



The Holy See

LITURGICAL FEAST OF ST BRIDGET

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II

13 November 1999

1. *“Behold, I make all things new...these words are trustworthy and true” (Rev 21:5)*

Christ makes all things new. Saint Bridget, an illustrious daughter of Sweden, believed in Christ intensely and with deep love. With her song of faith and her good works she adorned the Church, which she recognized as the community of believers, the dwelling-place of the Spirit of God.

Today we remember this extraordinary holy woman, and I am especially glad that beside me in this celebration there are the highest representatives of the Lutheran Churches of Sweden and Finland, together with my venerable Brother Bishops of Stockholm and Copenhagen. I welcome each of them with great affection.

I also greet respectfully the King and Queen of Sweden, who have chosen to honour this celebration with their presence. My greeting goes also to the political leaders here with us. And finally I greet all of you, dear Sisters of the Most Holy Saviour of Saint Bridget, led by your Superior General.

2. Once again we are gathered to renew before the Lord the commitment to *unity of faith and unity of the Church* which Saint Bridget undertook with such conviction in troubled times. A passion for Christian unity sustained her entire life. And, thanks to her witness and the witness of Mother Elizabeth Hesselblad, this commitment has come down to us through the mysterious stream of grace which overflows the bounds of time and space.

Today's celebration encourages us to meditate upon the message of Saint Bridget, whom I recently chose to proclaim a Co-Patroness of Europe, together with Saint Catherine of Siena and Saint Teresa Benedicta of the Cross. Saint Bridget's dynamic love for the Church of Christ and her

witness to the Cross are a rallying-point for us all as we prepare to cross the threshold of the new millennium.

I am very pleased at the end of our celebration this evening to inaugurate and bless a statue which will make more vibrant here in the Vatican the memory of this great witness of faith. Placed on the outside of this Basilica and just beside the so-called "Door of Prayer", the marble image of Saint Bridget will be an enduring invitation to pray and work always for Christian unity.

3. My thoughts now turn to 5 October 1991, when a solemn ecumenical celebration was held in this same basilica for the sixth centenary of St Bridget's canonization. On that occasion I said: "For 25 years Lutherans and Catholics have been working to rediscover their common path....

Theological dialogue has brought to light again the vast heritage of faith which unites us.... Everyone knows that the Protestant Reformation began from the doctrine of justification and that it destroyed the unity of the Christians of the West. A common understanding of justification ... will, we are sure, help us to resolve the other controversies directly or indirectly linked to it".

This "common understanding", which I had hoped for eight years ago, today, thank God, has become an encouraging reality. On 31 October last, in the city of Augsburg, a Joint Declaration was solemnly signed in which Lutherans and Catholics expressed a consensus on basic truths of the doctrine of justification. This achievement of the ecumenical dialogue, a milestone on the way to full and visible unity, is the result of an intense work of research, meetings and prayer.

However, we still have a long way to go: "*grandis restat nobis via*". We must do even more, conscious of the responsibilities we all have on the threshold of the third millennium. We must continue to walk together, supported by Christ, who prayed to the Father in the Upper Room on the night before his death that his disciples would "all be one" (*Jn 17: 21*).

4. The Joint Declaration says very appropriately that the consensus reached by Catholics and Lutherans "in basic truths of the doctrine of justification must come to influence the life and teachings of our Churches" (n. 43).

On this path we trust in the ceaseless action of the Holy Spirit. Moreover, we also trust in those before us who loved Christ and his Cross so much, and prayed, like St Bridget, for that indelible note of the Church which is her unity.

We do not know the day when we will meet the Lord. The Gospel therefore calls us to watch, keeping our lamps lighted, so that when the Bridegroom comes we can be ready to welcome him. In this watchful expectation, the Divine Master's prayer echoes in the heart of every believer: "*Ut unum sint*".

May St Bridget be our example and intercessor. In a special way I ask you, her dear spiritual daughters of the Order of the Most Holy Saviour, to continue faithfully your precious apostolate of service to unity.

The new millennium is now at hand: may "Christ yesterday, today and for ever" be the focus and goal of all our aspirations. It is he who makes all things new and marks out for his faithful ones a journey of joyful hope. Let us pray unceasingly that he will grant the wisdom and strength of his Spirit; let us beseech him that all Christians may achieve unity as soon as possible. Nothing is impossible for God!

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