

Evangelical Church Berlin-Brandenburg-Silesian Upper Lusatia, Bishop Dr Dr h.c. Markus Dröge,

Sermon on the 7<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter (*Exaudi, Domine, vocem meam, qua clamavi ad te.*<sup>1</sup>),

service at St Paul's Cathedral, London,

13 May 2018, John 17:11-19

*(The sermon's biblical passage will be read as a gospel immediately prior to the sermon.)*

*In the Name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.*

Dear brothers and sisters in faith,

many guests from all over the world visit this wonderful cathedral. And so – coming from many countries of Europe and the world – we are gathering here at St Paul's to worship today. I came from Berlin. I bring along greetings of my church here to London. Yesterday I had the privilege to participate in the installation of the new bishop of London, Sarah Mullally.

Today the Gospel tells us how Jesus prays to God. Jesus bids farewell to his disciples. He intercedes for them and entrusts them to God. He prepares them for the life without Him. His words are like a testament.

There are three requests included in this testament:

1. *Protect them in Your name.*
2. *Protect them from the evil one.*
3. *Sanctify them in the truth.*

#### I.

The first request reads: *Holy Father, protect them in Your name, that You have given Me, so that they may be one, as We are one.*

This request provides us with orientation. For God has revealed Himself to this world in Jesus Christ. In Jesus Christ, we can realise how God is and we are connected in the one worldwide Church, as the body of Jesus Christ.

There are many signs of reconciled unity in the worldwide Church. It was for example a wonderful sign of reconciliation that we in Germany in the last year were able to celebrate the anniversary “500 Years since the Reformation” to-

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<sup>1</sup> Ps. 26:7.

gether with our Catholic brothers and sisters as a *Christ-feast* (a *Christusfest*, how we call it), although the Reformation had led to the separation of the Church in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Last year, we did not want to stress what divides us but what we have in common. We celebrated reconciliation services. That was a good sign, as the struggle of the confessions meant in former times much suffering and war in Germany. This is not the spirit of the Gospel and particularly not the spirit of the farewell request of Jesus:

*Holy Father, protect them in Your name, that You have given Me, so that they may be one, as We are one.* We shall be one, dear brothers and sisters, like God is associated with Jesus. Today we are making great strides and get close to each other. We seek reconciliation.

## II.

The second request Jesus addresses to His Father reads: *Protect them from the evil one.*

Christians live in this world. They live under the conditions of this world. Yet they are not *of* this world. Through baptism, they participate in the new world of God. In the new world, evil has been conquered. In the new world, peace is already there. In the new world, they are one with themselves and with God. That is why Christians live in this world as if it already was the new world. In a world where peace is threatened, they stand up for reconciliation. In a world that lets starve a big part of its population, they stand up for justice.

We live under the conditions of the world, believing in the reconciling power of the love of God. We believe in the peace-bringing power of law and justice.

That comprises peace initiatives, reconciliation work, assistance of people needing support as well as commitment to justice and to the conservation of creation.

In Berlin, we live in a multicultural and multiethnic city that maintains atheist traditions too. Only a quarter of the population belongs to the Christian faith.

But during the celebrations of the Reformation's anniversary last year, we noticed that the reformatory message of freedom is indeed understood in the secular world: A human being shall be free to arrange his life only in accordance with his conscience and he concurrently accepts responsibility for the community. This connection of freedom and responsibility provides the basis of social peace. Only where freedom and responsibility for my neighbour get together, peace can prevail and the evil can be conquered.

### III.

The third request Jesus addresses to His Father reads: *Sanctify them in the truth*. “*Sanctify them*”. That means: “Keep them, oh God, lovingly by your side. Make them belong to you.” Saints are relatives to God. Every human being is called to be such a relative, a relative to God.

“*Sanctify them in the truth*”, Jesus says.– “What is truth?”, Pontius Pilate will ask Jesus during the interrogation. That is how it is written immediately after Jesus' farewell speeches in the Gospel of John (John 18:38).

What is truth? The truth stood for by Jesus is no rigid dogmatism. It is the truth in love, inviting the neighbour to embark upon the path of reconciliation.

I believe, dear brothers and sisters, that we as Christians have to bear witness to this truth in love, even more clearly at the very present.

Many people in Europe and throughout the world currently seek their salvation in delimitation. There is a movement of “me first” - and a nationalist movement: “my country first”. The securing of one's own life is searched for by distancing oneself from the life of others. That is not the path of truth Jesus teaches us.

Therefore, we Christians face a worldwide challenge to call all people to embark upon the path of reconciliation and peace today. This is the path Jesus died for on Good Friday and resurrected for at Easter.

#### IV.

In Berlin, we recently reminded our church-members and the population that Martin Luther King had been murdered 50 years ago. He has great significance for my church. For he empowered the people in Berlin in the time when a wall separated Berlin. In September 1964, he spoke the following words in two important churches in East Berlin:

*“No barrier made by man can make us forget that children of God live on both sides of the Wall”.*

Martin Luther King spoke of a “world house” that can be inhabited by all people having the same dignity and the same rights.

Once more, dear brothers and sisters, the presence requires us to feel responsible for connecting us beyond national borders, in the spirit of reconciliation that is given to us as a present by Jesus Christ.

In this truth, God may sanctify us.

Amen.

Translation from German into English, Jörg Schneider