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Audience with an Ecumenical Delegation from Finland, on the occasion of the feast of Saint Henrik

This morning, the Holy Father Francis received in audience an ecumenical delegation from Finland, on the occasion of the feast of Saint Henrik.

The following is the address delivered by the Pope to those present:

Address of the Holy Father

Dear brothers and sisters, good morning!

I offer a cordial welcome to all of you, the members of the Ecumenical Delegation from Finland. “Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ” (*Rom 1:7*)!

I am pleased that this year you have once more come to Rome as pilgrims to celebrate the feast of Saint Henrik, in what has, over time, become a fine ecumenical event. In a special way, I greet those taking part in this pilgrimage for the first time. Today too, for the first time, I welcome you, my dear brother Raimo, as the new Catholic Bishop of Helsinki. May the Lord bless your ministry!

Dear Bishop Åstrand, I thank you most heartily for the fine reflection you offered, as usual, with its mention of the witness of the saints and its broad ecumenical spirit. I am likewise grateful for the thoughtful and carefully-chosen gifts.

I was struck by what you had to say about the importance of journeying and about the pilgrim Church. As members of the community of the baptized, we are indeed on a journey, with Jesus Christ as our common goal. That goal is not far distant or unattainable, for in his mercy our Lord has come down to meet us. He drew near to us in the Incarnation and made himself the Way, so that we might journey safely amid the crossroads and false paths that confront us in this world, with its frequent lies.

The saints are our brothers and sisters who have completed this journey and have arrived at its goal. They accompany us as living witnesses of Christ, who is the Way, the Truth and the Life. They encourage us to persevere on the path of discipleship, even at those times when we struggle and fall. Like lamps kindled by God, they light the way before us, to ensure that we constantly keep the goal in sight. “Trust in God’s grace!”, they tell us, “for he loves you and calls you too to be saints” (cf. *Rom 1:7*).

As I listened to you speak, dear brother, I thanked God, for there have been times when the veneration of saints appeared to be a source of division rather than of unity, with Catholic and Orthodox faithful on one side, and Evangelical faithful on the other. That is not how it should be and, in fact, has never been, in the holy and faithful people of God. In the Eucharistic Liturgy, we pray to our heavenly Father in these words: “For you are praised in the company of your saints and, in crowning their merits, you crown your own gifts” (*Preface of Saints I*). And the *Augsburg Confession*, in its 21st Article, states that “the saints should be remembered, to strengthen our faith, when we see how they received grace and how they were helped by faith; and to take example from their good works.”

Dear brothers and sisters, you mentioned several great Nordic saints: Birgitta, Henrik and Olav. Here I think of the words of Pope Saint John Paul II in his Encyclical *Ut Unum Sint*: “I would like to recall” – he said – “the prayer meeting held in Saint Peter’s Basilica, at which I joined the Lutheran Archbishops, the Primate of Sweden and Finland, for the celebration of Vespers on the occasion of the sixth centenary of the canonization of Saint Birgitta... This can serve as an example to us, for the awareness of the duty to pray for unity has become an integral part of the Church’s life” (No. 25). If the millennium of Saint Olav’s death in 2030 can inspire and deepen our prayer for unity, and our journey together, this will prove a gift to the entire ecumenical movement.

Dear friends, thank you again, because this meeting with you is a living sign in the midst of the present Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. Let us ensure that this annual ecumenical encounter continues to flourish and expand, that it will always be enlivened by the Holy Spirit and open to welcoming our poor and forgotten brothers and sisters, including those who feel abandoned by God or have strayed from the path of faith and hope.

And now, I would invite you to join in praying the Lord’s Prayer. Each of us can recite it in his or her own language. Together, let us call upon our heavenly Father:

“Our Father...”
