



The Holy See

***ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THE LUTHERAN SWEDISH COMMUNITIES
RESIDING IN ROME AND MILAN***

Thursday, 30 October 1980

It is a pleasure and an honour for me to welcome Their Royal Highnesses Prince Bertil and Princess Lilian of Sweden, the Archbishop of Uppsala, Primate of the Lutheran Church of Sweden, and other distinguished Church representatives who, together with His Excellency the Ambassador of Sweden to Italy, have come to the Vatican today. I am likewise pleased to greet the many other people who have come from Sweden, as members of the Swedish Lutheran Church residing in Rome. This visit comes in close continuity with the many visits that Swedish pilgrims have paid in recent years to my predecessor Paul VI and to myself.

The particular occasion of this visit today is the special exhibition that has been organized in the City, with the title "Sweden and Rome", illustrating the close relationship that has existed for so many centuries between the centre of Christianity and Sweden. The most outstanding figure in that history are, of course, Birgitta, a great Saint of the Catholic Church and Patron Saint of your land, who lived for nearly twenty years in Rome and died here in 1373; and in the second place, three hundred years later, Queen Christina, whose body is buried near Saint Peter's tomb in the Vatican Patriarchal Basilica. But Rome has known many other fellow-countrymen of yours, in particular the various artists who have taken their inspiration from Rome and other parts of Italy, adding to the cultural heritage of both Rome and their native land.

Coming closer to our own times, we have the figure of Mother Elisabeth Hesselblad, who earlier in this century founded a new branch of the Bridgettine Order, in the very house where Saint Birgitta and her daughter Saint Katerina lived. I am happy to offer a special word of greeting to the Abbess General and the Bridgettine community here today, and I thank them for the valued service of hospitality and ecumenical openness which they offer, especially to visitors from the Nordic countries.

I gladly take this opportunity to renew the expression of the friendship of the Catholic Church towards the still separated brethren in those lands. I trust that the presence of all of you in Rome at this time will serve to strengthen the ties of that friendship, and will lead to an increase of mutual understanding and esteem. I know that you join me in my prayer that God will, in ways known only to himself, hasten the day when full unity of faith and Christian life will be established between us.

Our present gathering seems indeed a propitious occasion for all of us children of God - with a heightened awareness of the common treasure of the Sacred Scriptures that we venerate together - to turn our thoughts to “the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named”^[1], and to his Son, Jesus Christ, the “one mediator between God and man”^[2]. It is he, Jesus Christ, who through his Holy Spirit invites us to ever greater union in himself.

May God bless you! May God bless all the people of Sweden!

[1] *Eph.* 3, 15.

[2] *1 Tim.* 2, 5.