



The Holy See

ECUMENICAL CELEBRATION OF VESPERS ON THE SEVENTH CENTENARY
OF THE BIRTH OF ST BRIDGET OF SWEDEN CO-PATRONNESS OF EUROPE

HOMILY OF JOHN PAUL II

Friday 4 October 2002

1. *"I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified"* (1 Cor 2,2). The Apostle Paul's words that rang out during this ecumenical celebration found a special echo in the activity and mystical experience of St Bridget of Sweden; this evening we observe the seventh centenary of her birth.

In the different stages of her life, that saw her first as wife, mother and educator of her children, then as widow, and, finally, as foundress of a new form of consecrated life, the saint was constantly inspired by the mystery of Christ's passion and death. She never tired of contemplating the face of the Crucified One.

We remember her this evening, as we thank the Lord for giving us this distinguished and holy daughter of the noble land of Sweden, who was linked to the city of Rome and was a unique witness to the deep Christian roots of European civilization.

2. With great pleasure I extend heartfelt greetings to you, dear brothers and sisters, who are taking part in this solemn evening liturgy in honour of St Bridget. My thoughts go in particular to my Brother Bishops, to the clergy and to the men and women religious present.

In a spirit of brotherhood and friendship I greet the distinguished representatives of the Lutheran Churches. Your presence at this prayer is a cause of deep joy. I express the hope that our meeting together in the Lord's name will help to further our ecumenical dialogue and quicken the journey towards full Christian unity.

I wish to send a special greeting to Their Majesties, the King and Queen of Sweden, represented here by their daughter, Princess Victoria.

I respectfully greet the other religious and civil authorities taking part, as well as the organizers, speakers and participants in the symposium on "*The path of beauty for a more just and dignified world*", commemorating the 700 years since the birth of St Bridget. My affectionate greeting goes to the dear Sisters of the Order of the Most Holy Saviour of St Bridget, gathered here with the Abbess General.

3. Here, at the tombs of the Apostles and in the places sanctified by the blood of the martyrs, St Bridget spent many hours in prayer during the time she was in Rome. Here she drew strength and steadfastness in order to be able to fulfil that extraordinary charitable, missionary and social commitment which made her one of the most notable people of her day.

Contemplating the crucified Lord and in intimate union with his Passion, she was able, with prophetic determination, to complete the mission which Christ had entrusted to her for the good of the Church and society at that time.

The marble statue situated on the outside of the Vatican Basilica, near the entrance commonly called the "Door of Prayer", aptly expresses the ardour of her life and of her spirituality. St Bridget is portrayed in an attitude of prayer, with the book of her "Revelations" open, carrying a pilgrim's staff and scrip, intent on contemplating the crucified Christ.

4. I strongly desire to bring out another aspect of the personality of this great missionary of faith whom I wished to proclaim *co-patronness of Europe*: her active and zealous longing for Christian unity. In a difficult and complicated age of the history of the Church and of Europe, this indomitable disciple of the Lord never stopped working for the cohesion and genuine progress of the unity of believers. I wish to repeat what I recently wanted to recall to the Briggittine Sisters in a Message for the Seventh Centenary of her birth. I wrote of St Bridget "as a woman of unity, comes before us as a witness of ecumenism. Her harmonious personality inspires the life of the order that traces its origins to her in the direction of an ecumenism that was both spiritual and active" (n. 6; *L'Osservatore Romano* English edition, 9 October 2002, p. 4). I offer it as a spiritual heritage to be maintained, a common commitment to be continued with joyful generosity. However, because the unity of the Church is a gift of the Spirit, we are conscious that we must first implore it constantly in prayer and then build it with tireless tenacity, each making his own personal contribution.

5. Dear Brothers and Sisters, today is the Feast of St Francis of Assisi. Everyone knows of the admiration and devotion of this Franciscan Tertiary to the "Poor Man" of Assisi. Among the pilgrimages that she made to the chief sanctuaries of her day, her pilgrimage to Assisi in the summer of 1352 is notable. The visit left in her mind and heart an indelible memory.

May these two great saints who have had such an influence on the life of the Church and on the history of the European continent, help us to be, like them, courageous witnesses of Christ and of his perennial message of salvation. May Mary, to whom St Bridget was always deeply devoted, intercede for us so that we may contribute effectively to establishing the Kingdom of Christ and building the civilization of love.

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