

**Sermon on the occasion of the Joint Commemoration of the Reformation  
Lund Cathedral, Sweden, October 31, 2016  
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Dear sisters and brothers in Christ,

For centuries, generation after generation, we have been reading this text from the Gospel that presents Jesus as the True Vine. However, rather than reading it as an encouragement to affirm our unity, we focused on the branches that, because they did not bear fruits, were removed from the vine. This is how we have seen one another: as branches separated from the true vine, Christ.

But there were women and men who, in times when this joint commemoration was still unimaginable, already gathered together to pray for unity or to form ecumenical communities. There were theologians, women and men, who already entered in dialogue, seeking to overcome doctrinal and theological differences. There were many, who together offered themselves to serve the poor and the oppressed. There were even some who suffered martyrdom for the sake of the Gospel.

I feel deep gratitude for those bold prophets. As they lived and witnessed together they began to see one another no longer as separated branches but as branches united to Jesus Christ. Even more, they began to see Christ in their midst and to acknowledge that even in those periods of history when dialogue was broken between us, Christ continued talking to us. Jesus never forgot us, even when we seemed to have forgotten him, losing ourselves in violent and hateful actions.

Thus, as we see Jesus among us, we have also started to see each other anew. We acknowledge that there is much more that unites us than that which separates us. We are branches of the same vine. We are one in Baptism. This is why we are here at this joint commemoration: to rediscover who we are in Christ.

However, the revelation of the unity that we have in Jesus Christ clashes with the fragmented reality of Christ's body, his church. The vision of a communion grounded in Jesus Christ, with all its beauty and the hope that it inspires in us, also entails to suffer with even greater pain from the wounds of our brokenness. What never should have been broken was broken: the unity of the body of Christ. We lost what is given to us.

How can we continue walking now with the same boldness and hope of those who preceded us in this ecumenical pilgrimage towards unity? How do we direct our steps towards the future of communion into which God calls us? How can we be healed so that finally we may become what we already are in Christ: branches of the same vine?

A Latin American thinker, Eduardo Galeano, wrote: "History is a prophet who looks back: because of what was, and against what was, it announces what will be."

I suggest that from now on we apply this key when we read the Bible text of the true vine. Let it be the hopeful and prophetic announcement of the solid link between the vine and its branches bearing fruits of healing and life in abundance. Let this be the spirit to approach this historical moment in which we commit ourselves, Catholics and Lutherans, to move away from a past overshadowed by conflict and division and to walk the paths of communion.

No doubt, it is a promising but also a demanding journey. It takes place in times of great fragmentation and marked by tendency to conflict. Imposing sectarianisms alienate individuals and communities, leaving them unable to communicate. However, the journey we are called into must be built on even more intense dialogues. Our own narratives about who we are and who the other is generally underline and highlight our differences. Our memories are often marked by pain and conflict.

Aware of all those centrifugal forces that always risk separating us, I would like to call us to rely trustfully on the centripetal force of Baptism. The liberating grace of baptism is a divine gift that calls us together and unites us! Baptism is the prophetic announcement of healing

and unity in the midst of our wounded world, and thus becomes a gift of hope for humanity that longs to live in peace with justice and in reconciled diversity. What a profound mystery: the cry of peoples and individuals living under violence and oppression is consonant with what God continually whispers into our ears through Jesus Christ, the true vine to which we are united. Abiding in this vine we will bear the fruits of peace, justice and reconciliation, mercy and solidarity that the people cry for and that God brings forth.

Let us move forward then, answering faithfully God's call and, by doing so, responding to the cries for help, to the thirst and the hunger of a wounded and broken humanity.

And if tomorrow God would see us holding stones in our hands, like those we carried in former times, may they not be to be thrown at each other. Who could throw the first stone now that we know who we are in Christ? May they not be used either to build walls of separation and exclusion. How could we when Jesus Christ calls us to be ambassadors of reconciliation? Rather, may God find us building bridges so that we can come closer to each other, houses where we can meet together, and tables -yes, tables - where we can share bread and wine, the presence of Christ, who has never left us and who calls us to abide in him so that the world may believe.

**Address of His Holiness Pope Francis  
Common Ecumenical Prayer  
Lutheran Cathedral of Lund  
Monday, 31 October 2016**

"Abide in me as I abide in you" (Jn 15:4). These words, spoken by Jesus at the Last Supper, allow us to peer into the heart of Christ just before his ultimate sacrifice on the cross. We can feel his heart beating with love for us and his desire for the unity of all who believe in him. He tells us that he is the true vine and that we are the branches, that just as he is one with the Father, so we must be one with him if we wish to bear fruit.

Here in Lund, at this prayer service, we wish to manifest our shared desire to remain one with Christ, so that we may have life. We ask him, "Lord, help us by your grace to be more closely united to you and thus, together, to bear a more effective witness of faith, hope and love". This is also a moment to thank God for the efforts of our many brothers and sisters from different ecclesial communities who refused to be resigned to division, but instead kept alive the hope of reconciliation among all who believe in the one Lord.

As Catholics and Lutherans, we have undertaken a common journey of reconciliation. Now, in the context of the commemoration of the Reformation of 1517, we have a new opportunity to accept a common path, one that has taken shape over the past fifty years in the ecumenical dialogue between the Lutheran World Federation and the Catholic Church. Nor can we be resigned to the division and distance that our separation has created between us. We have the opportunity to mend a critical moment of our history by moving beyond the controversies and disagreements that have often prevented us from understanding one another.

Jesus tells us that the Father is the "vinedresser" (cf. v. 1) who tends and prunes the vine in order to make it bear more fruit (cf. v. 2). The Father is constantly concerned for our relationship with Jesus, to see if we are truly one with him (cf. v. 4). He watches over us, and his gaze of love inspires us to purify our past and to work in the present to bring about the future of unity that he so greatly desires.

We too must look with love and honesty at our past, recognizing error and seeking forgiveness, for God alone is our judge. We ought to recognize with the same honesty and love that our division distanced us from the primordial intuition of God's people, who naturally yearn to be one, and that it was perpetuated historically by the powerful of this world rather than the faithful people, which always and everywhere needs to be guided surely and lovingly by its Good Shepherd. Certainly, there was a sincere will on the part of both sides to profess and uphold the true faith, but at the same time we realize that we closed in on ourselves out of fear or bias with regard to the faith which others profess with a different accent and language. As Pope John Paul II said, "We must not allow ourselves to be guided by the intention of setting ourselves up as judges of history but solely by the motive of understanding better what happened and of becoming messengers of truth" (Letter to Cardinal Johannes Willebrands, President of the Secretariat for Christian Unity, 31 October 1983). God is the vinedresser, who with immense love tends and protects the vine; let us be moved by his watchful gaze. The one thing he desires is for us to abide like living branches in his Son Jesus. With this new look at the past, we do not claim to realize an impracticable correction of what took place, but "to tell that history differently" (LUTHERAN-ROMAN CATHOLIC COMMISSION ON UNITY, *From Conflict to Communion*, 17 June 2013, 16).

Jesus reminds us: "Apart from me, you can do nothing" (v. 5). He is the one who sustains us and spurs us on to find ways to make our unity ever more visible. Certainly, our separation has been an immense source of suffering and misunderstanding, yet it has also led us to recognize honestly that without him we can do nothing; in this way it has enabled us to understand better some aspects of our faith. With gratitude we acknowledge that the Reformation helped give greater centrality to sacred Scripture in the Church's life. Through shared hearing of the word of God in the Scriptures, important steps forward have been taken in the dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Lutheran World Federation,

whose fiftieth anniversary we are presently celebrating. Let us ask the Lord that his word may keep us united, for it is a source of nourishment and life; without its inspiration we can do nothing.

The spiritual experience of Martin Luther challenges us to remember that apart from God we can do nothing. "How can I get a propitious God?" This is the question that haunted Luther. In effect, the question of a just relationship with God is the decisive question for our lives. As we know, Luther encountered that propitious God in the Good News of Jesus, incarnate, dead and risen. With the concept "by grace alone", he reminds us that God always takes the initiative, prior to any human response, even as he seeks to awaken that response. The doctrine of justification thus expresses the essence of human existence before God.

Jesus intercedes for us as our mediator before the Father; he asks him that his disciples may be one, "so that the world may believe" (Jn 17:21). This is what comforts us and inspires us to be one with Jesus, and thus to pray: "Grant us the gift of unity, so that the world may believe in the power of your mercy". This is the testimony the world expects from us. We Christians will be credible witnesses of mercy to the extent that forgiveness, renewal and reconciliation are daily experienced in our midst. Together we can proclaim and manifest God's mercy, concretely and joyfully, by upholding and promoting the dignity of every person. Without this service to the world and in the world, Christian faith is incomplete.

As Lutherans and Catholics, we pray together in this Cathedral, conscious that without God we can do nothing. We ask his help, so that we can be living members, abiding in him, ever in need of his grace, so that together we may bring his word to the world, which so greatly needs his tender love and mercy.