



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC PILGRIMAGE
TO NORWAY, ICELAND, FINLAND,
DENMARK AND SWEDEN

ECUMENICAL MEETING

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II

Lutheran Cathedral of Turku
Monday, 5 June 1989

“You did not choose, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide” (Jo. 15, 16).

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

1. These words of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ remind us that our *discipleship is a gift*, it is a work of grace. The spiritual fruitfulness of our lives is the result of a commission that we have received from the Lord, in whom we abide as branches of the vine, and apart from whom we can do nothing (Cfr. *ibid.* 15, 5).

Today, in this *ancient Cathedral of Turku*, we have gathered together as disciples of Christ in order to glorify the Father in the Holy Spirit. It is a joyful occasion, for in our midst we recognize the presence of the Risen Lord who promised us that wherever two or three are gathered in his name, he is there in their midst (Cfr. *Matth.* 18, 20). It is also an occasion for us to reflect on his prayer that we, his disciples, “may all be one... so that the world may believe” (*Jo.* 17, 21). This constitutes a *special challenge*, for as we listen to the Lord’s words, we are reminded that his disciples throughout the world are not one. Despite the prayer which Jesus made on our behalf, we remain divided in many ways, and continue to bear the burdens of many centuries of separation and hostility. Yet Christ, who is seated at the right hand of the throne of God (Cfr. *Hebr.* 12, 2), has not

abandoned us. We know that even now he lives to make intercession for us (Cfr. *ibid.* 7, 25), and his will, that we may all be one, continually challenges his Church on her pilgrim way through history.

If, as his disciples, we are to do the Lord's will and thus glorify the Father, we must work together to tear down the barriers which have long separated us. We must seek to resolve the issues which have divided us, and grow together, as branches of the one vine, in the life we have received from Christ.

2. Today, in Turku, I give thanks to Christ for this ecumenical meeting, and for the growing fellowship among his disciples which it symbolizes. As your guest, I am especially pleased to share this moment of common prayer with you. I am *deeply grateful* to you, *Archbishop Vikström*, for your kind invitation, and to all of you, my brothers and sisters in the Lord, for the warm welcome you have given me.

In these last decades, important *progress has been made in doctrinal discussion and in pastoral collaboration* among Christians. On an even deeper level, we have also witnessed a *growing awareness of those elements of the apostolic heritage* which, despite our divisions, we still hold in common. These cherished elements of our common heritage should inspire us to "lay aside every weight and sin... and run with perseverance the race that is set before us" (*Hebr.* 12, 1). They help us recognize that what we share comes as a gift of God to those whom he has called to be one. It is in this context, on this first visit of a Bishop of Rome to Finland, that *I wish to speak to you about the papal ministry* which I have received, and which I exercise within that communion which is the universal Catholic Church (Cfr. *Lumen Gentium*, 23).

3. Who am I? Like all of you, I am a Christian, and in Baptism I received the grace that unites me with Jesus Christ our Lord. *Through Baptism I am your brother in Christ.*

In addition, and without any merit on my part, I was called to the priesthood and ordained for the ministry of the word, the celebration of the Holy Eucharist and the forgiveness of sins. Later, in my native Poland, I was ordained a bishop and received the call to exercise the fullness of the priesthood in the pastoral care of God's people. Finally, God's design has been for me to be charged with the special ministry of the Bishop of Rome, the Successor of Peter, in whom – according to Catholic teaching – the Lord instituted "*a permanent and visible source and foundation of unity of faith and fellowship*" (*Ibid.* 18).

The faith of the Catholic Church sees the ministry of the Pope as the permanence of the ministry of Peter. My office as Bishop of Rome demands that I be concerned with *both the local Church of Rome and with the Church universal*. In a special way, I have inherited the "care for all the Churches" of which Saint Paul spoke (Cfr. *2Cor.* 11, 28), and I rely upon the grace of Christ to sustain me in my task.

As the Successor of Peter, *I preach no other message but the Gospel*, the good news of God's love as revealed in the words of Jesus Christ: "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you; abide in my love" (*Io. 15, 9*). I proclaim the name of Jesus Christ, "the leader and perfecter of our faith" (*Hebr. 12, 2*). I bear witness that for our sake, Christ endured the Cross and left us his example lest we become weary or fainthearted (Cfr. *ibid. 12, 2-3*).

4. As the Successor of Peter, I am also bound to work for the unity of all Christ's disciples. While Christians remain divided on many important points, we can all agree that the quest for Christian unity must be rooted primarily in Christ. Jesus himself said: "I am the vine and you are the branches. He who abides in me and I in him, he it is who bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing" (*Io. 15, 5*). The point of reference for all Churches and Ecclesial Communities is our Lord Jesus Christ and the apostolic Church which he founded, that community of disciples which he brought into being during and immediately after his earthly life. *For the Catholic Church unconditional fidelity to the will of Christ as it appears in the Apostolic Church and its Tradition constitutes the very ground of our existence.*

Because *ecumenism* seeks unity in Christ through the Holy Spirit to the glory of the Father it must also be *founded upon prayer*. In this connection, Archbishop Vikström, I recall the occasion when, in January 1985, along with the late Archbishop Paavali of the Orthodox Church in Finland and Bishop Verschuren of the Catholic Church, you visited me in Rome. You came to *inaugurate a chapel* in the Church of *Santa Maria sopra Minerva* for the use of the Finnish people of various Churches who live in Rome. That was a very tangible display of the value of ecumenical prayer in common.

5. The presence at the *Second Vatican Council* of observers from other Christian Churches and Ecclesial Communities, such as the Lutheran World Federation, gave great impetus to the ecumenical relations which have developed since then. Besides the importance of prayer, the Council *taught the significance of personal conversion of mind and heart*, as well as *renewal in the Church itself for the fostering of Christian unity* (Cfr. [*Unitatis Redintegratio*](#), 6-8). It asked for a renewal with regard to the preaching of the word of God, catechetics, liturgical reform, the apostolate of the laity and many other areas of ecclesial life. This renewal has had important implications for the internal life of the Catholic Church. It brought the mystery of the Church to the forefront of our attention, and in this way it has strengthened our resolve to travel the road to the unity of all Christians.

The unity which we seek can only be based on unity of faith. Theological dialogue, wherein each can speak to the other on an equal footing (Cfr. *ibid. 9*), remains indispensable to the pursuit of communion in faith in fidelity to the Apostolic Tradition. Here, I would like to say a word of appreciation for the work of both the International Lutheran/Catholic Dialogue and the International Orthodox/Catholic Dialogue. Both commissions have produced significant statements. At the proper time these statements need to be studied by the Churches themselves, in order to see how

far the dialogues have taken us towards unity in faith. In the meantime, my hope is that research will continue, and will focus more and more upon the reality of the Church itself. The goal for which we are striving is impossible for man alone, but for him who prays in obedience to the words of the Lord, nothing is impossible.

In speaking of dialogue, may I take the opportunity to express *gratitude to the Lutheran Church of Finland for the ecumenical openness* it has shown in this regard. I have been told of the importance of its dialogue with the Russian Orthodox Church and its dialogue with some Finnish Protestant communities. I express gratitude as well to the *Orthodox Church of Finland* for the generosity with which it hosted the Orthodox/Catholic international dialogue held in 1988 in this country, in the monastery of New Valamo. All of these efforts, we can hope, will lead one day to the sharing of the Apostolic Tradition in its fullness by all Christians.

6. "If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you will and it shall be done for you" (*Io. 15, 7*). Dear brothers and sisters in Christ: if we remain faithful to the Lord's will, and abide in him, there is no division that his grace cannot heal, no obstacle that his love cannot overcome. May we always be guided by his Holy Spirit, that all who believe in him may be truly one, and that the Father will be glorified in our bearing much fruit. Amen.

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