



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF POPE JOHN PAUL II TO THE BISHOPS OF THE LUTHERAN CHURCH IN AMERICA

Thursday, 26 September 1985

Dear Friends,

I welcome you warmly to Rome, the city of the Apostles Peter and Paul: "Grace to you and peace from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ" (*2 Thess. 1, 2*).

I know that your visit here is one phase of a remarkable journey you are making for ecumenical understanding. You have been to Geneva and Istanbul and will go to Canterbury. In each place witness is being given to the need for Christian unity. I appreciate your purpose in coming now to Rome, namely, to deepen your knowledge of the Catholic Church and to understand better her commitment to ecumenism. I commend this effort that you are making, for it relates so clearly to the prayer of Christ: "that they may all be one" (*Jo. 15, 21*).

On three occasions I have met the Presiding Bishop of the Lutheran Church in America, Bishop James Crumley. I appreciate his kind words that have just been read. I know of this deep commitment to the cause of Christian unity from our conversations and from the letters that we have exchanged. Please extend to him my most cordial greetings.

When we come together in ecumenical encounters such as this, there is always a sense of joy and hope and gratitude, but of sorrow as well. There is joy and hope, because the Lutheran-Catholic dialogue over the last twenty years has made us increasingly aware of how close we are to each other in many things that are basic. We experience sorrow too, because there are important issues which still divide us in the profession of faith, preventing us from celebrating the Eucharist together. But still we can be grateful, for every new encounter of persons seeking the unity of Christians is a fresh response to the Holy Spirit who is always challenging us to overcome our divisions.

Dear brothers in Christ: you are most welcome here. Let us rejoice that an encounter such as this can take place. Let us resolve to be open to the Lord so that he can use this meeting for his purposes, to bring about the unity that he desires. Thank you for the efforts you are making for full unity in faith and charity.

In an address that I gave to the Roman Curia in June, I reviewed some of the achievements of ecumenism over the last twenty-five years. I expressed a hope then, which I believe is appropriate to all of us now: "May the Lord grant . . . that we may be courageously docile to his will, so that he may bring to a conclusion what he has begun in us". And with Saint Paul we are convinced that he who has begun this good work in us "will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ" (*Phil.* 1, 6).

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