



The Holy See

**LETTER OF THE HOLY FATHER FRANCIS
TO THE ARCHBISHOP OF BARI-BITONTO
FOR THE 50TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE ELEVATION
OF THE BASILICA OF SAINT NICHOLAS OF BARI
TO "PONTIFICAL BASILICA"**

To the dear brother

Msgr. Francesco CACUCCI

Archbishop of Bari-Bitonto

Pontifical Delegate of the Basilica of Saint Nicholas

Fifty years have passed since my predecessor Saint Paul VI elevated the Basilica of Saint Nicholas of Bari to a Pontifical Basilica, attributing the office of Pontifical Delegate to the Archbishop *pro tempore* of Bari. This important occasion is a source of joy for the archdiocese, for the city and for the Region of Apulia, for the Order of the Preachers that guards the sacred temple, and for all Catholicity since this place of faith, prayer, meeting and dialogue has favoured the ecumenical movement.

In recent years, the Basilica of Saint Nicholas, so singularly linked to the Holy See, has been able to manifest its specific vocation intended to inspire the journey of Christian unity. This has been facilitated by the sincere devotion to the Holy Bishop of Myra by the faithful of the East and of the West. My thoughts go to all those who in any way have cooperated in liturgical, pastoral, cultural and above all ecumenical activity, the fruits of which I have witnessed personally in my recent visit at the meeting of prayer and reflection with the Heads of Churches present in the Middle East.

I encourage all those who work with different responsibilities in the pastoral care of this historic and famous Basilica to continue their service with a spirit of collaboration and renewed apostolic zeal, helping the pilgrims and the people who visit it and look to it with confidence to rediscover its spiritual importance. It is a matter of promoting in the faithful the path of assiduous search for God, nurtured by intense piety and an insatiable longing for contemplation. Prayer has an extraordinary

evangelizing force and is necessary for the achievement of full communion among Christians.

I hope that the significant fiftieth anniversary is also a reason for a renewed interest in the study of the historical events of the Pontifical Basilica, of the figure of Saint Nicholas, as well as of ecumenical theology. Scientific reflection, accompanied by planned cultural manifestations, can be combined with piety, liturgy and worship of the Saint, making a valid contribution to ecumenical relations between Catholic and Orthodox communities.

With these sentiments, invoking the intercession of the Virgin Mary and Saint Nicholas, I cordially impart the Apostolic Blessing to you and to the entire diocesan community, to Cardinal Angelo Becciu who presides over the commemorative event, to the Dominican Fathers, to the promoters and speakers of the conference and to those taking part in the evocative ceremonies.

From the Vatican, 24 November

FRANCIS

**Bulletin of the Holy See Press Office, 24 November 2018*

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