



The Holy See

**MESSAGE OF JOHN PAUL II
ON THE OCCASION OF THE JUBILEE CELEBRATIONS
ORGANIZED BY THE DIOCESE OF ALESSANDRIA (ITALY)
FOR THE FIFTH CENTENARY OF THE BIRTH OF ST PIUS V**

To my Venerable Brother

*Bishop Fernando Charrier of Alessandria*¹. I am pleased to send you a cordial greeting on the occasion of the Jubilee celebrations promoted for the fifth centenary of the birth of my Predecessor, St Pius V. I extend my affectionate thoughts to the faithful of this beloved Diocese which, with joy and gratitude to God, is rightly commemorating its illustrious son. The various events arranged to commemorate this happy anniversary are an opportunity to revive the memory of this great Pontiff and to reflect on the rich heritage of examples and teachings that he left us, which are also more valid than ever for the Christians of our time. May the fifth centenary of his birth be a blessing for the whole Church, and especially for the beloved Diocese of Alessandria, as well as for the ecclesial community of the Piedmont. May the intercession of St Pius V and the example of his virtues be an incentive to one and all to strengthen their faith and keep it pure and in constant contact with the sources of Revelation, spreading it in society to establish a humanity open to Christ and set on building the civilization of love.² The age in which Pius V lived was actually very different from our own, yet there are certain unusual similarities. Both historical periods saw the consolidation of converging religious energies, and at the same time registered deep crises in society with clashes between cities and peoples that sometimes developed into grievous armed conflicts. In both epochs the Church strove to find new ways to revive the faith and present it appropriately in the changed cultural and social conditions, with the celebration of the Council of Trent then, and in the last century with the Second Vatican Council. The Councils were followed by efforts to implement the teachings faithfully - no easy task - by initiating processes of authentic Church reform. The human and spiritual life of St Pius V, which ended on 1 May 1572, fits into this historical and religious context characteristic of the 16th century. Since childhood, Michele Ghislieri endured the hardships of poverty and had to work to help support his family. He drew on the typical values of his beloved region of Alessandria to which he was always attached, even to the point that on becoming a member of the College of Cardinals he was known as "Cardinal Alessandrino". At the age of 14, he entered the Order of Preachers and received his formation at the friaries of Vigevano, Bologna and Genoa; he pursued his studies without respite, persevering on the way of Gospel perfection in prayer and learning, and drawing in abundance from the sources of God's Word in accordance with the Dominican charism. Even then he manifested a special liking for Sacred Scripture and the teachings of the Fathers; he was also an assiduous student of the works of St Thomas Aquinas whom, as Supreme Pontiff, he himself was to make a Doctor of the Church. He was ordained a priest in Genoa in 1528. Charged by Pope Paul III to ensure that the faith be kept pure in the regions of Padua, Pavia and Como, he drew inspiration from St

Dominic, St Peter Martyr of Verona, St Vincent Ferrer and St Antoninus of Florence, whom he took as his models and protectors. His sole concern was always to seek the greatest glory of God and the authentic good of his brethren, faithful to the motto "walk in the truth", which he made his own. He continued with equal zeal when appointed Commissioner for the Doctrine of the Faith in Rome and in the other tasks that Popes Julius III, Paul IV and Pius IV entrusted to him. He was appointed Bishop of Sutri and Nepi in 1556; he was created a Cardinal in 1557, and in 1560 he became Bishop of Mondovì.³ In January 1566, when he was 62 years old, he was elected Successor of Peter, and during the years of his Pontificate he devoted himself to reviving the practice of faith in every member of the People of God, impressing upon the Church a providential evangelizing zeal. Unflagging in his pastoral work, he sought direct contact with everyone with total disregard for his frail health. He strove to apply faithfully the decrees of the Council of Trent: in the liturgical field, with the publication of the renewed Roman Missal and the new Breviary; in the area of catechetics, by entrusting to parish priests in particular the "Catechism of the Council of Trent"; and as for theology, it was he who introduced *St Thomas' Summa* into the universities. He reminded the Bishops of their duty to reside in their Dioceses in order to attend to the pastoral care of their faithful, the Religious of the fittingness of enclosure, and the clergy of the importance of celibacy and a holy life. Conscious of the mission he had received from Christ the Good Shepherd, he devoted himself to tending the flock entrusted to him, encouraging daily recourse to prayer and making Marian devotion a priority. He contributed significantly to spreading it by giving strong encouragement to the practice of praying the Rosary, and he himself would recite the whole of it every day, despite his many exacting tasks.⁴ Venerable Brother, may the apostolic zeal, constant aspiration to holiness and love for the Virgin that marked the life of St Pius V be an incentive to all to live their own Christian vocation with deeper commitment. I would like in particular to invite them to imitate him in his filial Marian devotion, and to rediscover the simple and profound prayer of the Rosary which, as I desired to recall in my Apostolic Letter *Rosarium Virginis Mariae*, is helpful in the contemplation of Christ's mystery: "In the sobriety of its elements, it has all the depth of the Gospel message in its entirety, of which it can be said to be a compendium.... With the Rosary, the Christian people sits at the school of Mary and is led to contemplate the beauty on the face of Christ and to experience the depths of his love" (n. 1). It is also possible, by means of a fervent recitation of the Rosary, to obtain extraordinary graces through the intercession of the heavenly Mother of the Lord. St Pius V was firmly convinced of this and after the victory of the Battle of Lepanto, he wanted to establish a special feast day for Our Lady of the Rosary. To Mary, Queen of the holy Rosary, in this beginning of the third millennium, I entrusted with the recitation of the Rosary the precious good of peace and the strengthening of the family institution. I renew this confident entrustment through the intercession of that great devotee of Mary, St Pius V.⁵ I assure my special remembrance in prayer to you, Venerable Brother, to the Bishops who will be attending the ceremony for the closure of the Jubilee celebrations, to the National Committee and the Committee of Honour, to the Authorities of the Region, of the Province and of the Municipalities in the territory of Alessandria, to the clergy, the Religious and the beloved faithful, and to all who will be taking part in Holy Mass on 5 May in the Church of Holy Cross Monastery, Boscomarengo. I cordially impart a special Apostolic Blessing to you all. *From the Vatican, 1 May 2004*

JOHN PAUL II