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Festpredigt
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St. Gertrudis-Kathedrale

The 50th Anniversary of the Bonn Agreement

The celebration of the feast of Saint Willibrord, November 7th 1981

*Jesus said: "There shall be one flock,
and one shepherd" (St. John 10:16)*

Today is a very special and happy day for the churches united in the Utrecht Union and for the Anglican Communion. We commemorate the fact that 50 years ago the Bonn Agreement was signed.

The effect of this was that a Full Communion between the Anglican and Old-Catholic Churches was established. We are grateful that today we can remember this event with so many faithful here present. It is particularly a pleasure for us that the Lord Archbishop of Canterbury is willing to concelebrate this Eucharist.

In this respect we should not forget that the Churches of England and Utrecht had already been tightly united in faith for many centuries. The great missionaries who preached the Gospel in the "Low Countries by the sea" came from England. Amongst them we count Saint Wilfrid, who later became Archbishop of York, and after him the pious monks Willibrord and Boniface. With an ardent zeal they proclaimed the glad tidings of salvation and reconciliation which is the message of the Kingdom of God. They were ready "to suffer the loss of all things, that they might win Christ" (Philippians 3:8). When Saint Boniface decided to leave England for the Continent, he is known to have engaged in a prayer fellowship with the then Archbishop of Canterbury and his clergy. By doing so they shared in prayer for the missions to the Kingdom of the Frisians. It is also told of Saint Ludger, later to be Bishop of Münster, that he was sent by the church of Utrecht to be a student at a monastic school in York; on his return home he brought with him an enormous amount of books. The missionary work of these devout English religious was not restricted only to the Netherlands, but it penetrated deep into Europe, even to northern Italy. This gave a special character to the churches that arose

as a result of their preaching. If anywhere there have been Christians taking the Lord's instruction "to be one flock with one shepherd" seriously, then it must have been these ardent workers for the Gospel. We can only hope and pray that this unity in faith, so deeply felt by our forefathers, will keep growing in effective strength evermore, also in our present age.

Today's world seems very different from the days of Saint Willibrord, the founder of the Church of Utrecht. But the struggle for freedom, peace and justice continues to be as hard as it was in those days; the aim of this struggle being to put up signs that the Kingdom of God is coming.

We all know what an enormous danger nuclear wars, pollution, racism and unjust economic structures involve, and how they threaten death to our modern society. In addition to this we see so many young people come to maturity with deep frustrations, often caused by drastic changes of ideas about family-life.

It is however not the church's first task to find a sufficient response to all these threats; its primary task consists of "continuing stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers" (Acts 2:42). Then the Father will send us the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, in the name of Jesus; He will inspire us and guide mankind in distress to a meaningful future.

Jesus said: "They shall hear my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd." Today's world is further away from this ideal than ever before. In spite of all the suffering brought about by the two World-Wars, the fire of discord and division is kept burning harder yet in a most cruel way.

Even those who style themselves followers of Jesus Christ have neglected and even violated their Lord's instruction by causing schism after schism in the one Body of Christ, which is His Church.

Therefore I repeat here what I have said many times already: "No new schism is allowed!" Our vocation is to struggle for reuniting the Church of Jesus Christ: in this way the phrase "one flock and one shepherd" will come true, and hopefully the world would also respond to its calling for unity instead of division.

If today's celebration is to be meaningful, then only being *able* to contribute to this unity would not be enough, but we should regard it as our *duty* to strive for that end. This is why I am so glad that many members of the Dutch Council of Churches have sent their representatives to be present here.

We all share the roots of faith. The Bonn Agreement mentions all principles of Christian Faith both of our churches profess. It should be a passion for all churches to seek after these principles of faith, in order to regain their unity in Christ the Lord. The nearer we approach to Christ in living His Gospel not only in word but also in deed, the closer we will come to one another in the unity of faith, hope and charity: and according to the Apostle Paul (I Corinthians 13:13) the greatest of these will always be charity.

It is this very charity that brings us together on today's joyful occasion: may I express the wish that it will continue to push us forward to Our Lord's ideal of one flock with one Shepherd. Amen