



The Holy See

**LETTER OF JOHN PAUL II
WRITTEN FOR THE
50TH ANNIVERSARY OF PRIESTLY ORDINATION
OF CARDINAL RUINI**

*To my Venerable Brother Cardinal Camillo Ruini
Vicar General of the Diocese of Rome President of the Italian Bishops' Conference*

1. On 8 December 1954, the centenary of the proclamation of the Dogma of the Immaculate Conception, you received priestly ordination, Venerable Brother, at the hands of the then-Vicegerent of Rome, Bishop Luigi Traglia. Recalling this fundamental moment of your life 50 years later, I would like to join spiritually in the thanksgiving that on the very eve of the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception you will raise to God during the solemn Holy Jubilee Mass in the Patriarchal Lateran Basilica of which you are Archpriest.

On this happy occasion, Your Eminence, I like to think of the Most Holy Virgin as the Mother of your priesthood and of your entire life, which began in those difficult years for the secular and Ecclesial Communities of Italy but especially for the region of Emilia. Mary watched over your parents, Iolanda and Francesco, a doctor still remembered for his dedication to his profession at the service of the people. From them, whom we like to think of as joining in the joy of this anniversary from Heaven, you received the education in the great spiritual values that has accompanied you in your long pastoral ministry.

The Virgin Mary has sustained you at every stage in your life. You grew up among the young people of Catholic Action at the after-school recreation centre in Sassuolo. First, you began as a boy to take an interest in the social and political problems that were so keenly felt in your native area; then, guided by wise priests, you were able to recognize and accept the call of the Lord and to follow him on the path of total dedication to the cause of the Kingdom of God. You studied in Rome at the Pontifical Gregorian University and completed your seminary training at the Almo Collegio Capranica of which, today, the Episcopal Commission is in charge. There you came into contact with exemplary priestly figures such as Mons. Cesare Federici, the Rector; Mons. Luigi

Solari, the Vice-Rector; and Mons. Pirro Scavizzi.

2. Fifty years have passed since the day of your priestly ordination! There have been unforgettable moments that you relived and are reliving in these days with your relatives and friends and with the beloved Diocese of Reggio Emilia-Guastalla. The community of the diocesan Seminary and the Seminaries for interdiocesan and regional theological studies where for many years you taught first philosophy and then dogmatic theology, are rejoicing with you. Catholic Action and the pastoral, cultural and scholastic institutions that esteemed you as an enlightened chaplain and guide, as well as the entire community of Reggio where you served as Auxiliary Bishop to the late Bishop Gilberto Baroni, are participating in the event.

The Community of the Diocese of Rome in particular is rejoicing, for it has been more than 13 years since I entrusted the office of Vicar General to you. I am grateful for the dedication with which you carry out this task, sparing no efforts. I am also grateful for the service you have rendered to the Holy See for years as a member of the Congregation for Bishops and of the Administration of the Patrimony of the Apostolic See.

On this happy occasion the Church in Italy is also close to you. Indeed, from the mid-1980s, in fact, having appreciated you as a perceptive collaborator in the preparation for the Ecclesial Congress of Loreto, she chose to entrust you with the office of Secretary General of the Italian Bishops' Conference. Beside the late President, Cardinal Ugo Poletti of venerable memory whose successor you subsequently became, you led the Italian Bishops' Conference during the years of the implementation of the measures of the new Concordat between Italy and the Holy See, at the service of the Christian Community. It is deeply indebted to you, for you have not failed to raise a clear and courageous voice all these years, almost 19 now, that have been marked by great social and cultural changes in Italy and throughout the world.

3. In this period, you have been a zealous promoter of numerous ecclesial events in Rome and Italy. I limit myself to recalling the conclusion of the Diocesan Synod of Rome, as well as the City Mission in preparation for the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000 and "The Great Prayer for Italy". In guiding these initiatives on my behalf, as in all your activities, you have given proof of constant pastoral dedication, strengthened by a unique capacity for combining defence of the spiritual and cultural patrimony of beloved Italy with missionary concern to reach out with the Gospel message to the men and women of our time through an open dialogue with contemporary culture. You have lived and done all this, impelled by a priestly spirit, seeking first of all the greatest glory of God and the good of souls and drawing inspiration from the Second Vatican Council.

Consequently, Venerable Brother, I am enormously grateful for the work you have done and spontaneously desire to express this feeling in prayer, asking God for the abundant reward you deserve that he alone knows and can give. In the special Year of the Eucharist that we are celebrating I pray that, nourished daily with the Bread of Life, you may continue to advance on the

path of full and sincere conformation to Christ, the Good Shepherd, who laid down his life for his flock to the point of dying on the Cross.

In continuing with docility on this arduous journey, you will see your priesthood increasingly enriched by spiritual fruits, blessed and sustained by the Immaculate Virgin and your holy Protectors.

With these sentiments, I impart a special Apostolic Blessing to you, which I willingly extend to all who are close to you on this happy Jubilee celebration, together with a thought for all whom God has entrusted to your pastoral care.

From the Vatican, 4 December 2004

JOHN PAUL II

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