The Holy See

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS
TO THE ECUMENICAL DELEGATION OF THE LUTHERAN CHURCH OF FINLAND

Friday, 17 January 2020

[Multimedia]

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

I offer you a cordial welcome in the words of Saint Paul: “Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ” (*Rom* 1:7). I thank Bishop Teemu for his words, a beautiful invitation to mutual understanding in the midst of today’s many misunderstandings. Your ecumenical pilgrimage for the feast of Saint Henrik has once more brought you to Rome. Together you are journeying – as all of us are – in communion of faith, so as to encourage one another and to strengthen one another in Christian discipleship.

This past Sunday, we celebrated the Baptism of Jesus and we recalled our own baptism. A Christian is someone who can give thanks for his or her baptism; and this gratitude unites us within the community of all the baptized. The “baptism for the forgiveness of sins” that we profess in the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed is also a clear summons to holiness.

The Report of the Catholic-Lutheran dialogue group for Sweden and Finland, entitled *Justification in the Life of the Church*, rightly observes that “those who are already baptized can, together with their brothers and sisters, develop their opportunities for holiness, which come from their common justification in Christ. As members of one and the same mystical body of Christ, Christians are bound to one another and must bear one another’s burdens. Since Christ came to redeem the whole world, it is also a mission for the church and for individual Christians, both lay and ordained, to witness to the good news in the midst of their daily life” (No. 203).

Hospitality is likewise part of our shared witness of faith in daily life. The Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, which begins tomorrow, shows us this ecumenical virtue, and indeed recommends

it to us. “They showed us unusual kindness” (*Acts* 28:2) as we read in the Acts of the Apostles, with reference to the inhabitants of the island of Malta, who received with hospitality the Apostle Paul, together with hundreds of shipwrecked people.

As baptized Christians, we believe that Christ wishes to meet us precisely in those who are – both literally and figuratively – shipwrecked in life. Those who show hospitality grow richer, not poorer. Whoever gives, receives in return. For the humanity we show to others makes us in a mysterious way partakers in the goodness of the God who became man.

Dear Finnish friends, as heralds of humanity, as recipients of the goodness of God incarnate, we are journeying together in the community of all the baptized. Christians are those who can give thanks for their baptism. This gratitude links and expands our hearts, and opens them to our neighbour, who is not an adversary but our beloved brother, our beloved sister. The community of all the baptized is not a mere “standing beside one another”, and certainly not a “standing against one other”, but wants to become an ever fuller “standing together”.

Spiritual ecumenism and ecumenical dialogue serve to deepen this “standing together”. May this “standing together” continue to grow, prosper and bear fruit in Finland. To that end, I pray that God may grant you his abundant grace and his blessing. I would ask you also to please pray for me. Thank you.

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