



The Holy See

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

ECUMENICAL PRAYER SERVICE

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II

Lutheran Cathedral of Uppsala
Friday, 9 June 1989

“May all be one... so that the world may believe that you have sent me” (*Jo. 17, 21*).

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

1. With these words of the Gospel before us, I wish to give thanks to Almighty God who in his loving Providence has made it possible for me to be with you today. My cordial greeting goes to Their Majesties King Carl Gustav and Queen Silvia, whose presence I gladly acknowledge with fervent prayers for the peace and well-being of the nation. I also wish to express my thanks to Archbishop Werkström, who has opened wide the door of friendship for this ecumenical service. To all of you who have come here this morning to pray with the Bishop of Rome I extend the hand of brotherhood and peace in our Lord Jesus Christ.

The Scripture readings which we have just heard from the Book of *the Prophet Isaiah* and from *the Gospel of John* respond to the *deepest longings of the human heart for unity and peace*. In the Book of Genesis we read how these gifts were lost because of sin. The murder of Abel by his brother Cain (Cfr. *Gen. 4*) and in particular the building of the *Tower of Babel* (Cfr. *ibid. 11*) show how the reality of sin spread and multiplied. Forgetting God, men sought to raise up a tower through their own efforts, only to end in incomprehension and division. The Tower of Babel is the first of many episodes in the Old Testament which show the consequences of man's misguided attempts to succeed on his own, without reference to the God who created him.

But in today's first reading the Prophet Isaiah announces the promise of a *restoration of unity and peace with God and among men* which the Lord himself will bring about on Mount Sion. He proclaims this vision of hope: "the mountain of the house of the Lord... shall be raised above the hills; and all the nations shall flow to it,... many peoples shall come, and say: 'Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord... that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths'... nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more" (*Is. 2, 2-4*). Unlike the builders of Babel, Isaiah recognizes that unity and peace are not guaranteed by any human programme, but will come through knowledge of God, through obedience to the divine law, through *learning God's ways and "walking in his paths"*. Isaiah recognizes the spiritual nature of the "temple" in which unity and peace with God and among men will be restored.

This vision of Isaiah is *fulfilled in our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ*. He is the Eternal Priest, who on the eve of his death begins a prayer for unity and peace which he will continue to offer until its perfect fulfilment at the end of time: "I do not pray for these only, but also for those who believe in me through their word, that they may all be one; even as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us" (*Io. 17, 20-21*). By his Death and Resurrection, Christ became that spiritual temple to which "all the nations flow". By his revelation of the truth about God and man, Christ shows that the human longing for unity and peace has *its beginning and end in a transcendent mystery: the union of Father, Son and Holy Spirit*.

2. Dear brothers and sisters: this Gospel touches each of us personally. Christ's priestly prayer includes us, inasmuch as we too have become believers through the apostles' word. The gift of salvation, which restores man to communion with God and with others, is directed to all. "It has pleased God to make men holy and to save them not merely as individuals without any mutual bonds, but by making them into a single people, a people which acknowledges him in truth and serves him in holiness" (*Lumen Gentium, 9*). Into the unity of the one Church of Christ, then, God calls all who believe that Jesus is "the author of salvation and the source of unity and peace" (*Ibid.*). He, in fact, has established this Church, "that for each and all she may be the visible sacrament of this saving unity" (*Ibid.*).

Unity is an essential mark of the Church. Far from being a merely human organization with a message, the Church is the Body and Bride of her Lord, born from his wounded side on the Cross. *Her unity flows from her very nature and is essential to her mission*. It is part of God's plan of salvation. It is the will and prayer of Christ. We recognize too that for the Church to be *a credible sign of redemption and communion with God*, she must live in conformity with what she is and with what she proclaims. Indeed, all who look upon Jesus as "the author of salvation and the source of unity and peace" (*Ibid., 9*) will want to do everything possible to be effective signs and instruments of that unity and peace, "so that the world may believe" (*Io. 17, 21*). For this reason, the concern for Christian unity with which we have gathered in prayer this morning is no small or superficial matter.

3. We must acknowledge with sorrow that Christians are not united. At the same time we can be confident that *the Lord of history has not abandoned us to our divisions*. He wisely and patiently draws us by his grace to an ever greater remorse for them and an ever greater desire for unity (Cfr. *Unitatis Redintegratio*, 1).

Despite all the dissension and division over the centuries, belief in our one Lord and Saviour and incorporation into him by Baptism ensures a kind of *communion, however imperfect*. Baptism, which is a sacramental bond among all those who have been reborn, is at the same time a dynamic point of departure. *Once baptized, we must strive for fullness of life in Christ*, a fullness that is expressed in the complete profession of faith and in the sacramental unity and fellowship of the Church as Christ willed it to be (Cfr. *ibid.* 22). As I stated last year to a Delegation from the Lutheran World Federation: "Because we already share bonds of unity in Christ through Baptism, *we can never be satisfied with anything less than full communion*" (Ioannis Pauli PP. II *Ad quosdam seiunctos Fratres coram admissos*, 3, die 4 mar. 1988: *Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, XI, 1 [1988] 552).

Protestants and Catholics in Sweden also share an *impressive historical heritage, of which this great cathedral of Uppsala is a striking reminder*. It was built as a national shrine at a time when all the people of Sweden were joined in the same faith. Even today the tomb of *Saint Erik* is preserved here. The faith which inspired the construction of this cathedral once brought Cistercians, Dominicans and Franciscans to your country. It inspired *Saint Birgitta*, whose revelations were read throughout Europe. Even after the Reformation, much of the Catholic heritage was preserved here, more than in other countries.

4. Reference to this history and acknowledgment of this shared heritage make our divisions all the more painful. They instil in us *a spirit of repentance*. The Decree on Ecumenism of the Second Vatican Council recalls the injunction of the First Letter of John: "If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us" (*1Jo.* 1, 10). It extends this warning to *sins against unity*, and so it urges us to "beg pardon of God and of our separated brethren, just as we forgive those who trespass against us" (*Unitatis Redintegratio*, 7).

Dear brothers and sisters: *it is a challenge for us to forgive each other*, but the Lord has commanded us to do so. After four hundred years of separation, time is needed for the process of reconciliation and healing to take place. Not everything can be done at once, but *we must do what we can today with hope for what may be possible tomorrow*.

In seeking greater understanding, much can be gained through patient dialogue. Let us ask: *What can we learn from one another? How can we enrich one another?* Dialogue makes it possible for us to examine anew the profound questions raised at the time of the Reformation, free from polemics and mistrust. But one thing is clear: we will never find unity by searching for some least common denominator that may be acceptable to all. Our efforts will only be fruitful *to the extent*

*that we discover and accept together the full authentic heritage of faith given by Christ through his apostles. Let us all try more and more to find in that faith our strength to live a truly Christian life (Cfr. *ibid.* 8).*

Living in Christ provides an indispensable *spiritual foundation for our quest for Christian unity*. It is very important, therefore, that there should be a spiritual commitment to unity on the part of each and every Christian. Ecumenism challenges us *to intensify our private and public prayer, to be converted anew, to grow in holiness of life*. Only in this way will we be able to discern God's will and open ourselves to the whole truth about Christ and his Church. When we consider the greatness of the ecumenical task, we must acknowledge our inadequacy. But the Lord assures us: "I will pray the Father, and he will give you another Counsellor, to be with you for ever, ...the Spirit of truth" (*Jo.* 14, 16-17). This Spirit of truth will bear witness to Christ and guide the believer to the complete truth since "he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak" (*ibid.* 16, 13). However much we strive for unity, it remains ever *a gift of the Holy Spirit*. We will be well disposed to receive this gift only to the extent that we have opened our minds and hearts to him through Christian living, and especially through prayer.

5. I join you in giving thanks for the many ways in which the Holy Spirit has accompanied the ecumenical movement in Sweden over the years and has drawn Christians closer together. One has only to think of the life and work of individuals like *the great Archbishop of Uppsala, Nathan Söderblom*, who is buried in this cathedral and whose efforts on behalf of Christian unity and world peace are well known. I recall with great pleasure how he conversed and corresponded with my compatriot Ursula Ledochowska, that remarkable woman who lived for several years in Sweden during the First World War, and whose name has now been inscribed among the "Blessed".

It is also gratifying to see the extent of Christian cooperation in Sweden today. Special mention must be made of the *call to ecumenical dialogue* which Archbishop Werkström issued in 1987 on behalf of the Bishops of the Swedish Lutheran Church to all Church leaders in Sweden. In addition to the important dialogues taking place between Lutherans and Catholics internationally, there have also been *theological discussions* in a truly fraternal spirit *between the Catholic Church and the Swedish Lutheran Church*. These discussions have led to significant reports on Christian marriage and the family, and on the office of bishop.

In Sweden we must gratefully acknowledge a new spirit of *good will between Catholics, Lutherans, and members of the Free Churches*. In many places where Catholics are without a church building, their Protestant neighbours have made available the facilities needed for worship. There is also the cordial relationship that exists between Catholics and their Orthodox brothers and sisters in Sweden. I am reminded of the words of Saint Paul: "All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation" (*2Cor.* 5, 18).

6. Dear friends: I have come to your country in a spirit of love as your brother in Christ, as the

Bishop of Rome, the Successor of Peter, to whom the Lord said: "I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail; and when you have turned again, strengthen your brethren" (*Luc. 22, 32*). I have come as *Christ's servant and witness*, as Shepherd of his flock. I greet you *in the name of the Catholic Church* and I bring greetings and prayers from all those in full communion with the Church of Rome, which from ancient times was said "to hold the primacy of love" (S. Ignatii Antiocheni *Ad Romanos*).

Here in Uppsala, in this great cathedral, as a brother I urge both Protestants and Catholics to "fight the good fight of the faith" (*1Tim. 6, 12*), to *grow closer to Jesus Christ*, who died "to gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad" (*Io. 11, 52*). *In this way we will also grow closer to one another.*

Brothers and sisters, let us never cease to seek unity. Let us climb together "the mountain of the house of the Lord". *Let us love one another*, "so that the world may believe". Amen.

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