The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS
TO SWEDEN
(31 OCTOBER - 1 NOVEMBER 2016)

COMMON ECUMENICAL PRAYER AT THE LUTHERAN CATHEDRAL OF LUND

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS

Lund
Monday, 31 October 2016

[Multimedia]

"Abide in me as I abide in you" (*Jn* 15:4). These words, spoken by Jesus at the Last Supper, allow us to peer into the heart of Christ just before his ultimate sacrifice on the cross. We can feel his heart beating with love for us and his desire for the unity of all who believe in him. He tells us that he is the true vine and that we are the branches, that just as he is one with the Father, so we must be one with him if we wish to bear fruit.

Here in Lund, at this prayer service, we wish to manifest our shared desire to remain one with Christ, so that we may have life. We ask him, "Lord, help us by your grace to be more closely united to you and thus, together, to bear a more effective witness of faith, hope and love". This is also a moment to thank God for the efforts of our many brothers and sisters from different ecclesial communities who refused to be resigned to division, but instead kept alive the hope of reconciliation among all who believe in the one Lord.

As Catholics and Lutherans, we have undertaken a common journey of reconciliation. Now, in the context of the commemoration of the Reformation of 1517, we have a new opportunity to accept a common path, one that has taken shape over the past fifty years in the ecumenical dialogue

between the Lutheran World Federation and the Catholic Church. Nor can we be resigned to the division and distance that our separation has created between us. We have the opportunity to mend a critical moment of our history by moving beyond the controversies and disagreements that have often prevented us from understanding one another.

Jesus tells us that the Father is the *"vinedresser"* (cf. v. 1) who tends and prunes the vine in order to make it bear more fruit (cf. v. 2). The Father is constantly concerned for our relationship with Jesus, to see if we are truly one with him (cf. v. 4). He watches over us, and his gaze of love inspires us to purify our past and to work in the present to bring about the future of unity that he so greatly desires.

We too must look with love and honesty at our past, recognizing error and seeking forgiveness, for God alone is our judge. We ought to recognize with the same honesty and love that our division distanced us from the primordial intuition of God's people, who naturally yearn to be one, and that it was perpetuated historically by the powerful of this world rather than the faithful people, which always and everywhere needs to be guided surely and lovingly by its Good Shepherd. Certainly, there was a sincere will on the part of both sides to profess and uphold the true faith, but at the same time we realize that we closed in on ourselves out of fear or bias with regard to the faith which others profess with a different accent and language. As Pope John Paul II said, "We must not allow ourselves to be guided by the intention of setting ourselves up as judges of history but solely by the motive of understanding better what happened and of becoming messengers of truth" (*Letter to Cardinal Johannes Willebrands*, President of the Secretariat for Christian Unity, 31 October 1983). God is the vinedresser, who with immense love tends and protects the vine; let us be moved by his watchful gaze. The one thing he desires is for us to abide like living branches in his Son Jesus. With this new look at the past, we do not claim to realize an impracticable correction of what took place, but "to tell that history differently" (LUTHERAN-ROMAN CATHOLIC COMMISSION ON UNITY, *From Conflict to Communion*, 17 June 2013, 16).

Jesus reminds us: *"Apart from me, you can do nothing"* (v. 5). He is the one who sustains us and spurs us on to find ways to make our unity ever more visible. Certainly, our separation has been an immense source of suffering and misunderstanding, yet it has also led us to recognize honestly that without him we can do nothing; in this way it has enabled us to understand better some aspects of our faith. With gratitude we acknowledge that the Reformation helped give greater centrality to sacred Scripture in the Church's life. Through shared hearing of the word of God in the Scriptures, important steps forward have been taken in the dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Lutheran World Federation, whose fiftieth anniversary we are presently celebrating. Let us ask the Lord that his word may keep us united, for it is a source of nourishment and life; without its inspiration we can do nothing.

The spiritual experience of Martin Luther challenges us to remember that apart from God we can do nothing. "How can I get a propitious God?" This is the question that haunted Luther. In effect,

the question of a just relationship with God is the decisive question for our lives. As we know, Luther encountered that propitious God in the Good News of Jesus, incarnate, dead and risen. With the concept *"by grace alone"*, he reminds us that God always takes the initiative, prior to any human response, even as he seeks to awaken that response. The doctrine of justification thus expresses the essence of human existence before God.

Jesus intercedes for us as our mediator before the Father; he asks him that his disciples may be one, "so that the world may believe" (*Jn* 17:21). This is what comforts us and inspires us to be one with Jesus, and thus to pray: "Grant us the gift of unity, so that the world may believe in the power of your mercy". This is the testimony the world expects from us. We Christians will be credible witnesses of mercy to the extent that forgiveness, renewal and reconciliation are daily experienced in our midst. Together we can proclaim and manifest God's mercy, concretely and joyfully, by upholding and promoting the dignity of every person. Without this service to the world and in the world, Christian faith is incomplete.

As Lutherans and Catholics, we pray together in this Cathedral, conscious that without God we can do nothing. We ask his help, so that we can be living members, abiding in him, ever in need of his grace, so that together we may bring his word to the world, which so greatly needs his tender love and mercy.

JOINT STATEMENT

on the occasion of the Joint Catholic-Lutheran Commemoration of the Reformation

Lund, 31 October 2016

«Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me» (*John* 15:4).

With thankful hearts

With this Joint Statement, we express joyful gratitude to God for this moment of common prayer in the Cathedral of Lund, as we begin the year commemorating the five hundredth anniversary of the Reformation. Fifty years of sustained and fruitful ecumenical dialogue between Catholics and Lutherans have helped us to overcome many differences, and have deepened our mutual understanding and trust. At the same time, we have drawn closer to one another through joint service to our neighbours – often in circumstances of suffering and persecution. Through dialogue

and shared witness we are no longer strangers. Rather, we have learned that what unites us is greater than what divides us.

Moving from conflict to communion

While we are profoundly thankful for the spiritual and theological gifts received through the Reformation, we also confess and lament before Christ that Lutherans and Catholics have wounded the visible unity of the Church. Theological differences were accompanied by prejudice and conflicts, and religion was instrumentalized for political ends. Our common faith in Jesus Christ and our baptism demand of us a daily conversion, by which we cast off the historical disagreements and conflicts that impede the ministry of reconciliation. While the past cannot be changed, what is remembered and how it is remembered can be transformed. We pray for the healing of our wounds and of the memories that cloud our view of one another. We emphatically reject all hatred and violence, past and present, especially that expressed in the name of religion. Today, we hear God's command to set aside all conflict. We recognize that we are freed by grace to move towards the communion to which God continually calls us.

Our commitment to common witness

As we move beyond those episodes in history that burden us, we pledge to witness together to God's merciful grace, made visible in the crucified and risen Christ. Aware that the way we relate to one another shapes our witness to the Gospel, we commit ourselves to further growth in communion rooted in Baptism, as we seek to remove the remaining obstacles that hinder us from attaining full unity. Christ desires that we be one, so that the world may believe (cf. *John* 17:21).

Many members of our communities yearn to receive the Eucharist at one table, as the concrete expression of full unity. We experience the pain of those who share their whole lives, but cannot share God's redeeming presence at the Eucharistic table. We acknowledge our joint pastoral responsibility to respond to the spiritual thirst and hunger of our people to be one in Christ. We long for this wound in the Body of Christ to be healed. This is the goal of our ecumenical endeavours, which we wish to advance, also by renewing our commitment to theological dialogue.

We pray to God that Catholics and Lutherans will be able to witness together to the Gospel of Jesus Christ, inviting humanity to hear and receive the good news of God's redeeming action. We pray to God for inspiration, encouragement and strength so that we may stand together in service, upholding human dignity and rights, especially for the poor, working for justice, and rejecting all forms of violence. God summons us to be close to all those who yearn for dignity, justice, peace and reconciliation. Today in particular, we raise our voices for an end to the violence and extremism which affect so many countries and communities, and countless sisters and brothers in Christ. We urge Lutherans and Catholics to work together to welcome the stranger, to come to the aid of those forced to flee because of war and persecution, and to defend the rights of refugees

and those who seek asylum.

More than ever before, we realize that our joint service in this world must extend to God's creation, which suffers exploitation and the effects of insatiable greed. We recognize the right of future generations to enjoy God's world in all its potential and beauty. We pray for a change of hearts and minds that leads to a loving and responsible way to care for creation.

One in Christ

On this auspicious occasion, we express our gratitude to our brothers and sisters representing the various Christian World Communions and Fellowships who are present and join us in prayer. As we recommit ourselves to move from conflict to communion, we do so as part of the one Body of Christ, into which we are incorporated through Baptism. We invite our ecumenical partners to remind us of our commitments and to encourage us. We ask them to continue to pray for us, to walk with us, to support us in living out the prayerful commitments we express today.

Calling upon Catholics and Lutherans worldwide

We call upon all Lutheran and Catholic parishes and communities to be bold and creative, joyful and hopeful in their commitment to continue the great journey ahead of us. Rather than conflicts of the past, God's gift of unity among us shall guide cooperation and deepen our solidarity. By drawing close in faith to Christ, by praying together, by listening to one another, by living Christ's love in our relationships, we, Catholics and Lutherans, open ourselves to the power of the Triune God. Rooted in Christ and witnessing to him, we renew our determination to be faithful heralds of God's boundless love for all humanity.

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