2004) *First day in eternity - Cork collage in the time of pagans.* Kairosz Publishing House, Budapest.

The journalist author explores the still unsolved circumstances of the murder of János Brenner in his documentary novel, and also provides an excellent chronicle of the Austrian border patrol in the 1950s and 1960s.¹⁵

EmberHalas - Servant of God by János Brenner Martinus Book and Journal publisher (2009-2015)
[Also available online](#)

The EmberHalas Magazine was published by the Martinus Publishing House of the Diocese of Szombathely between 2009-2015 under the title "*The Journal of János Brenner, Servant of God*". The authors of the quarterly magazine gave an insight into the life of János Brenner, recalled various recollections, testimonies, reported on the memorial sites and the individual steps of the beatification process.

¹⁵ Based on book reviews available on the internet.



AUDIOVISUAL RESOURCES

Audiovisual interpretations of János Brenner's life and story: documentaries and interviews, often offering a personal perspective.

Mihály L. Kocsis, Péter Kovács (2000) In memoriam BRENNER JÁNOS 1931-1957. In memoriam | Youtube JÁNOS 1931-1957

The documentary film, released in 2000, was the first major public work to present the life of János Brenner, the circumstances of his death and the events that followed. The documentary is an interesting documentary, as many of János Brenner's contemporaries were still alive and speaking in front of the cameras at the time of its making - even for the first time only at that time - thus giving the viewer an authentic impression of the circumstances and atmosphere of the 1950s, and the strong emotions and fears that still existed at the end of the 1990s.

Everything is for the good of those who love God, Szombathely Media Centre, 2016. Everything is for the good of those who love God|Youtube

In the short film, Father József Brenner shares his personal memories of his brother. During the interview, he talks about their parents and grandparents, their childhood and the years as chaplain of Father János Brenner. He talks about the harassment that preceded the murder, which made life difficult for all priests at the time, the pain of learning of the tragedy, the funeral and the investigation. He talks about the research and information gathering that began after the change of regime, with the aim of preserving his memory in a dignified way and preparing the process of beatification. The title of the film refers to János Brenner's motto of the New Mass.

Zoltán Szerafin (2018): we asked József Brenner, the brother of the martyred priest, about Christian standing and the priestly vocation. Imacaffe |

Deputy Bishop Father József Brenner talks about their family life, their priestly vocation; the initiatives of the nineties and the beatification process.

Péter Rózsa (presenter), Eszter Herskovits (editor)(15 September 2022, 19:00): Murder for hire. In: on the other hand, Klubrádió. On the other hand, in Hungarian (in Hungarian) | Klubrádió

From an interview with Dr. János Székely, the county bishop, we can learn about the steps of the persecution of the church in the 1950s, the circumstances of János Brenner's death and the impact of his martyrdom in the Diocese of Szombathely, and the process of his beatification.

Szilágyi-Perjesi Réka - Szatmári Péter (2024): Brenner János. In: BŰNtények podcast. Crimes podcast

The podcast mainly uses Viktor Attila Soós's studies of the investigative procedures and secret reports, and Frigyes Kahler's book (*all three are described above*) to present the crime of János Brenner's murder and to ask questions that have not been answered yet.



DETAILED STUDIES

Studies and presentations by experts, focusing on a specific aspect or theme of the life of Blessed János Brenner.

István Bellavics, Réka Földváryné Kiss (ed., 2018) *Halálra verurve. Papi sorsok nach 1956.* National Memory Committee and Parliament House Publishing House. [Also available online.](#)

The publication contains the material of the nine lectures of the conference of the same title, organised by the National Remembrance Committee and the Office of the National Assembly on 15 December 2017, the 60th anniversary of the death of Blessed János Brenner. The lectures cover the early years of the Kádár government, its policy of intimidation and reprisals, backroom negotiations and the (constitutional) trials. They introduce the heroic priests and pastors of Hungary, many of whom suffered reprisals for or in spite of their conciliatory actions during the 1956 revolution. Blessed János Brenner will be the subject of two lectures. Attila Viktor Soós spoke in detail about the martyr's family background, his life and tragic death, and how the authorities made it difficult to process the circumstances of his death. Dr János Székely, the county bishop, gave a presentation on the details of the process of János Brenner's beatification.

Kahler Frigyes (2005) *A priest murder through the eyes of a legal historian. The circumstances of the murder of János Brenner, former curate of Rabakethely, and the afterlife of the case.* Brenner János Memorial Foundation, Szentgotthárd. [Also available online.](#)

The author, a legal historian, explores the case of János Brenner's murder from the perspective of almost forty years, drawing on contemporary writings, material memories and eyewitness accounts. He examines the murder in the light of the anti-clerical era of the communist dictatorship, showing the practice of constitutional trials and persecution of the church, through which the authorities shaped and distorted reality. The work makes a major contribution to understanding how the martyrdom of János Brenner became part of a power play and the legacy of his victim to this day.

Viktor Attila Soós (2019) *Stages on the road to ordination in the life of János Brenner.* In Kálmán Imre - Karácsony Tiborné - Szatmári Beatrix (eds.), "All things work together for good to those who love God" (Rom 8,28). [Available online.](#)

This study focuses on the lesser-known early years of János Brenner's life, in particular the places where he studied and the key figures who helped his career to develop. Although his martyrdom has been well documented, the scenes of his childhood and youth are less well known due to a lack of sources. The author provides an incomplete blend of personal history and political context: he juxtaposes anti-ecclesiastical measures - from the nationalisation of schools to the dissolution of monastic orders and the restriction of seminary education - and their impact on the life of a young person preparing to make a monastic commitment.

Viktor Attila Soós (2012) *The investigative procedure in the Brenner murder case.* In. ¹⁶

In his study, Viktor Attila Soós examines the investigative procedure of the Brenner murder, the persons involved in the investigation and the documents generated during the investigation. The author points

¹⁶ Three studies by Viktor Attila Soós published in Vasi Szemle in 2012 are also available online in the volume Krajsovszky Gábor (ed.) (2021) Thank God I was a humble instrument Study volume for the 105th anniversary of the ordination of József Mindszenty, the 75th anniversary of his appointment as Archbishop of Esztergom and the



out that the authorities did not focus on uncovering the facts, but rather on constructing a narrative that sought to conceal the premeditation and political motivation of the murder.

Viktor Attila Soós (2012) *Secret reports from the period after the Brenner assassination.* In.¹⁷

This study presents and analyses reports obtained through clandestine and non-legal means in the days and months after the murder. The documents published here for the first time - police mood reports and agents' reports - provide an interesting insight into the historical period, the mood of the people of Szentgotthárd district after the Brenner murder, their first reactions and their attitude towards the martyr.

Viktor Attila Soós (2012) *Legal proceedings after the murder of János Brenner.* In.¹⁸

The author uses archival documents to describe the history of the trials; the investigative materials in the cases of the two defendants, the motives in the court documents, and the verdicts. It highlights the contradictions between the investigation and the court proceedings, and the questions that remain unanswered to this day. The study also gives an insight into the workings of the justice system under the communist regime.

Viktor Attila Soós (2018) *Parallel traits in the lives and martyrdom of two diocesan priests of Szombathely - the life sacrifice of Blessed János Brenner and Ferenc Kováts during the years of communist dictatorship.* In: Vasi Szemle LXXII. no. 6 pp. 569-590 Link.

This study describes the fate of two martyrs of faith, Blessed János Brenner and Ferenc Kováts (1931-1958), a chaplain in Gencsapát who was beaten to death, and reveals how they both became victims of the brutality of the communist dictatorship. The author explores their lives along common points and parallels. The tragic process that led to their deaths through official reprisals unfolds through an examination of the elements that linked their lives - their youth education, their monastic ties and the intimidating measures taken against them.

Also:

Viktor Attila Soós (2004) *Priestly murder along the western border I.* In Sign Journal, October 2004, Vol.XVI No.8, pp.229-232.

Viktor Attila Soós (2004) *Priestly murder along the western border II.* In Sign Journal, November 2004, Vol.XVI No.9, pp.265-268.

Viktor Attila Soós (2002) *The anatomy of a political assassination of a priest.* In. Pázmány History Workshop Studies 1., pp. 341-365, Piliscsaba, Pázmány Péter Catholic University, Faculty of Humanities, Institute of History.

45th anniversary of his death. Hittel a Nemzetért Alapítvány, Budapest.:
<https://mek.oszk.hu/23800/23867/23867.pdf>

¹⁷ Ibid

¹⁸ Ibid



ORIGINAL SOURCES

Direct documents and accounts: authentic, original sources such as letters, official documents, eyewitness accounts, contemporary records.

Unpublished letter of Blessed János Anastasius Brenner (1954), Published by Rókus Kereszty. *Vigilia*, Vol. 85 (2020/8), p. 627 [Vigilia](#)

The letter was written by János Brenner on 30 November 1954, seven months before his ordination, to 'Lóránt Sigmond, his spiritual father and superior. He wrote the letter in desperation, when his faith, hope and vocation were shaken. Those who knew him personally, already a priest, knew him as a person who was always serene and peaceful. By then he had accepted the destiny that his priestly journey could and did bring him.

Rókus Kereszty (2007) Two Cistercian life-sacrifices - 'Letters of Lóránt Sigmond to János Anastasius Brenner. *Vigilia*, vol. 72 (2007/10), p. 789 [Vigilia 2007/10](#)

In 1952, János Brenner took his vows in the now banned monastic order before 'Sigmond Lóránt. As members of the Order, they remained in contact throughout their life, meeting and corresponding regularly. The letters were usually destroyed. The six letters that survive, dated between 1952 and 1955, give an insight into their relationship and are a valuable document of church history on the persecution and illegality of the monks.

CREATIVE ADAPTATIONS

They are works of fiction inspired by real events, but with creative elements to illustrate the life story or important events in it.

Film, music

Szilágyi Andor (2023) Be with love. TV series

A young blogger is coming to Szentgotthárd to meet and present the story of János Brenner in person. His questioning will guide the threads of the eight-part film series, in which we will get to know the everyday life of the young Rábakethely chaplain - both the moments of joy and the increasingly threatening manifestations of persecution. Viewers can follow Father János on his last journey, witness the shocking moments of the murder, the investigation and the complex political background.

The drama vividly evokes the oppressive atmosphere of the 1950s and the everyday life of the borderlands, while also providing insight into the world of intelligence activities of the time, often using the original texts of the agents' reports. Most of the scenes were filmed on location and in the Szentgotthárd area, performed by actors from Szombathely and Zalaegerszeg, with extras and crew drawn from the local population.

The series is available on Filmio.hu after registration and subscription. [Filmio - Be with love](#)

Tamás Iváncsits: The Good Shepherd. Musical drama and film

The Good Shepherd is a musical drama about the life and tragic death of priest János Brenner, showing the strength of faith, vocation and human resilience that Father János represented.



The production, which is mainly aimed at young people, was first performed in Szentgotthárd in 2007, and following its success, a film version of the drama was made, with some scenes shot on the original locations. In addition to the drama, the film version also includes five interviews with retired Bishop József Brenner, Grand Provost, Sister Erzsébet Kurucz Vincenza¹⁹, and the authors.

- Tamás Iváncsits (2007): *The Good Shepherd* - music drama on cassette and CD
- Tamás Iváncsits - Ferenc Lauer (2008). *In memoriam Brenner János (1931-1957)* - DVD film

Both can be ordered from the author: www.ivancsicstamas.hu

Novel

Gábor Nagy (2009). Magyar Napló Kiadó Kft.

The novel is entirely fiction, not the story of János Brenner or any other priest murdered in Western Hungary, although some of the motifs are based on real events. However, the reader can experience what such an event might have meant for the family, the village and their patrons, what political strands and motivations were at work in the background.

¹⁹ Sister Erzsébet Kurucz Vincenza Vincenza came from Máriaújfalu near Rábakethely. In 1949 she joined the community of the Salvator Sisters, but after the dissolution of the monastic orders she had to leave the convent. Later he worked in the parish of Rábakethely, where he met the chaplain János Brenner. After Aunt Málcsi, he was the keeper of the bloody armband and the bursa. He was the first one who dared to talk about the murder and was actively involved in the board of trustees of the Brenner János Memorial Foundation, taking care of the chapel that had been built. József Brenner (2010). EmberHalas magazine Vol. II No. 2 (May 2010). Martinus Book and Journal Publishing House.



Lojze Kozar Jr. (2008) *Martyr on the Murament* (Družina Publishers, Ljubljana).

Martyr on the Murament is the first comprehensive book on the life and death of Danijel Halas.

The book chronologically describes Danijel Halas's entire life, from his birth in Črenšovci, through his family relationships and journey to becoming a parish priest, to his passionate death. The author of the book, Alojzij Kozar Jr., has described every stage of his life in great detail and has enriched the book with photographs. Much of the content of the book is derived from the research of the author himself, Alojzij Kozar Jr. The book was published on the occasion of the 100th anniversary of the birth of the martyr Danijel Halas.

Lojze Kozar Jr., Klavdija Dominko (2011) *Glory to the Martyr* (published by the Diocese of Murasombati).

The author and co-author of *Glory to the Martyr*, with a very rich photographic material, has not only focused on the life and work of Danijel Halas, but also looks at the later period, describing the various meetings and gatherings organised in memory of the martyr.

Lojze Kozar Jr. (2017) *The Way of the Cross* (publisher: Diocese of Murasombati)

A shorter booklet, *The Way of the Cross*, was published with the aim of informing not only Christians but also the general public about the Way of the Cross in Hotiza and how each station is connected to Danijel Halas. The booklet also includes a chronological overview of his life.

Lojze Kozar Jr. (2001) *Pilgrimage of Fisherman* (published by Stopinje, Muraszombat).

This short booklet contains the places where the martyr Danijel Halas was active. Each pilgrimage site has its own pilgrimage site point and children or adult pilgrims who have taken part in the pilgrimage with this booklet have collected stamps or certificates at each point to prove that they have visited all the sites mentioned in the booklet.

Sacred images - published in several different eras

The pictures include prayers for the beatification and a short biography.

Lojze Kozar Jr. (2008) *Catechesis for children, youth and parents on the Servant of God Danijel Halas*

From Gabon to Gabon I, II, III, Hours of Prayer, Reflections and Prayers, Diocese of Murasombati, 2009, 2013, 2013.

Dr. Mária Kepéné Bihár and Dr. Zoltán Lendvai Kepe (2019) *Lyndvamuseum 13, Trden grad je naš Bog - Our God is a strong fortress*

The 13th issue of *Lyndvamuseum* is about different religious institutions, people and religious history. It also includes an article on Danijel Halas.



dr. Lendvai Kepe Zoltán (2014) Lyndvamuseum 8 - Znameniti Lendavčani - Notable lendvaiak

Danijel Halas is undoubtedly one of the most renowned people in Lendava, so a special place has been reserved for him in Lyndvamuseum issue 8.

MNTI, MNMI and MMÖNK (2024) - Calendar 2024

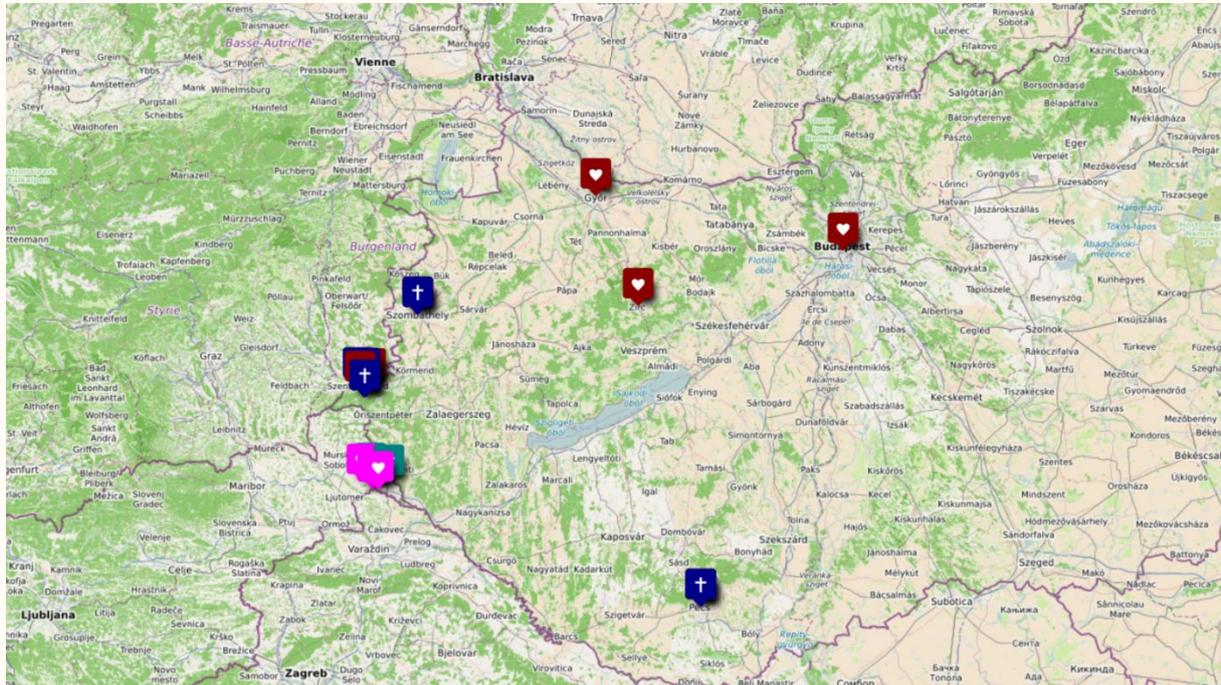
Article about Danijel Halas.

Other web literature: wikipedia, Bishopry of Murska Sobota, Ognjišče magazine, V fokusu, Obrazi slovenskih pokrajin,



Locations

An interactive map showing the lives and memorials of János Brenner and Danijel Halas is available in our digital inventory:



BIOGRAPHY OF JÁNOS BRENNER

Important places in the life of János Brenner

<i>Szombathely</i>	<p>EARLY CHILDHOOD AND ORDINATION He was born and raised in Szombathely, where he completed his first year of seminary and was ordained a priest and said his first Mass. He was buried in the church of St. Krivin in Szombathely.</p>
<i>Pécs</i>	<p>He began <i>his secondary school years</i> at the Nagy Lajos Gymnasium of the Cistercian Order in Pécs, which played a decisive role in the development and deepening of his Cistercian vocation.</p>
<i>Zirc</i>	<p>COMPLETION OF CISTERCIAN (SECULAR) OBLATE AND GRAMMAR SCHOOL STUDIES: began his preparation for monastic life while receiving his secondary education from monastic teachers dismissed from former church schools. Shortly before the dissolution of the Order, he took the habit of novice.</p>
<i>Budapest</i>	<p>RELIGIOUS STUDIES AND SECRET NOVITIATE As a lay student he attended classes at the Academy of Theology, but he lived with Cistercian families and continued his novitiate illegally.</p>
<i>Győr</i>	<p>YEARS AS A STUDENT After the closure of the seminary in Szombathely, he continued his studies at the seminary in Győr, where he became the first year's lecturer.</p>
<i>Rábakethely (Szentgotthárd district)</i>	<p>CHAPLAINCY SERVICE On 17 August 1955 he was appointed chaplain in Rábakethely, next to the parish priest Dr. Ferenc Kozma.</p>



<i>Zsida</i> (<i>Szentgotthárd district</i>)	THE PLACE OF HIS MARTYRDOM On 15 December 1955 he was found behind the Jewish school.
<i>Magyarlak</i>	CHAPLAINCY SERVICE Parish of Rábakethely. During the investigation, it emerged that the motive for his murder was to raise money for the construction of a church in Magyarlak. Ferenc Kóczán was convicted for this.
<i>Máriaújfalu</i> (<i>Szentgotthárd district</i>)	FÍLI He said his last mass here.
<i>Farkasfa</i> (<i>Szentgotthárd district</i>)	FÍLIA They attacked him on his motorbike on his way to Mass, throwing wooden sticks in front of him.

MEMORIALS

<i>Budapest, XI. district</i>	STATUE OF JÁNOS BRENNER It is located near the Feneketlen lake, near the Cistercian church and the high school. The statue is the work of Tibor Rieger.
<i>Farkasfa</i> (<i>Szentgotthárd</i>)	GLASS WINDOW WITH THE PORTRAIT OF JÁNOS BRENNER Farkasfa's blending into the landscape, but modern church features glass windows of prominent figures from 20th century church history
<i>Máriaújfalu</i> (<i>Szentgotthárd</i>)	In the sanctuary is a marble plaque commemorating the last Mass of Father John. A portrait of Father John Brenner can be found near the entrance to the CHURCH .
<i>Pécs</i>	The statue of the martyr, erected on the 50th anniversary of his death, is located in his former secondary school, the HIGH SCHOOL OF THE CISTERCIAN ORDER OF LOUIS THE GREAT .
<i>Rábakethely</i> (<i>Szentgotthárd</i>), <i>church</i>	IN CHURCH: portrait of János Brenner IN THE CEMETERY: statue of the Virgin Mary in Sorrow - carved by parish priest Dr. Ferenc Kozma in memory of János Brenner. He was not given permission to place it in the church, so it was placed in the cemetery. It was renovated in 2022. IN THE PARISH GARDEN: statue of János Brenner
<i>Szentgotthárd</i>	CHURCH OF THE ASSUMPTION: altar dedicated to John Brenner and a relic of the martyr THE CATHEDRAL OF OUR LADY OF THE SICKLE - after his beatification, the remains of János Brenner were laid to rest here, commemorating his life and work. The confessional chapel of ST ELIZABETH'S CHURCH has a glass window depicting János Brenner.
<i>Szombathely</i>	A few steps FROM ST MARTIN'S CHURCH is the school named after Father János. A full-figure statue of him stands in the schoolyard. There is a relief on the wall of the BISHOP'S PALACE . At the entrance to BRENNER COLLEGE there is a relief. The portrait of János Brenner is in front of the ALTAR OF ST MARTIN . There is a wooden statue in front of the CHRIST THE KING CHURCH IN KAMON . THE FRANCISCAN CHURCH HAS a portrait of János Brenner on a glass window.
<i>Zsida</i>	CHAPEL OF THE GOOD SHEPHERD , or Chapel of Blessed János Brenner - In 1996, the Chapel of the Good Shepherd was consecrated, built on the site where János Brenner's last journey took him. Since 1992, A MEMORIAL CROSS has stood in front of the Zsida school chapel near the site of his martyrdom.



EXHIBITIONS

János Szily Diocesan Collection and Visitor Centre, Szombathely

A permanent exhibition on János Brenner is on display on the ground floor of the Bishop's Palace. (9700 Szombathely, Berzsenyi Danijel tér 3. - [János Szily Diocesan Collection and Visitor Centre](#))

János Brenner died sixty years ago

In 2017 the Szentgotthárd Heritage Club organised a temporary exhibition about János Brenner. On the exhibition's tableaux you can follow the significant places of János Brenner's life, including his birthplace, his schools and the memories of his service as curate in Rábakethely. The photographs show the pilgrimages organised in his honour, the Jewish memorial chapel and the site of his martyrdom.

Chapel of the Good Shepherd- Chapel of the Blessed János Brenner, Szentgotthárd-Zsida

The foundation stone of the chapel, built on the initiative of the Brenner János Memorial Foundation, was laid on 9 December 1995, and the building was consecrated on 25 August 1996 by the Bishop István Konkoly. In the chapel, marble plaques recall the story of the death of John Brenner and convey the donor's appeal to the faithful to pray for families and new priestly vocations. On St Peter and St Paul's Day, the new priests of the Diocese of Szombathely make their debut here, while on the 15th of every month (from May to October), a holy mass is held in the chapel at 6pm. And on the eve of the third Sunday in December, the Christian Movement Association of Szentgotthárd organises a night pilgrimage on foot from the All Saints' Church in Rábakethely along the Brenner pilgrimage route (the Route of Martyrdom) to the chapel and from there to the Jewish memorial cross near the site of the murder. The chapel, which is also linked to the St. Mary's Way, has become a destination for religious tourism - pilgrims can book in advance to receive a professional guided tour. There is seating for around 40 people in front of the chapel and around 100 on the benches outside.

THE LIFE OF DANIJEL HALAS

Important places in the life of Danijel Halas

<i>Črenšovci</i>	Danijel Halas was born in Črenšovci on 24 June 1908. He was baptised in the Church of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross. He finished primary school here, and after his ordination, he had his Mass here.
<i>Murska Sobota</i>	Started secondary school in Murska Sobota
<i>Ljubljana</i>	Graduated in Ljubljana
<i>Ljutomer</i>	Chaplain
<i>Lendava</i>	chaplain and head of the Society of Mary
<i>Velika Polana</i>	He was a parish priest in Velika Polana, where he was buried.
<i>Budapest</i>	He was in prison in Budapest
<i>Hotiza</i>	He was arrested and murdered in Hotiza.
<i>Kot</i>	His body was found in a pot.



MEMORIALS

Črenšovci

Exaltation of the Holy Cross Church, Daniel Halas permanent exhibition

Kot

Memorial Park, where Danijel Halas's body was found

Hotiza

The Way of the Cross, or Halas's Way of the Cross, on the route he took on his last journey before his assassination

Velika Polana

Here is the grave of Danijel Halas

