

An anniversary is often a time for the marking of life's significant passages, a noting of important events, sometimes an opportunity for nostalgia and memories but most often a time for celebration. Soon we will reach another anniversary, the anniversary of that fate-filled event when, on All Hallows Eve in the year of Our Lord 1517, Father Martin Luther nailed his 95 thesis to the doors of the Castle Church at Wittenberg, inviting an academic disputation within the Church on the matter of indulgences. And now, 500 years later, we stand on the eve of that anniversary to mark an event which transformed the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church of Jesus Christ and altered the face of Christendom as it had been known for 1,500 years. Even the Great Schism of 1054 did not have the same social and cultural effects as that of the Reformation which engulfed Europe and the known world, shaking it to its very core.

But this is not solely a Lutheran anniversary but rather one which affected us all, Catholic and Lutheran alike, for both were changed by the actions taken that day and the events which followed. So on this impending anniversary, it seems meet and right that we come to mark this event with a joint service of worship, Catholics and Lutherans together, joined in prayer and praise and in a common reflection of what this might mean for our ecumenical future. But while this anniversary may have its historical memories and even nostalgia for some, it is not a time for celebration. Rather it is a time for grieving – a grieving of that which was lost, while clinging to the hoped for unity into which God calls us. For while we Lutherans hold to certain truths which we believe are essential to the heart of the faith and the evangelical mission of the Church, as so clearly outlined in the Augsburg Confession, we acknowledge that what was lost after the sound of those pounding nails was hushed, was the

unity of the Church. We know.... all of us here know... that there is only one Lord, one Faith, one baptism and one Father of us all and that salvation is in Christ alone and by no other means. But because of the actions on both sides in the heated rhetoric of the day, the unity of the Church was sundered and anathemas were issued one against the other. So it is with thanks to God that we can recall tonight another anniversary, the 19<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Joint Declaration on Justification which was issued in 1999 and signed by the Lutheran World Federation and the Vatican. This agreement brought some resolution to this division by rescinding those anathemas relating to Justification and declaring that the main neuralgic point of the Reformation was now resolved. Yet we come tonight still grieving our many unhealed divisions...at the Holy Eucharist primarily but in so many other ways that it saddens us as Lutheran's, especially those of us in this Society of the Holy Trinity, who believe, as

our Rule makes so clear in Chapter VIII that “we long for the reunion of Christians in which the Gospel might have free course and for that unity for which Jesus prayed.” And even more explicitly, the Rule goes on to read, “Therefore this Ministerium is dedicated to the Lutheran vocation of reform of the Church and the Lutheran ecumenical destiny of reconciliation with the bishop and the church of Rome.” With such reunion still not accomplished, we cannot celebrate this or any anniversary but rather continue to grieve our division.

Since then we do not celebrate this anniversary nor glory in this division, but rather grieve our fractured unity, it is therefore good for us to have come together this evening and offer our joint prayer and praise to God, having raised our common voices and our united prayers to Him who is the source of our common faith and life together. Through this small act of common

witness shared here tonight, we not only grieve but from that grief our hearts and voices rise together in common hope and we pray that the Spirit may move among us, strengthening us for the journey ahead as we move into God's future where we pledge to pray unceasingly for that unity for which Christ prayed until He shall come again.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.