



SALA STAMPA DELLA SANTA SEDE **BOLLETTINO**

HOLY SEE PRESS OFFICE BUREAU DE PRESSE DU SAINT-SIÈGE PRESSEAMT DES HEILIGEN STUHL
OFICINA DE PRENSA DE LA SANTA SEDE SALA DE IMPRENSA DA SANTA SÉ
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N. 161016b

Thursday 13.10.2016

Francis receives a pilgrimage of a thousand Lutherans: God's mercy unites us

This morning in the Paul VI Hall the Pope received a thousand Lutherans from Germany, Luther's birthplace, on an ecumenical pilgrimage to the see of the bishop of Rome. The Holy Father described this as a "beautiful initiative" and thanked the bishops who supported and accompanied the pilgrims.

"Let us give thanks to God", he said, "because today, as Lutherans and Catholics, we are journeying together on the way from conflict to communion. We have already travelled an important part of the road. Along the path we feel contrasting sentiments: pain for the division that still exists between us, but also joy at the fraternity we have already rediscovered. Your presence, so numerous and enthusiastic, is a clear sign of this fraternity, and it fills us with the hope that mutual understanding may continue to grow".

"The apostle Paul tells us that, by virtue of our baptism, we all form the single Body of Christ. The various members, in fact, form one body. Therefore, we belong to each other and when one suffers, all suffer; when one rejoices, we all rejoice. We can continue trustfully on our ecumenical path, because we know that despite the many issues that still separate us, we are already united. What unites us is far greater than what divides us", the Holy Father emphasised, noting that at the end of the month he will travel to Lund in Sweden to commemorate, along with the World Lutheran Federation, the five hundredth anniversary of the Reformation, and to give thanks to God for the official dialogue between Lutherans and Catholics.

"An essential part of this commemoration", he observed, "will consist of turning our gaze towards the future, with a view to a common Christian witness to today's world, that thirsts so greatly for God and His mercy. The witness that the world expects of us is above that of rendering visible the mercy God has towards us, through service to the poorest, to the sick, to those who have abandoned their homelands to seek a better future for themselves and for their loved ones. In placing ourselves at the service of those most in need we experience that we are already united: it is God's mercy that unites us".

He concluded by encouraging the young, in particular, to be "witnesses of mercy". "While theologians continue their dialogue in the doctrinal sphere, continue insistently to seek opportunities to meet each other, to get to know each other better, to pray together and to offer your help to each other and to all those who are in need. In this way, freed of every prejudice and trusting only in the Gospel of Jesus Christ, that announces peace and

reconciliation, you will be true protagonists of a new season in this journey that, with God's help, will lead to full communion. I assure you of my prayer, and ask you, please to, pray for me, as I am in need. Thank you".
