

**Opening Sermon**  
**Reverend Sonia Andrea Skupch**

*“So he came and proclaimed peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near; for through him both of us have access in one Spirit to the Father. So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone. In him the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you also are built together spiritually into a dwelling place for God” (Ephesians 2:17 – 22).*

Dear Brothers and Sisters: The grace and the peace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with all of us, today and always. Amen.

The country from where I come, Argentina, like many other countries, has a high percentage of children and teenagers living on the streets. Many of them are continually being sent to prison, then leaving it and falling back into crime again. But some time ago, a human rights movement began an interesting and creative project with a group of street teenagers. A film director was involved who proposed the following task to the teens: “I’m going to give you a camera, teach you to film, and then you should make a short movie.” The teens accepted and decided to film their own lives, their daily life, their dreams, hopes, concerns and problems. Once the movie was ready they called it “The Nobodies,” because they see themselves as nobodies in society.

The film was really very good, was presented in cinemas in Buenos Aires and received awards not only in Argentina, but also in other countries of Latin America and Europe. Some time after that, one of the teens got jailed again. While there, he was told that the movie “The Nobodies” was going to be presented on one of the TV channels. So he asked the police whether he and the other prisoners could be allowed to see it. The police agreed. A policeman prepared a room with a TV set so that all the prisoners could see the film. The boy was so proud of what he had done that he felt really famous, that he was an actor, and a movie star. His fellow prisoners as well as the police wanted autographs, and to be photographed with him! It was a great and special day for him. A few days after that, people from the human rights movement visited him, and he told them: “You know, for one day, for a few hours, I left behind being a nobody like we called ourselves in the film; for a short time I was a person.”

Dear Brothers and Sisters: We live in a world of nobodies, a world where people turn into numbers or directly vanish. Poverty makes people invisible, anonymous, insignificant, they don’t count because they are not useful to the actual economic system. In Argentina, we quite often compare society with a plate. We say that in the past there were people living in the center of the plate and people living on its border. But at this time, many people are no longer on the border; they are falling from the plate's edge and disappearing. They are nobodies. They do not exist.

To make matters worse, illiteracy contributes to the sad condition of being nobodies; they don’t have any way in which to defend themselves, to raise their voices.

We are facing violence on different levels; people are disappearing again and turning into nobodies. A few days ago, a woman came to our parish desperately asking for help because her son had been killed in jail by the police. The boy had just disappeared; nobody wanted to remember him. He turned into a nobody.

Globalization, economic injustice, neoliberalism, violence, illiteracy, misuse of power, destruction of the environment, and so on, bring about these consequences. People are becoming nobodies. People—who do not exist, are not important—are disappearing.

In Paul's letter to the Ephesians, we read that through Jesus Christ all people have access to the Father by the Holy Spirit. We are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household. That really is a powerful message for us. In a world of nobodies, God says that we all belong to a family, to God's family. There are no longer people who are invisible or anonymous. There are no longer people who have more right to live than others. All people are citizens through Jesus Christ. They are people with the same rights, all of them justified by Jesus, and because of that, all members of God's family.

Paul emphasizes that several times. We belong to the same household. In chapter four of the same letter, Paul writes about this unity, about these facts that we share and have together as a family. He says that there is one family, one Spirit, one Lord, one faith, one baptism and one God and Father of all.

When we talk about communion we mean all that: people, God's people, sharing the same inheritance, sharing the same spirit, sharing the Reign of God. Being citizens, active members, protagonists, people who exist and have an identity. In being part of God's household, built on the foundation of Jesus Christ himself, there lies the power and the strength of communion. The communion of all those who believe in Christ has the power and strength that come from the cross and the resurrection of Christ.

The power and strength of this communion that come from the Holy Spirit can transform the world. Communion in Christ Jesus helps us to fulfill our tasks and challenges as churches of the Lutheran World Federation. This communion gives sense to our calling. We are not a group of crazy people dreaming of a better world. We are the people of God, citizens with the same rights, not anonymous and no longer nobodies. People of God with names, identities, stories to share. Therein lies our hope, our strength, our faith and joy.

The theme of this Council meeting and Church Leadership Consultation is "Living in Communion in the World Today." I invite all of you to deepen our communion through God during all of these days together. But the challenge is to live the communion as God's people during and after this meeting through the power of the Holy Spirit.

And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, guards our hearts and our minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.