

**EN**

**Opening celebration**

**Tuesday 18 September 2014, 19.30**

**MARIAPLAATS  
Cloister of St Mary**

**Cathedral of St Gertrudis**

**ATTACHMENT**

## **Thanksgiving over the water**

Most merciful God,  
We praise you this day in the communion of your church,  
The church which you have gathered out of every tribe and  
people.

We praise you for your Son Jesus Christ, in whom you have  
given us

new life through baptism.

We thank you that having died with Christ in baptism we will  
also be raised with him in your glory.

You, o God, have made all water  
to be a sign of the mystery of baptism:  
in the beginning, the Spirit swept over the waters and you  
created the heavens and the earth;  
with the gift of water you nourish and sustain all things;  
in the waters of the flood you condemned evil and saved  
those whom you chose,  
Noah and his family;  
by the pillar of fire you led your people Israel through the  
waters of the Red Sea,  
out of slavery and into the freedom of the promised land.

In the waters of the Jordan your Son was baptized by John  
And anointed with the Holy Spirit.

We believe that on the cross there also flowed from his side  
streams of blood and water.

In the baptism of his death and resurrection your beloved  
Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, has freed us from the bonds of  
sin and death.

He has opened to us the way to the joy and freedom of eter-  
nal life with you, our Father.

In obedience to his command, we proclaim his death and  
praise his resurrection unto the ends of the earth and among  
all peoples,

Baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Praise and honor to you for the water of our baptism  
and for your word that has saved us through this water.  
At this font we ask you, holy God:  
Breath your holy Spirit into all those who have gathered here  
today  
to give you praise and into all your good creation.  
Illumine the days that lay before us,  
tear down whatever still separates us from each other and  
from you,  
and dry all our tears.  
Wash away the sin that is still within us and drown the evil  
that is around us.  
Still our thirst with your living water, Jesus Christ,  
Our saviour and redeemer,  
Who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, God for-  
ever and ever.

**Amen.**

### **Acts 8,26-40**

Then an angel of the Lord said to Philip, 'Get up and go towards the south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.' (This is a wilderness road.) So he got up and went. Now there was an Ethiopian eunuch, a court official of the Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, in charge of her entire treasury. He had come to Jerusalem to worship and was returning home; seated in his chariot, he was reading the prophet Isaiah.<sup>29</sup> Then the Spirit said to Philip, 'Go over to this chariot and join it.' So Philip ran up to it and heard him reading the prophet Isaiah. He asked, 'Do you understand what you are reading?' He replied, 'How can I, unless someone guides me?' And he invited Philip to get in and sit beside him. Now the passage of the scripture that he was reading was this:

'Like a sheep he was led to the slaughter,  
and like a lamb silent before its shearer,  
so he does not open his mouth.

In his humiliation justice was denied him.

Who can describe his generation?

For his life is taken away from the earth.'

The eunuch asked Philip, 'About whom, may I ask you, does the prophet say this, about himself or about someone else?' Then Philip began to speak, and starting with this scripture, he proclaimed to him the good news about Jesus. As they were going along the road, they came to some water; and the eunuch said, 'Look, here is water! What is to prevent me from being baptized?' He commanded the chariot to stop, and both of them, Philip and the eunuch, went down into the water, and Philip baptized him. When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away; the eunuch saw him no more, and went on his way rejoicing. But Philip found himself at Azotus, and as he was passing through the region, he proclaimed the good news to all the towns until he came to Caesarea.

## **Sermon**

Santiago de Compostella. The city in northern Spain with the tomb of James the apostle has for centuries been the destination of tens of thousands of pilgrims. They often do it on foot, because the days-long pilgrimage brings their lives down to simple basics. Thus vulnerability gets a chance: vulnerability which is necessary to get to know oneself. We are on a journey ourselves with the same destination: to get to know both ourselves *and* God. Both go hand in hand.

Our destination was not Santiago but Utrecht. Most of us did not come on foot and there is no apostle's tomb here, but our hope is the same, namely that this congress will let us get to know ourselves and our world a bit better and come closer to God. We recognise ourselves in the Ethiopian in his carriage full of questions. He is a pilgrim and a serious man

seeking answers to questions of life in difficult books. He is a eunuch, a man who has suffered in order to conform to a particular regime. It is the regime of the queen of Ethiopia into which he became a courtier. For this he had to be castrated. The Ethiopian is a man who conformed to the norms of court. He became lonely. He could only wonder how his life could be fruitful. He sought a god and was thoroughly religious. But he fell outside the official religion. Yet he returned from his pilgrimage, a pilgrimage to Jerusalem. Jesus' life too was a single pilgrimage to Jerusalem. Luke wrote of his ascent to Jerusalem, the city where he would reveal himself. By the way, was Jesus' life truly fruitful?

Philip is a pilgrim. Not searching initially in learned books but he had learnt to listen. Philip is the alert believer. Belief is a question of paying attention. Life contains a hidden invitation. Maybe God speaks to you as one or another angel: 'Get up and go on a journey'. The way leads us through the desert, it is lonely. By being alert we discover fellow travellers. That's what happened to the disciples on the road to Emmaus after Jesus' condemnation.

On the road to Emmaus someone joined the disciples and asked them: "What is it you are debating as you walk?" (cf. Luke 24:17) Jesus is the fellow traveller who asks the questions. He invites, he doesn't force himself. He is there for the disciples, not for himself. Thus Philip walked along with the carriage. He stayed nearby a while before he was invited to speak: "Do you understand what you are reading?"

Asking questions without travelling with the pilgrim: isn't that the job of the church in the world? Didn't our Old-Catholic Mothers and Fathers also do that? Asking questions about the meaning of developments and happenings so that the real purpose emerges. The church is a community which seriously tries to understand what people are doing: laying a finger on the wound of evil and applauding good. That demands awareness and courage. It demands willingness to get to know oneself, the world and God.

For the eternal question is: who am I? What is man? What makes life worthwhile? The Ethiopian reads Isaiah. The text is crucial in this context.

*...like a lamb that is dumb before the shearer, he does not open his mouth...who will be able to speak of his posterity? For he is cut off from the world of living men. (Acts 8:32-35)*

It is a quotation from the song of the 'suffering servant'. The first Christians recognised Jesus in that song. Without realising it, the Ethiopian also recognised himself in it. He is also a man without descendants and so he seems to be a man without a future. His fertility has been denied him. What can make his life worthwhile?

You know how Jesus was silent before the high priests. Pilate let Jesus be flogged and then brought him before the crowd: "behold the man" ("ecce homo"). As though the evangelist wanted to say: man is an outstanding example of the vulnerable victim. It can happen to us all. It *has* happened to some of us. To realise that is to know one's real self...

But isn't vulnerability now exactly our fate? Isn't that why we do everything we can to deny it and avoid it? No, it is not fate, it is a joy and that is God's guarantee! That is exactly what Philip's friendship with the Ethiopian let him experience: men are entrusted to each other. Jesus' silence in those last hours in Jerusalem is a sign of God's bafflement about the fact that men want to kill each other. Whoever proclaims Jesus proclaims God's anger at the humiliation of men. Whoever allows God's anger into himself has had enough of the so-called normal procedure of established systems that serve only the mastery of one person over another.

To be baptised is to be immersed in God's bafflement and anger, to stand up as a person who wants to care for people and the world. To be baptised is to be immersed in God's passion for people. God awakens our awareness that we were not created to dominate one another, but to serve one another. *That* makes life fruitful. Where at first life seemed a lonely desert, now seems to have water: amniotic water for new life in dedication. That is the baptismal water into which

Philip and the Ethiopian descend together. That is what the Ethiopian missed on his pilgrimage to Jerusalem: the realisation of God's bafflement at his exclusion. The experience gave him a new perspective on life. And the story tells how *the eunuch went happily on his way.* (Acts 8 : 39)

We have recently been newly sprinkled with the same baptismal water. Therefore we can wish ourselves some of the same experience in the coming days. That we can learn more about ourselves and the world we live in and may experience how passionately God has chosen us. Not for our passion to dominate but rather for our vulnerability. Let us be open for this experience in order to be more dedicated to each other and to others and to God, who depends on us to co-operate, to share God's bafflement at the evil that men do and God's enthusiasm for all that is good and beautiful.

An orthodox theologian told me that the Eastern Christians have 'at least' seven sacraments and that one of the sacraments outside the traditional seven is surely the 'mystery' that is friendship. Friendship is a long term relationship built not only on mutual interests and common feelings but also primarily on the consciousness that we can serve each other and be partners in the pilgrimage of life.

Thank you for coming. I am grateful to be able to join you in your journey.

### **Intercessions**

Let us pray

for all who have assembled here  
to meet en to encourage each other;  
that we will be accessible to God and his world,  
so that our congress may be a sign  
of community that crosses many borders.

Let us pray

for the Church, the body of Christ,  
for solidarity among her multi-colored members  
in their celebrating and servitude,

so that she, on the foundation of apostles and prophets,  
may be built into a holy temple in the Lord,  
a refuge for very many.

Let us pray  
for the nations of our world and their leaders,  
for all who in these times of murderous violence  
seek to keep this world secure and free,  
that we will participate in the responsibility  
of all religions and all people of good will  
to make the earth flower  
as a garden of peace and justice.

### **Prayer of the Congress**

Lord God,  
how can we get up  
and go on our way to You  
and to each other  
if You do not show us the way?  
We pray You:  
let us see Him  
who is our way and our peace,  
Jesus Christ, our Lord;  
awaken us to life through your Spirit,  
so that, as Your daughters and sons, we stand up  
reborn and go forward  
proclaiming You in word and deed  
as the God of our life,  
today and for the rest of our days.

**Amen.**



## **Welcome**

### **Frank de Haart, President of the Congress**

Today the 31st International Congress of the Old Catholics starts. A tradition since 1890 in which old Catholics find their way to this gathering Europe.

We welcome you to Utrecht, a Dutch city with a rich history both in the Netherlands and in our communion.

Tomorrow we start the program at the oldest site of Utrecht, the Cathedral Square. The place where the Romans around 50 AD have created the basis for the city of Utrecht. On the banks of the Rhine, they built the "Castellum Traiectum" of wood and earth. This fort was part of the defensive border along the northern border of the Roman Empire. It can be visited at the 'attraction' DomUnder " which is a highly recommended underground exploration.

In 690 the Anglo-Saxon missionary and bishop Willibrord founded within the largely deserted border post Utrecht a spiritual center with a number of churches.

From this developed the complex of the cathedral dedicated to Saint Martin. Since the eighth century, it was the seat of the bishop in Utrecht, and therefore it was the religious center of the Northern Netherlands. Because the tearing of the Catholic churches and the formation of the Old Catholic Church, from 1723 on this city has had two bishops .

The most prestigious project of the fourteenth century was the construction of the colossal Cathedral Tower, one of the largest towers that had been built up to then.

In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries Utrecht played with his Utrecht School an important role in Dutch painting. In the first half of the seventeenth century Utrecht University was founded.

From the beginning of the 19th century, the city was gradually expanded and became the fourth largest city in the Netherlands. And is seen as the center of our country, especially given the track junctions which can be found here.

As congress committee we are proud to welcome you these various historic buildings. I told you about the Dom and the cathedral.

The oldest part of the Academy Building, the Union of Utrecht Hall or Aula, exists since 1462 In 1579 the Union of Utrecht was signed here, which is considered the beginning of the Dutch state. Which sometimes confuses people with the to our church known Union of Utrecht.

Paushuize is a city palace which was originally built for the sole Dutch Pope ever known, Pope Adrian VI. And it was recently restored.

Saint John's Church is from the 13th century and is one of the five canons churches.

The congress committee has enjoyed working on the organization of this conference for more than two years now. Starting with the core group of 10 people recently more than one hundred people are involved in the preparations. I want to make use of this opportunity to thank these volunteers warmly for their efforts.

The mission of the International Bishops Conference was making a compact three-day congress. We have tried to create a varied program. In this Congress, "Get up up and Go" we literally take you on a journey. In the program you will miss the familiar trip, and the international folklore evening. Choices we had to make because of the fewer number of available days. The conference will not be concluded with a

formal session and vote on resolutions.

I was asked as chairman to prepare this congress, but will leave the day chairmanship to others. Today and other days you will see Mr. Bert Maan guide you through the program, tomorrow Henriette Maan will do this for you. As already mentioned, we were able to contract the most beautiful locations. All nearby one another. Our prognosis was based on about 400 participants. But the Saturday afternoon celebration, however, we expect more than 750 visitors. We are pleased that we may receive our former queen and now Her Royal Highness Princess Beatrix at the commemoration of 125 years Union of Utrecht. Unfortunately, we cannot make the churches bigger than they already are and do we have to keep in mind the safety of the participants . This means that space may be tight and we ask your understanding for this.

You were able to have an insight at program already. In terms of content, the Archbishop will share this with you.. If you have questions about the program there are many volunteers who can lead the way, to answer questions, help with tourist information, or ordering a taxi for you.

Both here and at the various locations there are always information desks available.

You can follow the conference on the site of the conference, or via twitter.

May I hereby open the conference by welcoming all of you.

**Welcoming address**  
**+ Joris Vercammen**

It is a great pleasure to welcome you all to the 31st International Old Catholic Congress. The congresses look back on a

tradition that is almost as old as the Union of Utrecht itself. The first congress was held in Cologne in 1890. Since then the form and the expectations have changed, but the congress remains perhaps the most important meeting place for Old Catholics. Here we come together with a wide cross-section of other believers and reflect on our own witness. The congress has always focused on three aspects: connecting, reflecting or learning, and celebrating. This time our celebrations are taking place in Utrecht, where the courageous bishops of the German diocese, the Swiss diocese, and from Haarlem, Deventer and Utrecht met in 1889 to unite their churches as witness for the whole Church. From that time Utrecht became a symbol of their ecumenical enthusiasm. Later, others followed in their footsteps. The bishops' meeting took place in the former bishop's house, just a few hundred metres away from this cathedral. This year's congress marks the 125th anniversary of their momentous decision. And now we have all come to Utrecht with a similar enthusiasm for the Catholic imprint of our church and for Christian unity. This cathedral, which celebrated its 100th anniversary on 14 May, is an expression of a renewed self-confidence that followed the foundation of the Union of Utrecht. We hope that this congress will also strengthen us in our Old Catholic way of being Christians. All of us belong to member churches of the Union of Utrecht, and that is why Utrecht is also your city. A journey to Utrecht is a journey to place that is close to your heart or, if you like, a pilgrimage to your own spiritual roots.

Of the Christians gathered here, some were born Old Catholics and others might only recently have become Old Catholics. But all of us are members of a community that longs to share the witness of the Gospel with the world. There is much we can still learn about how to do that as Old Catholics. And we do so because there is too much violence in the world, too little respect, too little joy in people's hearts, too much despair, too much superficiality and too little liturgy, too much ideology and too little poetry, too much individual-

ity and too little community. Old Catholics are receptive to what life gives us, and they are open-minded about the questions the world faces today. And they are committed to God's dream of a new world and a new heaven. That is why they become involved with others in a solidarity that is experienced as grace, to work with God to achieve the quality of life that His Kingdom promises. Receptiveness, commitment and involvement: That's what we're here for!

We are on a pilgrimage that can bring us closer to our own time as well as to God; closer to the unrest in our world as well as to the peace of God; and closer to the questions in our own hearts as well as to God.

We are delighted that so many young people have come here to join us on this pilgrimage. More than 60 young people from several countries will be journeying together through their own programme, but sometimes our paths will join. We hope that they will be encouraged by the days they spend together. They should know that the church cannot fully be the church without them. We need the impatience of youth! Our pilgrimage will lead us to a major celebration on Saturday afternoon and evening. St. Martin's Cathedral (the Domkerk), where we will be celebrating, is a symbol of ecumenical and interreligious cooperation in the Netherlands. That is why we are at home there. It is the medieval successor of the seventh-century St. Willibrord's Church, and it connects us to the missionary church of the first millennium.

"Zwar unterwegs, doch unbestimmt,  
die trock'ne Erde, durstig, dürr,  
gleich' einer Schale, off'nen Händen,  
hör' ich mit wachem Herzen.  
Ein off'nes Buch, doch was ich les'  
versteh' ich nicht allein."

(from the congress song)

To remind us that we are walking together on our journey!  
Let us now set out on our pilgrimage. Thank you for being part of it.