



The Holy See

**LETTER OF HIS HOLINESS
POPE JOHN PAUL II
TO Cardinal Paul Joseph Pham Đình Tung
Archbishop of Hà Nội
President of the Episcopal Conference of Việt Nam
for bicentenary of
the Virgin Mary's apparitions in La Vang**

*To Cardinal Paul Joseph Pham Đình Tung Archbishop of Hà Nội
President of the Episcopal Conference of Việt Nam*

At the beginning of the jubilee celebrations for the 200th anniversary of the Virgin Mary's apparitions in La Vang, I warmly join in the joy and thanksgiving of the Bishops of Việt Nam and the members of their Dioceses.

In this shrine, so dear to the heart of Catholics in your country, it is a message of hope among spiritual and physical tribulations which the Mother of the Lord gave to her children in 1798, announcing to them: "Have trust, be willing to suffer hardship and sorrow. I have already granted your prayers. Henceforth all those who come to pray to me in this spot will see their wishes fulfilled". For two centuries this message, still up to date, has been fervently welcomed in La Vang. Despite the great trials which have marked it in the course of its history, it has now become a national Marian centre which has been able to keep alive the tradition of pilgrimages. Many people, of all origins and all conditions, come here privately to entrust their troubles and hopes to their Mother in heaven. Bishops, priests, religious and lay people like to find in her the welcoming presence of the One who gives them the courage to bear an admirable witness of Christian life in circumstances that are often difficult. I bless God who never abandons the people who seek him and who, with the motherly assistance of the Virgin Mary, continues to guide them, in days of happiness and of adversity.

I hope that the faithful who will come to pray to Our Lady of La Vang at her shrine during this jubilee year and those who will invoke her in other places will find a new apostolic impetus for their Christian life and receive comfort and strength, to face life's trials. I invite them to see in Mary the Mother Jesus himself gave to men, who leads them towards her divine Son. Having lived her condition as a disciple of the Lord perfectly, she calls Christians to progress on the path of a fervent life in accordance with the Gospel. May she make them pilgrims of steadfast faith in the person of Christ, the one

Saviour of humanity, pilgrims of hope, waiting anxiously for the hour of God, for the harvest of the seed already scattered on the ground, pilgrims of charity living their vocation of unity, fraternity and service amidst their brothers and sisters whose life they share!

Now that we have entered the second preparatory year for the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000, dedicated to the Holy Spirit, I urge the Catholics of Viêt Nam to contemplate in Mary a humble human woman who allowed herself to be led by the inner action of the Spirit. In intense and deep union with God, she obeyed his call with total fidelity. May everyone discover in her a woman of silence and attentiveness, who cherished in her heart the loving presence and sanctifying action of the Lord's Spirit which he enabled her to perceive! Never letting difficulties discourage her, she gave full expression to the longing of the Lord's poor, a radiant model for those who put all their trust in God's promises (cf. *Tertio millennio adveniente*, n. 48).

As in my heart and in my prayer I join the many pilgrims of La Vang, I ardently invoke the Mother of Christ, the Mother of men, for the entire people of Viêt Nam and for the Christian communities, originally from here, who now live abroad. May they put their trust in the Virgin most holy who maternally accompanies them on their earthly pilgrimage! Wherever they live, may they be faithful and generous disciples of Christ, witnessing to God's infinite love amidst their brothers and sisters!

On this happy occasion of the second centenary of the apparitions of the Blessed Virgin, I send you, Your Eminence, my affectionate Apostolic Blessing which I willingly extend to the Bishops, to the priests and to those preparing for the priesthood, to the religious and to all the faithful of Viêt Nam and the diaspora.

From the Vatican, 16 December 1997.

IOANNES PAULUS PP. II

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