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The Pope in Sweden for the Joint Commemoration of the Lutheran-Catholic of the Reformation: we cannot be resigned to the division and distance that our separation has created

At 11 a.m. today Pope Francis arrived at the airport of Malmö, Sweden, thus commencing his seventeenth apostolic trip dedicated this time to the Joint Commemoration of the 500th anniversary of the Reformation. The logo of the journey is a cross with Christ at the centre of all: of the cross and of the banquet to which all the peoples of the earth are called. In the cross there is a depiction of Triune God, creator and reconciliatory. At the base, His hands hold all of Creation, and He renews the life of man by His death and resurrection. A vineyard and vines symbolise Christ and the people of God. A dove, symbol of the Holy Spirit, is depicted in three places: it is the certainty that God's work of salvation continues to express its power in every time and situation, following the divine promise. The baptismal font symbolises the living water that regenerates man and integrates him with the body of Christ, in the communion of saints.

During the outbound trip the Holy Father greeted the journalists who accompanied him on the aircraft, thanking them for their work. "It is an important trip because it is an ecclesial trip, a very ecclesial trip in the ecumenical field. Your work will contribute greatly to ensuring that people understand this".

Upon arrival the Holy Father was welcomed by the prime minister Stefan Löfven and by the minister for culture and democracy, Alice Bah-Kuhnke, in the presence of a number of state authorities and members of the World Lutheran Foundation, along with the papal entourage. After a brief private meeting with both ministers, the Holy Father transferred to the papal residence in Igelösa.

Francis then transferred by car to the Royal Palace (Kunghuset) in Lund, where he paid a courtesy visit to King Carl Gustaf XVI and Queen Silvia of Sweden. The Pope gave the Royal Family a commemorative print of the Jubilee of Mercy, depicting the "seven Churches" of Rome, where pilgrims perform their Jubilee devotions. In the lower part of the print, the works of mercy are allegorically represented in connection with different architectural features. After the visit, the Pope and the Royal Family walked the short distance to the Cathedral for the Joint Ecumenical Prayer with the Lutheran World Foundation.

The Lutheran World Foundation was instituted in Lund in 1947 and is a communion of 145 Churches present in 98 countries, with 74 million faithful. The Churches are grouped in seven regions whose delegates participate in

the Assembly, the supreme organ of the Federation. Its Presidency, the General Secretariat, the Communion Office and the Council are based in Geneva and its activity is divided into three strategic directions: theology and dialogue, evangelisation and humanitarian commitment.

Lund was selected as the location for the ecumenical prayer between the Catholic Church and the Lutheran World Foundation for a series of reasons. The Foundation was founded there and commemorates its seventieth anniversary next year, and 31 October is "Reformation Day", the date on which according to tradition Martin Luther posted his "Ninety-Five Theses" on the door of Wittenberg Castle in 1517. The meeting in Lund is in this way linked with the anniversary of the Reformation, to be commemorated by Lutheran Churches around the world in 2017, a year which will also mark fifty years of Catholic-Lutheran dialogue, which commenced in 1967.

The Pope was awaited at the main entrance of the Cathedral by the primate of the Church of Sweden, Archbishop Antje Jackelén and the Catholic Bishop Anders Arborelius of Stockholm; they then advanced together to the main altar. The hymns and readings were followed by a discourse by Bishop Munib Youban, president of the Lutheran World Foundation. The Holy Father then pronounced a homily, the full text of which follows:

"'Abide in me as I abide in you'. These words, spoken by Jesus at the Last Supper, allow us to peer into the heart of Christ just before His ultimate sacrifice on the cross. We can feel His heart beating with love for us and His desire for the unity of all who believe in Him. He tells us that He is the true vine and that we are the branches, that just as He is one with the Father, so we must be one with Him if we wish to bear fruit.

"Here in Lund, at this prayer service, we wish to manifest our shared desire to remain one with Christ, so that we may have life. We ask Him, 'Lord, help us by your grace to be more closely united to you and thus, together, to bear a more effective witness of faith, hope and love'. This is also a moment to thank God for the efforts of our many brothers and sisters from different ecclesial communities who refused to be resigned to division, but instead kept alive the hope of reconciliation among all who believe in the one Lord.

"As Catholics and Lutherans, we have undertaken a common journey of reconciliation. Now, in the context of the commemoration of the Reformation of 1517, we have a new opportunity to accept a common path, one that has taken shape over the past fifty years in the ecumenical dialogue between the Lutheran World Federation and the Catholic Church. Nor can we be resigned to the division and distance that our separation has created between us. We have the opportunity to mend a critical moment of our history by moving beyond the controversies and disagreements that have often prevented us from understanding one another.

"Jesus tells us that the Father is the 'vinedresser' Who tends and prunes the vine in order to make it bear more fruit. The Father is constantly concerned for our relationship with Jesus, to see if we are truly one with Him. He watches over us, and His gaze of love inspires us to purify our past and to work in the present to bring about the future of unity that He so greatly desires.

"We too must look with love and honesty at our past, recognising error and seeking forgiveness, for God alone is our judge. We ought to recognise with the same honesty and love that our division distanced us from the primordial intuition of God's people, who naturally yearn to be one, and that it was perpetuated historically by the powerful of this world rather than the faithful people, which always and everywhere needs to be guided surely and lovingly by its Good Shepherd. Certainly, there was a sincere will on the part of both sides to profess and uphold the true faith, but at the same time we realised that we closed in on ourselves out of fear or bias with regard to the faith which others profess with a different accent and language. As Pope John Paul II said, 'We must not allow ourselves to be guided by the intention of setting ourselves up as judges of history but solely by the motive of understanding better what happened and of becoming messengers of truth'. God is the vinedresser, Who with immense love tends and protects the vine; let us be moved by His watchful gaze. The one thing he desires is for us to abide like living branches in His Son Jesus. With this new look at the past, we do not claim to realise an impracticable correction of what took place, but 'to tell that history differently'.

"Jesus reminds us: 'Apart from me, you can do nothing'. He is the one Who sustains us and spurs us on to find

ways to make our unity ever more visible. Certainly, our separation has been an immense source of suffering and misunderstanding, yet it has also led us to recognise honestly that without Him we can do nothing; in this way it has enabled us to understand better some aspects of our faith. With gratitude we acknowledge that the Reformation helped give greater centrality to sacred Scripture in the Church's life. Through shared hearing of the word of God in the Scriptures, important steps forward have been taken in the dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Lutheran World Federation, whose fiftieth anniversary we are presently celebrating. Let us ask the Lord that His word may keep us united, for it is a source of nourishment and life; without its inspiration we can do nothing.

“The spiritual experience of Martin Luther challenges us to remember that apart from God we can do nothing. ‘How can I get a propitious God?’ This is the question that haunted Luther. In effect, the question of a just relationship with God is the decisive question for our lives. As we know, Luther encountered that propitious God in the Good News of Jesus, incarnate, dead and risen. With the concept ‘by grace alone’, he reminds us that God always takes the initiative, prior to any human response, even as He seeks to awaken that response. The doctrine of justification thus expresses the essence of human existence before God.

“Jesus intercedes for us as our mediator before the Father; He asks Him that His disciples may be one, ‘so that the world may believe’. This is what comforts us and inspires us to be one with Jesus, and thus to pray: ‘Grant us the gift of unity, so that the world may believe in the power of your mercy’. This is the testimony the world expects from us. We Christians will be credible witnesses of mercy to the extent that forgiveness, renewal and reconciliation are daily experienced in our midst. Together we can proclaim and manifest God's mercy, concretely and joyfully, by upholding and promoting the dignity of every person. Without this service to the world and in the world, Christian faith is incomplete.

“As Lutherans and Catholics, we pray together in this Cathedral, conscious that without God we can do nothing. We ask his help, so that we can be living members, abiding in Him, ever in need of His grace, so that together we may bring His word to the world, which so greatly needs His tender love and mercy”.
