



The Holy See

**MESSAGE OF JOHN PAUL II
TO CARDINAL MARCO CÉ, PATRIARCH OF VENICE,
FOR THE CENTENARY OF THE CROWNING
OF THE IMAGE OF OUR LADY OF MONTE BERICO**

To my Venerable Brother
Cardinal Marco Cé
Patriarch of Venice

1. *"The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all" (2 Cor 13: 13)!*

With these words of the Apostle Paul I extend my cordial greeting to you, Your Eminence, to the venerable Archbishops and Bishops of the Ecclesiastical Region of the Triveneto, and to the priests, religious and the faithful who have gathered on Monte Berico to celebrate the centenary of the crowning of Mary, Mother of Mercy. Since the first half of the 15th century, trusting multitudes of devout people in search of protection and peace have never ceased to turn to this revered image.

At the beginning of my Pastoral Visit to the city of Vicenza on 7-8 September 1991, I too had the joy of making a pilgrimage to the Shrine of Monte Berico to venerate the Blessed Virgin, to ask her to bless the peoples of the Veneto and to show herself the tender and provident Mother of those who suffer and who long for justice and peace. I still have a vivid and grateful memory of the intense moments of prayer at her feet, as well as of the great popular devotion which marks the life of the shrine.

2. Today my thoughts naturally turn to 25 August 1900, when Cardinal Giuseppe Sarto, Patriarch of Venice, together with the Bishops of the Conciliar Region, climbed the slopes of Mount Berico to

crown the image of Mary, Mother of Mercy, amid the exultation of the faithful. Three years later he was to be called by Providence to be Supreme Pontiff with the name of Pius X and is today venerated as a saint by the universal Church. There he laid his people's joys, hopes and troubles at the feet of the Lord's Mother with great piety and trust, and left "on deposit, as it were, the precious golden crown set with gems ... to the religious custody of the Servants of Mary".

That solemn celebration sealed and enriched with a new token of love the ceaseless prayer which down the centuries has been raised to the Mother of the Lord in the Basilica of Monte Berico, a providential beacon of Marian spirituality where countless people began or intensified the inner pilgrimage that leads the believer to the spiritual peaks of holiness. In this church, as I said during my apostolic pilgrimage to the Vicenza region, one experiences how Marian prayer teaches us ecclesial communion by listening to her who holds the highest place in the Church and is the closest to Christ. For us all, Mary is the model of active charity since, by embracing God's saving will with a full heart and being impeded by no sin, she devoted herself totally to the person and work of her Son, contributing, through him and with him, to the mystery of redemption (cf. *Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, XIV/2, p. 501).

3. A century after her solemn crowning, the Churches of the Triveneto Ecclesiastical Region are renewing their profession of faith in the divine Trinity through their respective Pastors and in the presence of the authorities and a multitude of the faithful, endeavouring to live this moment of peaceful joy around the Mother of God as a significant moment in the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000. At the beginning of the third Christian millennium, may they entrust themselves to her, "the image and the beginning of the Church, to which she remains vitally united by her communion with the Redeemer" (ibid.), so that God will grant a fresh season of the Spirit to each Christian community. May believers look to her with gratitude for the gift of a clear, deep faith, which as a Mother she continues to inspire in her children, and with the awareness that "it is not possible to think of living true devotion to Our Lady if not in full harmony with the Church ... which has the role of verifying the legitimacy of the various forms of religious devotion" (ibid.).

The peoples of the Veneto have always asked Mary, Mother of Mercy, who from Monte Berico protects beneath her mantle all her children in their personal and community trials, even in the most difficult and troubled periods of history, to be tender and loving, and have received her help and protection. Her peaceful presence, especially in today's changed situations of social and economic well-being, is an invitation to believers to be ever worthy of her love and to profess their faith in Christ courageously. As the Mother of Life, Mary urges every member of the faithful to accept the gift of life with wonder and gratitude, from conception to its natural death. Mary also asks everyone to be compassionate to those who knock at the door of their home because they need forgiveness and reconciliation, support and fraternal solidarity.

4. Let us turn with trust to the Mother of Divine Mercy! May the centenary celebrations for the crowning of Our Lady of Monte Berico be a favourable opportunity for a more generous

proclamation of the Gospel! May Christ's message, which in distant times spread from Aquileia, Adria and Concordia and the ancient Roman cities of Padua and Verona, and continues to do so, now receive a new impetus in every community of the Triveneto.

"May Mary, Mother of the Lord, who from this shrine became the model and support of the countless priests, religious and lay people, who went to the most remote corners of the earth to proclaim and bear witness to revealed Truth, continue to raise up generous workers of truth and charity; may she inspire in all hearts openness to the divine call; may she give new missionary zeal to the young people of the Churches of the Triveneto.

"To your heavenly protection I entrust the Pastors, the religious communities, the missionaries and catechists, the sick, the elderly, the disabled, the young, families and, in particular, those who are experiencing moments of suffering or difficulty.

"O Blessed Virgin, from you I invoke the grace of deep apostolic zeal and full communion for all the faithful of the Churches of the Triveneto. To you, Our Lady of Monte Berico, I commend the beloved Italian nation, so that it will live in prosperity and peace and know how to be an instrument of lasting concord among the peoples.

"Mary, Mother of Mercy, support us on our way to the heavenly homeland!"

In the hope that the centenary celebration will yield abundant spiritual fruits, I gladly impart a special Apostolic Blessing to Your Eminence, to the Archbishops and Bishops of the Triveneto, to the region's clergy, religious and lay people, and entrust its efficacy to the intercession of the heavenly Mother of the Redeemer.

From Castel Gandolfo, 22 August 2000.

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