

**Bishop Teemu's homily at Lutheran mass at Santa Maria sopra Minerva during visit of
ecumenical delegation from Finland
19 January 2022**

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ!

Tradition tells us that Bishop Henry was killed on the 19th or 20th of January, 1156 on the ice of the frozen Lake Köyliö. Celebrating the anniversary of a person's death implies a belief that in death the person will meet God and move from life on earth to the eternity of Heaven.

At the end of the Catholic blessing of the Body we often sing the hymn that says, 'May the Angels lead you into Paradise'. Especially when we honour holy people, we refer to the anniversary of their death as the heavenly birthday. This thought was present already in the ancient times of Christianity and the Church. The foundation of this idea is in the Resurrection of Christ himself.

We know that after Jesus's humiliating and cruel death on the cross his disciples were deeply depressed and fearful. It seemed that the hope and faith they had placed in Jesus had been a waste. They were also afraid that they, too, as friends and disciples of Jesus, would face a similar death as their master. Yet their fear and depression did not last long. After only a few days, their Lord Christ appeared to them risen from the dead for the first of numerous times.

This experience was so vivid and profound for them that all their fears and sorrows were wiped away. They realized that Christ lived and had risen to an eternal life. All of their experiences with Jesus had not after all gone to waste; instead, it gained an even greater meaning than before. They experienced how real all Jesus' teachings and miracles were. They were not just of the moment, passing words and signs, but they had, as words and signs of the Risen Christ, an eternal value, and a message of hope and salvation for all people.

For the disciples, even Christ's death on the cross itself was shown to be the work of salvation. It happened for the sake of the weak and sinful people. In addition to the certain and eternal truth, the Resurrection of Christ revealed to them God's infinite love, conveyed to them and all people, by Jesus through his earthly life and his death on the cross.

In the light of the resurrection, the love of God had become permanent and eternal. They understood and believed that Christ, who was the first of those who had fallen into the sleep of death to rise again to eternal life, was a sign that they themselves were following the master for the bliss of eternal life. Aware of all this and sent by the risen Christ, the disciples, now beginning to be called apostles, left their locked hiding places and began to proclaim with great boldness the good news of Christ, the Son of God, the Saviour and Lord of all men, the giver of truth and love. They dared to move the bar, defying the danger of having to suffer and even die for proclaiming their faith. With the exception of John, they were all killed. Here in Rome, churches named after them have been built on the graves and burial places of the apostles Peter and Paul. There are also numerous other shrines built on the graves of early martyrs around the world. Believers began to think about the day of their death, their heavenly birthday. In the same way, they later began to consider the deaths of other saints who were not martyrs. Of course, based on the resurrection of Christ, faith and hope that we have all been called to eternal life in heaven are associated with the celebration. Dear brothers and sisters, the resurrection of Christ had and still has a tremendous power that led and will continue to lead to an increase in the number of Christians. St. Henry belongs to the tradition of these apostles. Although we know only a little about his personality and activities, we respect him as an example of faith and an apostle of Finland. He apparently had two great principles for his mission in Finland: truth and love. He was convinced of the truth of Christ, of his good news and of his salvation. Likewise, he believed that God's love and people's love for each other was the force that underlies everything in Christianity. That is why we hold on to him, St. Henry, for his courage to testify of the living Christ, and to die in this faith itself. We may also ask for his intercessions for ourselves and each other. Although many of us gathered here for worship belong to various Christian associations, we are all united by many matters of faith. One of these is certainly a respect for St. Henry. He is, in a sense, the father of many kinds of doors. It is probably Henry's great hope, as with Christ, that the flock he planted will form a unity of faith. For the unity of Christians, we pray especially this week. We pray that in the way of faith, our hearts will be sincere and filled with the love of truth, and thus in the connection of God we will draw closer to one another. Amen.