

Yesterday, Today, and Forever

Remarks to the Metropolitan Chicago Synod

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Tinley Park Convention Center, Tinley Park, Illinois
June 11, 2017

First, I want to acknowledge that we stand in a place of grief at the death of His Eminence, the Most Reverend Iakovos, Metropolitan of Chicago for the Greek Orthodox Church. The Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America gathers around their brothers and sisters of the Metropolis of Chicago, together with the religious and civic leaders of Metropolitan Chicago to mourn the loss of the bishop who served faithfully here for 38 years. Cardinal Cupich regrets not being with you today. As you heard, the Cardinal is representing the Catholic Church in a delegation of religious leaders of Metropolitan Chicago at Metropolitan Iakovos' funeral service. You should also know that the Greek Orthodox Church is fully aware of the sacrifice you have made so that Cardinal Cupich could be with them in their time of mourning and they are grateful to you. This is another testimony to the fine ecumenical relations we enjoy in this city.

Yesterday

I should begin by telling you that Cardinal Cupich welcomed receiving the invitation to speak to you today. About a year ago or so, he saw the announcement from Pope Francis that the Holy Father was going to Lund to pray with Lutherans to open the commemoration of the 500th anniversary of the beginning of the Reformation. This

prompted the Cardinal to learn more about the local relationship between Lutherans and Catholics. He had not been here in Chicago long. At the time he said that what he learned inspired him and gave him great hope for the Church. He was convinced that by learning this local history and through the opportunity we have in this year of commemoration of the 500th anniversary of the Reformation, that we can deepen our relationship and “walk together a stretch further”, as Pope Francis says, toward full communion with each other.

There is of course the big story of the 1517 anniversary and there are new and challenging resources to help us learn about this history. But I want to focus on the smaller story of our relationship right here in Metro Chicago. We already commemorated another 500th anniversary as an early ecumenical event in our common life in Chicagoland. It was the 500th anniversary of the Birth and Baptism of Martin Luther. On November 30, 1983 a joint celebration brought the bishops and faithful of three Lutheran churches together with the bishops and faithful of the Archdiocese of Chicago at Holy Name Cathedral. Cardinal Bernardin, Bishop Paul Erickson, Bishop Ehme Osterbur and Bishop Victor Brandt presided and the Rev. Dr. Martin Marty preached. A renowned local artist, Franklin McMahon, has a watercolor of this event as part of his collected works. It is indeed a moment to remember.

The ground for this had been prepared many years before. Some will remember that, here in Chicago, the entry of Christians into ecumenical relationships happened because of our common cause in the civil rights movement. The urgent and pressing issues of that time called us and caused us to walk across the street.

By November 1985 a process began to develop a Lutheran/Roman Catholic Covenant. A planning committee was appointed which drafted a covenant document and they were ready to move ahead. At the same time this was going on, the dialogue between three Lutheran churches was moving to a conclusion and it was announced that the Lutheran Church in America, the American Lutheran Church, and the Association of Evangelical Lutheran Churches would merge in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America in 1988.

After the merger, a Covenant commission was appointed and by May 1989 Cardinal Bernardin and Bishop Sherman Hicks signed our Covenant. This was remarkable, and more so in that it must have been one of the first ecumenical actions of the newly formed ELCA, perhaps the first of this Synod.

Since that time, many parishes and congregations and also other institutions of the Archdiocese and Synod, have come into more intentional relationships with each other. For example, the Synodical and Archdiocesan Women's organizations have celebrated their covenantal commitments each year for more than 28 years. St Mark's Lutheran Church and St. Raymond de Penafort in Mount Prospect work closely together – even sharing administrative council meetings from time to time. At one point, Our Lady of the Wayside Roman Catholic School and The Evangelical Lutheran School of Saint Luke did many things together including a Cubs game with Cardinal Cassidy, then president of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity in Rome. Cardinal Cassidy would go on to write a congratulatory letter which praised the method of dialogue in Chicago which so directly engaged the faithful. And I have

heard of many new things that are happening as we prepare to renew our Covenant - like the growing relationships in Evanston between all of the Lutheran and Catholic churches there.¹

As we read the Covenant, we can see that it is not a statement about cooperative programs. We could do this and that would be good. But this Covenant is more. It is rooted in our desire for the unity of the *churches*, for the ending of the division between the Lutheran and Catholic communions. It is rooted in our trust of the Holy Spirit. The covenant we share is really baptism - the document we signed in 1989 merely articulates how we will strive to live the sacramental bond that already exists between us.

In form, the Covenant document sets forth affirmations of our common confession of the Faith and our hope for doctrinal agreement in the future. And it sets forth a call to common action. The signing of the Covenant by our Bishops in 1989 said that we believed we could make progress toward Christian unity through dialogue and good will. By publicly declaring our commitment to each other and to unity we placed ourselves in a posture of openness toward each other and toward the Holy Spirit. This enabled us to work together on areas of mutual concern - both theological and pastoral.

¹ Edward Cardinal Cassidy, *Letter to Joseph Cardinal Bernardin* on the occasion of the publication of *We Bring You Joyful News: Documents of the Lutheran/Roman Catholic Covenant in Chicago*, eds. Thomas A. Baima and Thomas Knutson (Chicago: Archdiocese of Chicago, 1988).

Today

Today we are preparing to renew our Covenant with each other. Bishop Miller and Cardinal Cupich are looking forward to the service of renewal at Holy Name Cathedral on October 31st this year. We will celebrate this story of our local relationship and we will commemorate together the 500th anniversary of the Reformation. It will mark another important moment in our common life. We should all be grateful, for wherever there is reform and renewal, we have cause to rejoice.

The archdiocesan ecumenical staff recently attended the National Workshop on Christian Unity where your Presiding Bishop, Elizabeth Eaton, asked the assembly gathered there: “What are we going to do on October 32nd?” This may be *the* question as we approach the anniversary of 1517. Today, I want to suggest one answer.

More than year ago when Bishop Miller and Cardinal Cupich were talking about the possibility of a Covenant renewal, I remember Bishop Miller saying that whatever we do it had to take on some practical and concrete form. The Cardinal immediately agreed. They were anticipating Bishop Eaton’s question months later at the National workshop.

And we can find inspiration in our own ecumenical story. Recalling how we learned to “cross the street” when responding to the civil rights movement, are we not now confronted with a similar pressing issue of social justice that calls for us to respond with urgency and energy? I am talking about the violence in our city.

I know this is also a concern of Bishop Miller and Presiding Bishop Eaton. They joined Cardinal Cupich and many others on Good Friday for the Way of the Cross

through the Englewood neighborhood. They expressed to him that day their desire to make this a common cause and to raise our moral voice together.

The Archdiocese has begun to look for the practical ways to respond. At this point, I need to switch voices and to speak in Cardinal Cupich's own words which he intended to speak to you this morning. "I invite the Metropolitan Chicago Synod to join us, formally, in the Anti-violence initiative. I believe we have already begun. We have built a strong relationship and neighborhood partnerships are growing. Let us find ways for our institutions, our parishes and congregations to work together to make our city a place of hope."

Forever

You may have noticed that I have been following your Synod theme from Hebrews: Yesterday, Today, and Forever. We have talked about Yesterday, recounting the story of our Lutheran - Catholic relationship. We have talked about Today and the call that is currently before us. Now I want to reflect on the Forever - that which deeply unites us - Lutherans and Catholics - for all time.

I said earlier that the covenant we share is really baptism. Do we truly understand the full meaning of our baptism? The first event I worked on with Cardinal Cupich was during the three weeks after his installation as Archbishop of Chicago. It was the annual gathering for our candidates for lay ecclesial ministry. Lay ecclesial ministers are women and men who have master's degrees in pastoral studies and have received authorization from the bishop to function as professionals in the Church as

their vocation. While not ordained, these women and men perform many of the roles of the pastoral ministry, except the sacramental ones reserved to ordered ministers. Their gifts compliment those of our priests and deacons. Currently there are about 125 authorized lay ecclesial ministers in the Archdiocese. Annually the Archbishop conducts a class for those preparing for this role. In that session, Cardinal Cupich spoke from an article he published on the emerging models of pastoral leadership. I find great resonance between what Cardinal Cupich said that day regarding baptism and the call to holiness which I want to relate to the ecumenical task that stands before us as baptized Christians in Chicagoland.

The Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification articulates the central insight of both Martin Luther and the Council of Trent. It is the insight that Pelagius was wrong and that there is no works righteousness. We are saved by grace through faith in Jesus Christ, which necessarily manifests itself in good works. The ancient pattern of pagan religion, where humanity acts and God responds is overturned by the revelation which comes to us in the history of the Jewish people and the person of Jesus Christ, where God calls and we respond. Of this basic pattern in the Christian life, Cardinal Cupich wrote:

God's call to each of us begins with the call to holiness, but does not end there. It must mature and develop through our response to the subsequent calls to communion and to witness. If this does not happen, then our Christian lives will not bear the fruit God fully intended in calling us to be holy and might even possibly wither. Similarly, for one to respond authentically to the calls to witness

and communion, both must be anchored by a faithful response to the call to holiness.”²

This fundamental realization of how it is between God and humankind shapes our entire sense of the Christian life. While simple in expression, when we say God acts and we respond as a way of affirming that “all is grace,” there are profound implications. It effects our understanding of unity in the body of Christ, and the fruits of that unity.

Cardinal Cupich puts it this way.

It is out of that common, humbling experience of our utter poverty, realizing all is grace, that we connect with one another as a holy people. . . . We are one in the death and life Christ shares with us. This is the ground of our unity and our common consolation, to which we must always return if the unity among us is to be authentic and life-giving.³

The Joint Declaration left unsettled a number of theological matters, especially around the topic of theological anthropology. Don’t worry, I am not going to try to solve them here. We have a perfectly good Lutheran/Roman Catholic Dialogue commission to take up that task. But I do want to play out one element of theological anthropology which is a consequence of our shared view of justification. It has to do with how we understand ourselves before a holy God who desires us to be holy. In the revised rites of Easter, which both of our communions have revised through our common

² Blase J. Cupich, “The Emerging Models of Pastoral Leadership Project: The Theological, Sacramental and Ecclesial Context” (April 21, 2008, Orlando, Florida) <http://nalm.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/Keynote-Theological-Context-of-the-EMP.pdf>

³ Ibid.

participation in the 20th century liturgical movement, we discover the paschal mystery – Jesus passion, death and resurrection – as the story of our spiritual lives as members of his body. Cardinal Cupich wrote:

We respond to our call to holiness by turning against our self as God does, by renouncing ourselves so completely that we acknowledge our utter poverty to save ourselves either by our life or death. We have to borrow not only our life from Lord, but also our death. It is through this total self-renunciation, this entering into the tomb with the Lord to share his death, that everything becomes grace for us, especially our sharing in God's ongoing work of saving the world, something we have in common with all the baptized. The only death we proclaim is the death of the Lord. So, too, the only life we have together is the one Christ shares with his Father in mutual self-giving love, which is the Spirit, for the salvation of the whole world. That is the radical unity we share in responding to the call to holiness.⁴

Conclusion

As I conclude, let me thank you again for your gracious understanding of the circumstances which prevented Cardinal Cupich from being here personally. Let us together lift our prayers for the Greek Orthodox Metropolis of Chicago and they lay their bishop to rest.

⁴ Ibid.

The Cardinal and the Archdiocese of Chicago are looking forward to praying and celebrating with you on October 31, 2017 at Holy Name Cathedral. As brothers and sisters in Christ we will, on that auspicious day, renew the Lutheran/Roman Catholic Covenant in Chicago. I know I speak for Cardinal Cupich when I say we are also looking forward to our work together in this city. Bishop Miller, please know that you, the Synod Assembly, and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America are in our prayers. We implore the Holy Spirit to guide you in your deliberations. I ask that you might remember us in your prayers as well. May we, as Pope Francis asks – walk together “just a stretch further” on the path toward Christian unity. If we can deepen the radical unity we share in baptism, we will be ready for October 32nd.

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