

EN

The Eucharist

**125 Jahre
Union of Utrecht**

**20 September 2014
Domkerk, Utrecht**

ATTACHMENT

The Collect

Almighty God,
who built your Church upon the foundation
of the apostles and prophets,
with Jesus Christ himself as the chief cornerstone:
so join us together in unity of spirit by their doctrine,
that we may be made a holy temple acceptable to you;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.

Amen.

Isaiah 55,1-11

Ho, everyone who thirsts,
come to the waters;
and you that have no money,
come, buy and eat!
Come, buy wine and milk
without money and without price.
Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread,
and your labour for that which does not satisfy?
Listen carefully to me, and eat what is good,
and delight yourselves in rich food.
Incline your ear, and come to me;
listen, so that you may live.
I will make with you an everlasting covenant,
my steadfast, sure love for David.
See, I made him a witness to the peoples,
a leader and commander for the peoples.
See, you shall call nations that you do not know,
and nations that do not know you shall run to you,
because of the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel,
for he has glorified you.

Seek the LORD while he may be found,
call upon him while he is near;
let the wicked forsake their way,
and the unrighteous their thoughts;
let them return to the LORD, that he may have mercy on
them,
and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.
For my thoughts are not your thoughts,
nor are your ways my ways, says the LORD.
For as the heavens are higher than the earth,
so are my ways higher than your ways
and my thoughts than your thoughts.

For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven,
and do not return there until they have watered the earth,
making it bring forth and sprout,
giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater,
so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth;
it shall not return to me empty,
but it shall accomplish that which I purpose,
and succeed in the thing for which I sent it.

Acts 8, 26-40.

See the liturgy

John 15, 1-8

‘I am the true vine, and my Father is the vine-grower. He removes every branch in me that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit. You have already been cleansed by the word that I have spoken to you. Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me. I am the vine, you

are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing. Whoever does not abide in me is thrown away like a branch and withers; such branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples.

Sermon

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

... Planting, growing and harvesting, respectively the bearing of fruit with the example of vines are the topic in the 15th chapter of St. John's Gospel. But do not worry. I am not speaking today as an expert in viticulture.

For us as Christians gathered here, the analogies are crucial. With the vine is meant Jesus Christ, or the church he founded. God and His Holy Spirit are the planters and wine-growers. And the vines are both individual Christians and the various churches and denominations. Therefore the following questions arise for me in today's context: How do the individual Christian and the Christian Church bring fruit in the world, in Jesus Christ's sense of planting, growing and harvesting? In what form do the Old Catholic Churches of the Union of Utrecht today represent a vine? What is the Union of Utrecht's message for Christianity, for Europe and the world today?

One difficulty is that this text from the Gospel of John is not very popular with some people. For too long it has been seen as a threat to the individual. It spread the fear, among readers of the Bible and hearers of sermons, that one could never be good enough for God: that one could bring no fruit and so

be cut off; that is, that at the final judgment one would be among the damned.

True enough, this cautionary aspect is also part of what Jesus says to his disciples. But it is not the main emphasis. In the centre remains Christ's promise: "Abide in me, and I in you"; "He who abides in me and I in him, bears much fruit."

I begin with planting.

The church and the churches are not an accidental product of history or societies freely established by human beings. They have been planted by God in the course of his history with the world. He let them be founded by Jesus Christ and constituted by the Holy Spirit. Also our dioceses and parishes have been planted by God as a vine and have a specific job in the vineyard of the Lord. Even though schism between the denominations is a sin, it is a reality. And in this reality, we have a special mission and destiny as a vine.

Now I come to the growing.

Growth is a sign of vitality. Jesus Christ himself has told us: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the world." (Matthew 28,19-20). However, God's promise is given to the whole Christian Church, that is, the vine. It does not cover every single branch, every individual church. There have been churches, larger than the Union of Utrecht, which have disappeared in the course of time. I am thinking here, for example, of the flourishing churches of North Africa, who fell victim to the Islamic invasion. This is also a current and tragic issue today in Iraq and Syria. And there have been churches, smaller than the Union of Utrecht, which have

grown strongly. Today this is happening particularly in Africa, Asia and South America. Still, growth can never be enforced. Perhaps it is God's will that churches in other parts of the world grow rapidly and that the churches in Europe decline, despite all efforts at planting. Perhaps it is God's will that the Union of Utrecht remains a small vine. Nevertheless, growth is also possible in Europe and in our communities; growth of personal faith, of the parish and of the church. The rest is up to God.

How can we personally grow in faith? This is simple actually: by reading the Bible, celebrating worship, prayer, undertaking a task or an office in the community, by charity and social activities outside the community. If we want to be a growing church or community, then that depends primarily on how much we as individuals live our faith and set an example.

How can we all together grow as a community? This can be understood in different ways, quantitatively and/or qualitatively. But one must not play off quantity and quality against each other. The more the quality increases, the greater is the chance that the quantity will be right. Whoever professes to be a member of a church cannot be completely free, because he or she is a part of a community. Being a part of a community means celebrating with others, sharing their problems, seeking together, suffering and rejoicing together, and joining in decision-making. Hélder Camara writes: "If one person dreams, it remains a dream. But if all dream together, it becomes reality." What is our Old Catholic dream, that is reality and will be a still greater reality? A local Catholic church which is managed jointly, according to the principle of consensus, by the faithful and the bishop and on the parish level by the faithful and the priest. A local Catholic church which has its principles, but leaves as many decisions as possible to the individual conscience. A local Catholic church

that practices the equality of women in all areas as a matter of course. A local Catholic church for which dialogue with other churches and the ecumenical movement and church unity are important. A local Catholic church which has its centre in the Sunday Eucharist.

If you are asked to introduce yourself, such as in a training course or to other people at the table during the holidays, you will mention many things: name, first name, what you do, where you live, etc.; but probably not your religion. Because we in Western Europe live in a culture where personal belief is regarded as a private matter. But in the third millennium – as in the ancient church – every Christian is a missionary. The situation in the context of globalization and European unity is similar to that in the Roman Empire: People are seeking a deeper meaning in their lives – even though they have almost everything superficially. But belonging to a church is now primarily determined by personal wishes; where do I want to take part and where do I feel at home? And most people discover this, on life's journey, through personal contact. Through others speaking about their faith and telling with joy and inner conviction eg. that their religious home is a small church, a vine in the vineyard of the Lord. They are glad to be members. In this church, everyone matters and can take part in making it what it is. The greatest danger for the churches in Europe is not of being destroyed by external enemies, but of being simply forgotten and overlooked by people. Growth in faith also means speaking of one's own church in a natural and relaxed manner. In the image of the vine, this is completely clear: Only the branch that draws its strength from the vine which bears it can bear fruit. From the vine it gets juice and strength. But remaining connected to the vine does not mean closing oneself to changes in the world around one. Traditional ideas must be questioned. Valid answers must be found again and again. Sometimes it will become necessary

to go new ways. The people to whom Jesus speaks in the Gospel of John have broken with their former lives, for his sake. The parable of the vine and its branches is among in the so-called farewell speeches in John's Gospel. Jesus is preparing his disciples for his death. "Nothing will remain as it is! I will no longer actually be among you". But still he says: "I will continue to stay with you, if you remain in me. Like the branches of the vine, in which the juice rises and which keep growing and making new leaves and producing fruit".

The Union of Utrecht has also changed in the last 125 years. Here are just two current examples from the present day:

While we have till now cultivated contacts especially with the Orthodox Churches, the Anglican Churches and the Roman Catholic Church, now other autonomous Catholic churches are becoming important, as a result of migration, European unity and globalization, such as the Mariavite Church in Poland, the Church of Sweden, the Indian Mar Thoma Church (Mar Thoma Syrian Church) and the Independent Church of the Philippines (Iglesia Filipina Independiente).

The existing church fellowship with the Church of England raises the question in continental Europe, because of migration, of whether the existing church communion is just political lip service or should have structural consequences?

I am confident that we will overcome all these changes with God's help.

We are, and will with God's help remain, an ecumenical pioneer church. People come through us to faith. They find a spiritual home in us. They are strengthened with us. With us, people discover their vocation to the ministry. People in need experience help, affection and friendship.

Therefore, let us remain grateful for everything that happens to us in the name of Jesus. And as in Psalm 145, we should first and foremost thank God. It depends on him and his plan for us, not on us. "Great is the Lord and greatly to be praised, his greatness is unsearchable."

Prayer of the Congress

Lord, our God,
How would we get up
And journey towards you
And each other
If you don't show us the way?
We pray to you:
Let us see him
Who is our way and our peace,
Jesus Christ, our Lord;
Bring us to life through your Spirit,
That we may be raised up as your daughters and sons,
Restored people on a journey
Who profess you in word and deed
As the God of our lives,
Today and every day.

Amen.

Congress Hymn 'Pilgrimage'

t. Andries Govaart, m. Christiaan Winter

1. A pilgrimage still unfulfilled,
A soil that thirsts, a barren land,
An empty vessel, hands held open,

A heart that longs to listen,
An open book, and yet I fail
To grasp it on my own.

2. Who guides the way in what I read,
Who joins to hear the word that sounds,
Who takes me by the hand and shows me
A life that's good and costly?
How can I hear a silent lamb
When I read on my own?
3. The Spirit sends an exegete:
A man who serves to guide and teach.
Old prophecies resound as new—
And seek to be fulfilled—
The Lamb is Christ, our Way. We are
No longer on our own.
4. Immersed in water and in Sp'rit
We bloom and blossom, bear new fruit.
We toil as servants to create—
Your heav'nly Kingdom here on earth—.
No other treasure needs our heart,
For you are God alone.

Prayer at the preparation of the Table

Lord, let the fire of your Holy Spirit
Sanctify these gifts
And purify our hearts
And make them an offering acceptable to you
Through Christ, our Lord.

Amen

The Eucharistic Prayer 3

See the liturgy

Prayer after Communion

God, our Father,
Sprinkle us with the dew of your Spirit
That we may bear fruits of love and faithfulness,
Peace and justice,
Today and all our days,
Now and forever.

Amen.