

All Saints

Five hundred years ago yesterday Martin Luther posted his 95 theses. The act launched the Protestant Reformation, a movement that grew larger than Luther ever could have imagined. Throughout the world Catholics and Lutherans have been remembering this event. In this cathedral about a month ago we hosted a prayer service with Bishop Johnston of our diocese, Archbishop Naumann of Kansas City in Kansas, and Bishop Roger Gustafson from the Central States Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America. Many Lutheran and Catholic congregations have worshiped together at different occasions this fall to express thanks to God for beliefs held in common, repentance for mistakes made, and hopes for a more united future.

Our unity begins from Christ and his word. For centuries Lutherans stressed the centrality of the bible more than Catholics did. After the Second Vatican Council the Catholic Church developed our lectionary, the book of biblical readings for mass, which now other communities have adopted or adapted. Catholic devotion to the word of God now inspires other denominations, but it's because Lutherans held the torch over the word of God for 500 years.

Yesterday the Vatican's Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity posted a statement together with the Lutheran World Federation. It included these words: "We, Lutherans and Catholics, are profoundly grateful for the ecumenical journey that we have travelled together during the last fifty years. This pilgrimage, sustained by our common prayer, worship and ecumenical dialogue, has resulted in the removal of prejudices, the increase of mutual understanding and the identification of decisive theological agreements. In the face of so many blessings along the way, we raise our hearts in praise of the Triune God for the mercy we receive.... Looking forward, we commit ourselves to continue our journey together, guided by God's Spirit, towards the greater unity according to the will of our Lord Jesus Christ. With God's help we intend to discern in a prayerful manner our understanding on Church, Eucharist and Ministry, seeking a substantial consensus so as to overcome remaining differences between us. With deep joy and gratitude we trust 'that He who has begun a good work in [us] will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ' (Phil 1:6)."

This is all good, but what happens now? Today is the day that one Lutheran commentator called, "October 32nd." We continue to forge friendships with those who think differently, and to worship and serve together.

It's accidental that the day after the Reformation began is All Saints Day, but it reminds us of the common goal toward which we all strive. Although Catholics and Lutherans do not yet share communion, we share baptism and a common goal: We want to be numbered among those 144,000 whom John saw in his vision as recorded in the Book of Revelation. We have been marked with the seal of God's Spirit. We worship God together with the angels, the elders and the four living creatures, crying out, "Amen. Blessing and glory, wisdom and thanksgiving, honor, power, and might be to our God forever and ever. Amen." We hope to see on earth what we hope to see again in heaven: all Christians worshipping God in one common voice.

Wednesday, November 1, 2017