



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS TO THE DELEGATION OF THE LUTHERAN WORLD FEDERATION

Friday, 25 June 2021

[Multimedia]

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

“Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ” (*Rom 1:7*). With these words that the Apostle Paul addressed to the Christian community in Rome, I want to welcome and greet you, the Representatives of the Lutheran World Federation, in particular your President, Archbishop Musa, whom I thank for his kind words, and your Secretary General, Reverend Martin Junge. I readily recall my visit to Lund, the city in which your Federation was founded. On that memorable ecumenical occasion, we experienced the evangelical power of reconciliation, testifying that “through dialogue and shared witness we are no longer strangers” (*Joint Declaration*, 31 October 2016). No longer strangers, but brothers and sisters.

Dear brothers and sisters, on the path from conflict to communion, on this day when you commemorate the Augsburg Confession, you have come to Rome to foster our unity. I thank you for this, and I express my hope that the shared reflection on the Augsburg Confession in view of the five-hundredth anniversary of its reading, 25 June 2030, may benefit our ecumenical journey. “On the path from conflict to communion”; this is a path taken only in crisis: a crisis that helps us to understand more deeply what we are seeking. From the conflict we have known for centuries to the communion we desire; that is why we enter into crisis. A crisis that is a blessing from the Lord.

At the time, the Augsburg Confession represented an attempt to avoid the threat of a division in Western Christianity; originally conceived as a document of intra-Catholic reconciliation, only later did it take on the character of a Lutheran confessional text. In 1980, on its 450th anniversary, Lutherans and Catholics stated that: “the common faith which we have discovered in the Augsburg

Confession can also help us to confess this faith anew in our own times” (*Joint Declaration “All Under One Christ”*, No. 27). To confess together what joins us in faith: we are reminded of the words of the Apostle Paul, “one body... one baptism, one God” (*Eph 4:4.5-6*).

One God. In its first article, the Augsburg Confession professes faith in the Triune God, expressly referring to the Council of Nicaea. The Nicene Creed is a binding expression of faith, not only for Catholics and Lutherans, but also for our Orthodox brothers and sisters and for many other Christian communities. It is a treasure we hold in common. Let us make every effort to ensure that the 1700th anniversary of that great Council, to be celebrated in 2025, will give new impulse to the ecumenical journey, which is God’s gift and for us an irreversible commitment.

One baptism. Dear brothers and sisters, everything that God’s grace is giving us the joy to experience and share – progress in overcoming divisions, the gradual healing of memory, reconciled and fraternal cooperation – is grounded in the “one baptism for the forgiveness of sins” (*Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed*). Holy baptism is the primordial divine gift at the basis of all our religious efforts and our commitment to the achievement of full unity. For ecumenism is not an exercise of ecclesial diplomacy but *a journey of grace*. It depends not on human negotiations and agreements, but on the grace of God, which purifies memories and hearts, overcomes attitudes of inflexibility and directs towards renewed communion: not towards reductive agreements or forms of irenic syncretism, but towards *a reconciled unity amid differences*. In this light, I would like to encourage all those engaged in the Catholic-Lutheran dialogue to persevere with confidence, in constant prayer, in the exercise of mutual charity, and in passionate efforts to achieve greater unity between the different members of the body of Christ.

One body. Here, the *Rule of Taizé* contains a fine exhortation: “Make the unity of the body of Christ your passionate concern”. A passion for unity deepens through the suffering we experience before the wounds we have inflicted on the body of Christ. Whenever we are pained by divisions between Christians, we draw close to Jesus’ own experience of seeing his disciples still disunited, his tunic rent (cf. *Jn 19:23*). Today you have given me the gift of a paten and a chalice produced in the workshops of Taizé. I thank you for these gifts, which evoke our sharing in the Lord’s passion. We too are experiencing a kind of passion, in both its senses: on the one hand, suffering because it is not yet possible to assemble around the same altar, the same chalice; and on the other, enthusiasm in our service of the cause of unity for which the Lord prayed and offered his life.

Let us continue, then, with passion on our journey from conflict to communion along the path of crisis. The next stage will seek to explore the close bonds uniting Church, ministry and the Eucharist. It will be important to examine with spiritual and theological humility the circumstances that led to the divisions, trusting that, although it is impossible to undo the sad events of the past, it is possible to reinterpret them as part of a reconciled history. Your General Assembly in 2023 could be an important step towards purifying memory and valuing the many spiritual treasures that the Lord has prepared over the centuries for all.

Dear brothers and sisters, the path from conflict to communion is not easy, but we are not alone: Christ accompanies us. May the crucified and risen Lord bless all of us, and in particular you, dear Reverend Junge, dear Martin, who on 31 October will conclude your service as Secretary General. Once more I thank you heartily for your visit, and I now invite you to pray together the *Our Father*, each in his or her own language, for the restoration of full unity between Christians. And the way to bring that about we can leave to the Holy Spirit, who is creative, very creative, and also a poet.

Let us now pray the *Our Father*.