



The Holy See

***LETTER OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THE BISHOPS OF SAN BENEDETTO
DEL TRONTO-RIPATRANSONE-MONTALTO
ON THE OCCASION OF THE 17th CENTENARY
OF ST BENEDICT'S MARTYRDOM***

*To my Venerable Brother Bishop Gervasio Gestori
of San Benedetto del Tronto-Ripatransone-Montalto*

1. The Diocesan Community entrusted to your pastoral care, venerable Brother, is preparing to commemorate with solemnity the 1,700th anniversary of the martyrdom of its Patron, St Benedict, from whom the city takes its name [San Benedetto del Tronto]. On this occasion, I am pleased to convey my affectionate greeting to you and to the faithful of your Diocese, and I express deep pleasure at the initiatives you have planned to renew attention and devotion to this Holy Martyr. The careful custody of his relics has served to keep his memory alive among the Christian people there, while at the same time it has strengthened the faith of a succession of generations. Thus, it is only right and proper to raise a hymn of praise and thanksgiving to the Lord, who through the intercession of St Benedict has protected the development of this City and its inhabitants through the centuries.

Christian history, from the very first, has had a wealth of holy martyrs. They were often humble, simple people who courageously succeeded in facing a gruesome death, steadfast in their love for Christ. In this lies the value of martyrdom, which is not contempt for life but a supreme and luminous act of love for Jesus, the one Saviour of humanity.

2. I am certain that this felicitous event will be a suitable occasion for the whole community of San Benedetto del Tronto to reassess its Christian roots and to be more alert in witnessing to the Gospel at this time in history. I know that in the past it has had to face adversity. Famine, plague, disease and civil tension have at times even threatened its survival, but in every difficult situation the faithful have always turned to St Benedict and obtained his powerful intercession.

And now, in a time that has radically changed, this Community feels the need to rediscover the indomitable apostolic zeal of its holy Patron, to continue to walk faithfully in his footsteps. This will help it preserve and fully appreciate its own religious traditions, nourishing hope and trust in the Lord in every circumstance, as has always been the practice of the sailors and fishermen who account for a considerable portion of San Benedetto del Tronto's social fabric.

3. May the fearless witness of the Holy Patron, who inspired love for Christ in everyone in a context of widespread paganism, be an incentive to families to understand ever better their vocation and form the new generations, often enticed by attractions quite other than the Gospel, so that they will not stray from the main road of Christian perfection.

May young people look to the Holy Martyr Benedict and in his example find the incentive to aspire to lofty and demanding ideals that can give their lives full meaning. May the young not be afraid to make demanding decisions, overcoming the temptation of conformism, the fascination of mere appearances and the attraction of promising but deceptive freedoms. On the contrary, may they focus on what really matters and St Benedict will see that no one who courageously intends to follow him on the path of the Christian ideal is deprived of his heavenly support.

Venerable Brother, I hope with all my heart that, thanks to the intercession of the holy Patron, you and the entire community of San Benedetto will experience the joy of a new spiritual springtime.

With these wishes, I cordially impart my Apostolic Blessing to you and to the whole Community of San Benedetto del Tronto.

From Castel Gandolfo, 10 August 2004

JOHN PAUL II