

Sermon: Bishop Martin Lind

Bishop of the Lutheran Church in Great Britain

LUTHERAN-CATHOLIC COMMEMORATION OF THE REFORMATION IN 1517

26 MARCH 2017

Dear Sisters and Brothers!

It is a great joy for me to be here and I thank Archbishop Peter and the preparing committee for inviting me to preach.

It is a joy to preach together with Archbishop Bernard, whom I know since long time ago and who once was a pilgrim to Vadstena in my old diocese in Sweden at a joint English Catholic-Lutheran pilgrimage.

Jesus prayed according to St John's Gospel: As you, Father, are in me and I in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. (*John 17, 21*).

We want unity.

We want Christian unity.

We want unity between Catholics and Lutherans.

We want unity between Catholics and Anglicans – this has to be said in England.

Some will not agree – we know. But I am convinced that a growing number does, not least among our younger Church members.

We are in Search of Lost Unity. (*Marcel Proust*)

You may say: we were once married. The marriage was broken in a divorce. Now we have to reconcile and unite again.

I don't know if you have ever met a couple that went through a divorce and then, maybe a long time afterwards, found each other again. It is not very common, but it does happen. And I have met such a couple. The most striking was their comments: We have met each other in a new way. We are not going back to what once happened. We are on the way to a new unity, an untried experience.

If we, Catholics and Lutherans, today want to unite we are not going back to the 16th century. We look forwards and try to find the visible unity in future.

Life is never a repetition. It is brand new every day. Or with our Christian language: Life is a gift of the Spirit. Jesus prays for unity. That does not mean that the members lose their identity. The unity is strictly analogous to the unity of the Father and the Son. The Father and the Son are one and yet remain distinct. The believers are to be one, in the Father and the Son, distinct from God and abiding in God.

This is of utmost importance. Unity, Christian unity, never means a denial of our identity. On the opposite – it is an acceptance of the identities of each one of us. I would like to propose a 'Holy Jealousy'. We should help each other to look on each other with holy eyes: what do you in your church have that we don't have, what do you in your church say that we don't say – and we have to try to find all these things we envy.

That is a good exercise and it will help us to keep and develop mutual respect and love.

The unity that Jesus is praying for underlines at least three perspectives:

Belonging

We all belong to one humanity since we have the same Creator. And we belong to the same Church since we have the same Saviour. There is only one Saviour in this world according to our faith. So whatever we think and reflect and confess we are already bound together in a holy belonging because we have the same Creator and the same Saviour, Jesus Christ. This is the fundament of the Christian unity.

Unity not uniformity

Unity, which we long for, is not uniformity. There has neither been a uniformed world, nor a uniformed church. That is all illusion. We are all products of a giant plural, a giant diversity. Every genealogical research will immediately confirm that. The diversity and the manifoldness is holy, given by God, so that we may learn to respect each other.

The unity of the Church if not an end in itself

We are not fighting for a Christian unity just for ourselves, within safe walls. We are fighting for a visible unity of the Church of Jesus Christ to help the world to believe. The Christian unity is God's instrument to help the world to reconcile – and we all know that reconciliation in the world is badly needed today.

Finally, Sisters and Brothers, I want to remind you that the visible unity of the Church of Jesus Christ completely is a gift of the Spirit. We have to work for it, fight for it, struggle for it and pray for it. But God alone will give us the unity, in the time and in the way God wishes.

Never end your prayers for the unity, the visible unity of the Church of Jesus Christ. Open your hands, open your hearts, open your minds and open yourself for the gift which God wants to give.