



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO AN ECUMENICAL DELEGATION FROM FINLAND
ON THE OCCASION OF THE FEAST OF SAINT HENRIK**

Monday, 19 January 2009

Dear distinguished Friends from Finland,

It is with great joy that I welcome all of you on this annual visit to Rome for the feast of your patron, Saint Henrik, and I thank Bishop Gustav Björkstrand for the kind words addressed to me on your behalf.

These pilgrimages are an occasion for shared prayer, reflection and dialogue in the service of our quest for full communion. Your visit is taking place during the Week of Prayer of Christian Unity whose theme this year is taken from the Book of Ezekiel: "That they may become one in your hand" (*Ez 37:15-23*). The prophet's vision is that of two pieces of wood, symbolizing the two kingdoms into which God's people had been divided, being brought together again into one (*Ezekiel 37:15-23*). In the context of ecumenism, it speaks to us of God who constantly draws us into deeper unity in Christ, by renewing us and liberating us from our divisions.

The Lutheran-Catholic Dialogue Commission in Finland and Sweden continues to consider the *Joint Declaration on Justification*. This year we celebrate the tenth anniversary of this significant statement, and the Commission is now studying its implications and the possibility of its reception. Under the theme *Justification in the Life of the Church*, the dialogue is taking ever fuller account of the nature of the Church as the sign and instrument of the salvation brought about in Jesus Christ, and not simply a mere assembly of believers or an institution with various functions.

Your pilgrimage to Rome takes place within the Pauline Year - the two thousandth anniversary of the birth of the Apostle to the Nations, whose life and teaching were tirelessly committed to the unity of the Church. Saint Paul reminds us of the marvellous grace we have received by becoming

members of Christ's body through baptism (cf. *1 Cor* 12:12-31). The Church is this mystical Body of Christ, and is continuously guided by the Holy Spirit; the Spirit of the Father and the Son. It is only based on this incarnational reality that the sacramental character of the Church as communion in Christ can be understood. A consensus with regard to the profoundly Christological and pneumatological implications of the mystery of the Church would prove a most promising basis for the Commission's work.

From Paul we also learn that the unity we seek is nothing less than the manifestation of our full incorporation into the Body of Christ, whereby "all you who have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. . . for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (*Gal* 3:27-28). To this end, dear friends, it is my fervent hope that your visit to Rome will further strengthen the ecumenical relations between Lutherans and Catholics in Finland, which have been so positive for many years. Together, let us thank God for all that has been achieved to date in Catholic-Lutheran relations, and let us pray that the Spirit of truth will guide us towards ever greater unity, in the service of the Gospel.

With these sentiments of affection in the Lord, and at the beginning of this new year, I invoke upon you and your families God's gifts of joy and peace.

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