



EPISCOPUS LAPUENSIS

A Green Olive Branch of Hope and Peace

Your Holiness,

On behalf of the Finnish delegation, I would like to thank you for the opportunity to meet you, Holy Father, on the occasion of the Feast of Saint Henry. This tradition has continued for almost forty years.

In the sacristy of Lapua Cathedral, the main church of the Lapua Diocese, there is a window painting depicting Bishop Henry. He is holding the Gospel in his hand. At the bottom of the painting is the text: 'Gloria in excelsis.'

According to the legend of Saint Henry, he brought the message of the Gospel to Finland. Later, the song 'Ramus virens olivarum' ('A Green Olive Branch') was written about the bishop's journey. This song is also found in the Finnish Lutheran hymnal, and it is sung especially during the Feast of Saint Henry.

On Christmas, a great heavenly host sang: 'Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favours!' Holy Father, in your Christmas message you appealed for peace in Ukraine and the Middle East. You hoped for the boldness to open the door to negotiations and dialogue in order to achieve a just and lasting peace.

Peace is also one of the fruits of the Spirit which the Apostle Paul lists in his letter to the Galatians. Elsewhere he states: 'For he (Christ Jesus) is our peace' (Eph 2:14). The Gospel leads to reconciliation and peace with God, other people and creation. This is the peace that the world needs.

We want to join in the prayer for peace and promote peace through our gift. We would like to give you a dove, a symbol of peace, by the Finnish artist Oiva Toikka. The song 'Ramus virens olivarum' tells how a dove carried an olive leaf in its beak to Noah's ark. The dove is also a symbol of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit builds peace. We wanted to support the work for peace symbolically with 2,025 euros, one euro for each year that has passed since the message of the Christmas Night.

Holy Father, today the number 2025 also refers to the Jubilee in the Catholic Church. I am delighted that you have offered an invitation to a pilgrimage of hope and a genuine, personal encounter with the Lord Jesus. For those of us who have arrived from Finland, this journey is a pilgrimage of hope. One of the signs of hope is peace, which this world so desperately needs. As you state in your bull, we must be committed, with courage and creativity, to seeking a lasting peace.

This year also marks the 1700th anniversary of the first great ecumenical council, the First Council of Nicaea. In the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland, the Apostles' Creed is traditionally often used, but this year in particular, we aim to increase the use of the Nicene Creed in church services.

The opening words of the Creed, 'We believe', were a strong sign of unity and common faith. They still are. The faith expressed in the Nicene Creed arrived in Finland from two directions, the West and the East, which also reminds us of unity in this broken world. The Nicene Creed is a call to build unity and to acknowledge it in accordance with Jesus' prayer, 'that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me' (John 17:21).

I joyfully join in the prayer for the Jubilee: 'May this grace of the Jubilee awaken in us, pilgrims of hope, a longing for heavenly gifts and may it spread over the whole earth the joy and peace of our Redeemer.' When the hymn 'Ramus virens olivarum' is sung in Finland these days, its last verse also joins in the prayer for peace and thanksgiving.

With these words, Holy Father, I greet you on behalf of the entire delegation. May the warmth and presence of the Lord of Peace that we have experienced warm us all from now on.

Matti Salomäki