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ECUMENICAL PRAYER
ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER
Rigas, Evangelical Lutheran Cathedral (Latvia)
Monday, 24 September 2018

It is a great pleasure for me to meet with you in this land marked by a journey of recognition, cooperation and friendship between the different Christian churches, which have succeeded in building unity while preserving the unique and rich identity of each. I might say that this is a "lived ecumenism" that is one of Latvia's special traits. Without a doubt, it is a reason for hope and thanksgiving.

I thank Archbishop Jānis Vanags for having opened his doors to us for this prayer meeting. For over eight hundred years, this cathedral has been home to the Christian life of this city, a faithful witness to all those brothers and sisters of ours who have come here to worship and pray, to sustain their hope in moments of trial and to find the courage to face times of great injustice and suffering. Today it welcomes us, so that the Holy Spirit can continue to weave bonds of communion between us and so make us weavers of unity in our cities, lest our differences turn into divisions. May the Holy Spirit arm us with the weapons of dialogue, understanding and desire for mutual recognition and fraternity (cf. Eph 6:13-18).

This cathedral is also home to one of the oldest organs in Europe, which at the time of its inauguration was the largest in the world. We can imagine how it accompanied the life, the creativity, the imagination and the devotion of all those who were moved by its sound. It has been the instrument of God and of men for lifting of eyes and hearts to heaven. Today it is a symbol of this city and its cathedral.

For those who live here, it is more than a monumental organ; it is part of the life, traditions and identity of this place. For tourists, though, it is a work of art to look at and to photograph. This is a recurring danger for all of us: from "residents" we can become "tourists". We can take what gives us our very identity and turn it into a curio from the past, a tourist attraction, a museum piece that recalls the achievements of earlier ages, an object of great historical value, but no longer one capable of thrilling the hearts of those who encounter it.

The same thing can happen with faith. We can stop feeling like "resident" Christians and become tourists. We could even say that our whole Christian tradition can run the same risk. The risk of ending up as a museum piece, enclosed within the walls of our churches, and no longer giving out a tune capable of moving the hearts and inspiring the lives of those who hear it. Nonetheless, as the Gospel we just heard tells us, our faith is not to be hidden away, but to be made known and to resound in the various sectors of society, so that all can contemplate its beauty and be illumined by its light (cf. Lk 11:33).

If the music of the Gospel is no longer heard in our lives, or becomes a mere period piece, it will no longer be capable of breaking through the monotony that stifles hope and makes all our activity fruitless.

If the music of the Gospel ceases to resonate in our very being, we will lose the joy born of compassion, the tender love born of trust, the capacity for reconciliation that has its source in our knowledge that we have been forgiven and sent forth.

If the music of the Gospel ceases to sound in our homes, our public squares, our workplaces, our political and financial life, then we will no longer hear the strains that challenge us to defend the dignity of every man and woman, whatever his or her origin. We will become caught up in what is "mine", neglecting what is "ours": our common home, which is also our common responsibility.

If the music of the Gospel is no longer heard, we will lose the sounds that guide our lives to heaven and become locked into one of the worst ills of our day: loneliness and isolation. That illness takes hold in those who have no relationships; it can be seen in elderly persons abandoned to their fate, but also in young people lacking points of reference or opportunities for the future (cf. Address to the European Parliament, 25 November 2014).

"Father, that all may be one... so that the world may believe" (Jn 17:21). These words, thank God, continue to echo in our midst. They are those of Jesus praying to the Father before his passion. As he looked ahead to his own cross, and the crosses of so many of our brothers and sisters, Jesus continued to pray to the Father. This constant and quiet prayer marks out a path for us; it shows us the way to follow. Immersed in this prayer, as believers in him and in his Church, we desire the communion of grace that corresponds to the Father's plan

from all eternity (cf. SAINT JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical *Ut Unum Sint*, 9). And we discover there the only path possible for all ecumenism: that of confronting the cross of suffering experienced by so many young people, elderly persons and young children all too often exploited, lacking meaning in life, deprived of opportunities and suffering from loneliness. Jesus turning to his Father, and to us his brothers and sisters, continues to pray: “that all may be one”.

Unity is something that our mission today continues to demand of us. This mission requires us to stop looking at past injuries and self-referential approaches in order to focus on the Master’s prayer. Our mission is to ensure that the music of the Gospel continues to be heard in our public squares.

Some may well say that the times in which we live are complex, that the times are difficult. Others may think that in our societies Christians have less and less margins of action or influence for any number of reasons, such as secularism or individualism. This may not lead to a closed and defensive mentality, even an attitude of resignation. Certainly, we have to admit that these are not easy times, especially for our many brothers and sisters who today, in their flesh, experience exile and even martyrdom for the faith. Yet their witness makes us realize that the Lord continues to call us, asking us to live the Gospel radically, in joy and gratitude. If Christ deemed us worthy to live in these times, at this hour – the only hour we have – we cannot let ourselves be overcome by fear, nor allow this time to pass without living it fully with joyful fidelity. The Lord will give us the strength to make every age, every moment, every situation, an opportunity for communion and reconciliation with the Father and with our brothers and sisters, especially those nowadays considered inferior, worthy of being discarded. If Christ considered us worthy to ensure that the melody of the Gospel be heard, can we fail to do so?

The unity to which the Lord calls us is always a “missionary” unity. It summons us to reach out to the heart of our peoples and cultures, to the postmodern society in which we live, “where new narratives and paradigms are being formed”, and in this way “to bring the word of Jesus to the inmost soul of our cities” (Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, 74). We will carry out this ecumenical mission if we let ourselves be imbued by the Spirit of Jesus. He can “break through the dull categories with which we would enclose him; he constantly amazes us by his divine creativity. Whenever we make the effort to return to the source and to recover the original freshness of the Gospel, new avenues arise, new paths of creativity open up, with different forms of expression, more eloquent signs and words with new meaning for today’s world” (ibid., 11).

Dear brothers and sisters, may the music of the Gospel continue to resound in our midst. May its music never cease to inspire our hearts to dream and our eyes to contemplate the life that the Lord calls us, all of us, to live to the full. And to be his disciples in the midst of the world in which we are called to live.

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