



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO AN ECUMENICAL DELEGATION FROM FINLAND
ON THE OCCASION OF THE FEAST OF SAINT HENRIK**

Friday, 18 January 2008

Distinguished Friends from Finland,

I am pleased to greet your ecumenical delegation as you make your traditional yearly visit to Rome on the occasion of the feast of Saint Henrik, Patron of Finland. I extend a warm welcome to Bishop Mäkinen and Bishop Wróbel, and to all members of your group.

Your visit coincides with the beginning of the [Week of Prayer for Christian Unity](#). In fact, this year marks the hundredth anniversary of its inauguration, by Father Paul Wattson, as the “Church Unity Octave”.

In some sense, the Week of Prayer traces its origins to the eve of Jesus’ suffering and death, when he prayed for his disciples: “that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I in you, may they also be one in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me” (*Jn 17:21*). Christian unity is a gift from above, stemming from and growing towards loving communion with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The joint prayer of Lutherans and Catholics from Finland is a humble but faithful sharing in the prayer of Jesus, who promised that every prayer raised to the Father in his name would be heard (cf. *Jn 15:7*). This indeed is the royal door of ecumenism: such prayer leads us to look at the Kingdom of God and the unity of the Church in a fresh way; it reinforces our bonds of communion; and it enables us to face courageously the painful memories, social burdens and human weaknesses that are so much a part of our divisions.

The appeal to “pray without ceasing” (*1 Thess 5:17*), which stands at the heart of the readings for [this year’s Week of Prayer for Christian Unity](#), also reminds us that authentic life in communion is possible only when doctrinal agreements and formal statements are constantly guided by the light

of the Holy Spirit. We must be grateful for the fruits of the Nordic Lutheran-Catholic theological dialogue in Finland and Sweden concerning central matters of the Christian faith, including the question of justification in the life of the Church. May the ongoing dialogue lead to practical results in actions which express and build up our unity in Christ and therefore strengthen relationships between Christians.

Last year, Finland commemorated the four hundred and fiftieth anniversary of the death of the theologian Mikael Agricola, whose translation of the Bible had an immense impact on Finnish language and literature. This occasion emphasized anew the importance of Scripture for the Church, for individual Christians and for the whole of society. Truly, the Word of God is the foundation for our life; as Saint Jerome said: "Ignorance of the Scriptures is ignorance of Jesus Christ" (*Comm. in Isaias*, Prol.). Encountering the Word of God, especially as it resounds in the Church and in her liturgy, is also important for our ecumenical journey. As the Second Vatican Council stated, "By this Word sacred theology is most firmly strengthened and constantly rejuvenated, as it searches out, under the light of faith, the full truth stored up in the mystery of Christ" (*Dei Verbum*, 24).

Dear friends, it is my fervent hope that your visit to Rome will bring you much joy as you recall the witness of the first Christians, and particularly the martyrdom of Peter and Paul, the founding apostles of the Church of Rome. Saint Henrik followed in their footsteps, bringing the Gospel message and its saving power to the lives of the Nordic peoples. In the new and challenging circumstances of Europe today, and within your own country, there is much that Lutherans and Catholics can do together in the service of the Gospel and the advancement of the Kingdom of God.

With these sentiments, and with affection in the Lord, I invoke upon you and your loved ones God's blessings of joy and peace.