

11 October 2018
Chapel of Taranto

Good evening, everyone.

I want to begin by repeating what St Paul says to the Corinthians, "I do not want to dominate your faith." I have not come to Taranto to dominate anyone. As the Apostle says, "Voglio soltanto lavorare con voi per la vostra gioia."

Your joy! And my joy too. This is an evening for joy together as Christians. Not this kind of Christian or that kind, just Christians tonight. The primate of the Episcopal Church says that our church in the Episcopal branch of the Jesus Movement. This evening, all of us are celebrating that we are each of us part of Jesus' Movement, part of God's mission in creation to bring joy and peace and love to all people everywhere, in fact, to the whole creation itself!

This is not our doing. No one can boast of being a better Christian than others, not this evening, not anytime. As St Paul says, "Dio ha compiuto tutte le sue promesse. Chi ci mantiene saldi nell'unione con Cristo, noi et voi insieme, è Dio ; egli ci ha scelti, ci ha segnati con il suo nome e ci ha dato lo Spirito Santo come garanzia di quel riceveremo. » God did this for you and for me, each the same.

So why are we still divided? There are of course historical reasons. Every church represented here tonight has been persecuted, and each church has persecuted others too. Those wounds heal slowly. But all too often, our divisions were the result not of pious doctrinal arguments, but political games. For example, the Church of England was not founded when Henry VIII broke relations with the Pope. Henry founded nothing and by the way, never asked for a divorce. (An annulment is not a divorce.) The Church of England today is the church as it was before Henry. The Diocese of Canterbury is not new, and there has been an Archbishop of Canterbury, our spiritual leader, since 597. It was when Pope Pius V excommunicated Henry's daughter Elizabeth that the final break happened.

Later, when the American colonists who were part of the Church of England were cut off from the mother church, they formed The Episcopal Church. Not out of doctrinal differences, but political changes.

When Christians argue about questions of doctrine, there is no reason to split. Division is not the work of the Spirit, who mantiene saldi nell'unione con Cristo, noi et voi insieme, è Dio. It is the work of Satan. I suppose it is a doctrinal question whether Satan is real or not, but I believe there is spiritual wickedness and that it has a cause and it has power. Look at how many different schisms have happened. How many churches claim to be Christian? How many claim to be the only true church? Is this the work of the Spirit? Is it? []

So tonight, as we gather in joy to bless Antonio as Abbot of this religious order, our joy is simple: the Christiana Fraternitas is an ecumenical order. Anyone who is a believer in Jesus, who is part of the Jesus Movement, can be a part. And in fact, with the Fraternitas authorized to use this chapel, I can tell you that anyone can use it: it is open to all.

This is normal, because we are together in our joy. Together despite schisms and arguments and historical wounds. And if we truly believe that egli ci ha scelti, ci ha segnati con il suo nome e ci ha dato lo Spirito Santo come garanzia di quel riceveremo, then we know that we all belong to Jesus, and Jesus belongs to God. And the Spirit has brought us into the same Movement, the communion of saints, the life everlasting. It is God who does this, not us. Therefore this chapel must be open to all.

God loves you. There are no exceptions. God loves each and every one of you. No one is excluded. There are no marginal people in God's reign. There is only us together, in joy and faith and peace and hope.

And love. Love never ends, and the love of God will not let our divisions stand for much longer. May the Christiana Fraternitas and Abbot Antonio be a mighty instrument in God's work: they are a small part of that garanzia di quel riceveremo. We all have Christ. Much more importantly, Christ has us.