



The Holy See

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

Thursday, 19 January 2012

Dear Bishop Sippo,

Dear Bishop Häkkinen,

Distinguished friends from Finland,

It is with great joy that I welcome you, the members of the Finnish delegation, on the occasion of your annual ecumenical pilgrimage to Rome in order to celebrate once more today's feast of Saint Henrik, the patron saint of Finland. In remembering our patron Saints we give thanks for the action of the Holy Spirit, informing and transforming the lives of those who have left us an outstanding example of fidelity to Christ and to the Gospel.

The annual visit of an ecumenical delegation from Finland testifies to the growth of communion among the Christian traditions represented in your country. It is my profound hope that this communion may continue to grow, bearing rich fruit among Catholics, Lutherans and all other Christians in your beloved homeland. Our deepened friendship and common witness to Jesus Christ – especially before today's world, which so often lacks true direction and longs to hear the message of salvation – must hasten our progress towards the resolution of our remaining differences, and indeed of all matters on which Christians are divided.

In recent times, ethical questions have become one of the points of difference among Christians, especially with regard to the proper understanding of human nature and its dignity. There is a need for Christians to arrive at a profound agreement on matters of anthropology, which can then help society and politicians to make wise and just decisions regarding important questions in the area of human life, family and sexuality.

In this regard, the recent ecumenical bilateral dialogue document in the Finnish-Swedish context not only reflects a rapprochement between Catholics and Lutherans over the understanding of justification, but it urges Christians to renew their commitment to imitate Christ in life and action. We trust in the power of the Holy Spirit to make possible what may still seem beyond our reach: a widespread renewal of holiness and public practice of Christian virtue, after the example of the great witnesses who have gone before us.

In this year's [Week of Prayer for Christian Unity](#), the second reading from today's suggested texts recalls the patience of faithful believers like Abraham (*Heb 6:15*) who were rewarded for their faith and trust in God. The realization that God lovingly intervenes in our history teaches us not to place undue emphasis on what we can accomplish through our own efforts. Our longing for the full, visible unity of Christians requires patient and trustful waiting, not in a spirit of helplessness or passivity, but with deep trust that the unity of all Christians in one Church is truly God's gift and not our own achievement. Such patient waiting, in prayerful hope, transforms us and prepares us for visible unity not as we plan it, but as God grants it.

It is my fervent hope that your visit to Rome will help to deepen the fraternal relations that exist between Lutherans and Catholics in Finland. Let us thank God for all that he has granted us so far and let us pray that he may fill us with the Spirit of truth to guide us towards ever greater love and unity. Upon you and all your fellow-citizens, I invoke God's abundant blessings.