



The Holy See

MESSAGE OF JOHN PAUL II

TO THE ARCHBISHOP OF LANCIANO-ORTONA

ON THE OCCASION OF THE REGIONAL EUCHARISTIC CONGRESS

OF ITALY'S ABRUZZI-MOLISE REGION *To my Venerable Brother*

*Archbishop Enzo d'Antonio of Lanciano-Ortona*¹. I learned with great joy that the Abruzzi-Molise Episcopal Conference has arranged for the celebration of a Regional Eucharistic Congress to be held in the city of Lanciano from 17 to 24 October. This congress anticipates and prepares for the great event of the Year 2000, one of whose most important moments will be the World Eucharistic Congress. Indeed, "in the sacrament of the Eucharist the Saviour, who took flesh in Mary's womb 20 centuries ago, continues to offer himself to humanity as the source of divine life" (Apostolic Letter *Tertio millennio adveniente*, n. 55). During the short period that remains until the opening of the Great Jubilee, the significant ecclesial event being prepared intends to offer an appropriate reflection on the *Eucharist as a deep bond of charity*. In greeting you, Venerable Brother, whose Diocese is hosting the work, I would also like to address the esteemed Prelates of the Church of this ecclesiastical region, the beloved priests, consecrated men and women, lay faithful and everyone who in various capacities will be taking part with their reflections and prayers in this intense ecclesial experience. Everyone is aware of the happy coincidence of the congress being held in the same city where, in the eighth century, in the Church of St Legontianus, the first Eucharistic miracle took place, accounts of which are preserved today in an artistic basilica.² Christ's promise to be with his disciples until the end of the world (cf. Mt 28:20) is uniquely fulfilled in the Church when the community gathers to "remember" the paschal sacrifice. It is at the time of the Eucharist, when the risen Christ is truly present among his followers, that the very identity of the Church, the Mystical Body of Christ, made up of "every tribe and tongue and people and nation" (Rv 5:9) is expressed. Christ, raised on the altar of the Cross, continues to draw all who turn their gaze to him as he offers himself until the end of the world for everyone's salvation. The Victim sacrificed on the altar of love forms an inseparable bond with his disciples, in the image of the bond which unites the Holy Trinity. He leaves them an ever valid instruction: "He who abides in me, and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing" (Jn 15:5). The assembly gathered round the altar and presided over by the priest who acts *in persona Christi* perpetuates in time the image of the first Christian community closely gathered round the Apostles. The newly baptized, according to St Luke, devoted themselves to the Apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers (cf. Acts 2:42). *Thus an intense experience of welcome emanates from the Eucharistic community*. Just as the Father lovingly welcomes his children who, without distinction and moved by the Holy Spirit, turn to him in the name of the Son, so everyone must be willing to welcome his brothers and sisters as a gift of God, to commemorate together the saving events of Easter, until the day the Lord comes. Thus, *each person's concern for the other is expressed in God's family, gathered together to be nourished by the Bread of the Eucharist*, since all are one in Christ (cf. Gal 3:28).³ This experience of unity lived in the Eucharist is extended in *responsible attitudes of*

brotherhood, since "the renewal in the Eucharist of the covenant between the Lord and man draws the faithful and sets them aflame with Christ's insistent love" (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, n. 10). Consequently, all those who receive the Bread of Life know that they are not only indebted to God, but also to one another, for a sincere and effective love which is expressed in acts of fraternal support and fruitful dialogue for their mutual edification. From this flows the joy of witnessing to God's merciful love of the world. Selfishness cannot prevail in those who live in the Eucharist, because Christ dwells within them (cf. Gal 2:20). This interior renewal gives rise to the desire to be open to one's brethren in order to build together the kingdom of God with an attitude of mutual spiritual exchange. Thus it happens that every member of the Church evangelizes the other in charity, urging them to become, in turn, convinced Gospel witnesses. Formed by the Eucharist, the community of believers see themselves as a family of brothers and sisters who are *indebted to one another for love and forgiveness*. Each one rejoices in the presence of the other and values his contribution to their common edification.⁴ In addition, the Eucharist is the sacred banquet whose *united brotherhood spurs the believer to bring the balm of charity to those in need of it*. The liturgical assembly, gathered round the altar, authentically expresses its catholicity when the communion that binds it to God becomes concrete care for every person, especially those in difficulty who are hoping for moral and material help. In this regard, I observed in the Letter *Dies Domini* that "the Sunday Eucharist, therefore, not only does not absolve the faithful from the duties of charity, but on the contrary commits them even more to all the works of charity, of mercy, of apostolic outreach, by means of which it is seen that the faithful of Christ are not of this world and yet are the light of the world, giving glory to the Father in the presence of men" (n. 69). All Christian tradition testifies that there is no genuine worship of God without effective love of neighbour. The Eucharist, when it is celebrated truly and sincerely, encourages acts of acceptance and reconciliation among the community's members and with regard to all humanity. Believers who gather for the Eucharistic liturgy know that they cannot be happy alone, since the gifts received from on high are for the good of all. Through the Holy Spirit's action *the sacred Banquet becomes a school of charity, justice and peace* from which stem initiatives to alleviate the hunger of those without food, to offer a respectful and cordial welcome to immigrants and foreigners who have been forced to leave their own country, to comfort those who are living in loneliness or are afflicted by illness, to support the work of missionaries involved on the frontiers of evangelization and human advancement.⁵ Yes, the Eucharist is a bond of charity, as you have appropriately chosen to stress in the theme of your Regional Eucharistic Congress, which will bring together at Lanciano from 17 to 24 October representatives of every parish for an important experience of faith. I am sure that it will be *a favourable opportunity to renew the souls of believers, making them more docile to God's saving will*. For the Church of Abruzzi and Molise, the Eucharistic Congress, suitably prepared at the local level, is an effective incentive to rediscovering the Eucharist as a gift that shapes the life of believers and of ecclesial communities and spurs each one to an ever new witness of communion and solidarity. In a world which needs an ever more profound experience of God's love for humanity, the Eucharistic *agape* must be a strong moment of interior renewal for your communities, through which they can fully experience the care of the heavenly Father, who bends down lovingly to each of his children. May the holy Virgin who, at the foot of the Cross, lived the sacrifice of the Redemption in communion with her Son, accompany the work of your Regional Eucharistic Congress. With her, the faithful of the communities of Abruzzi and Molise offer the Blessed Trinity a perfect tribute in the Eucharist, singing of the mercy of God which "is on those who fear him from generation to generation" (Lk 1:50). I accompany these sentiments with my Apostolic Blessing, which I gladly impart to you, to the prelates of the Episcopal Conference and to all who will be taking part in the Eucharistic Congress, as I remember in particular the children and young people, the elderly and the sick. *From Castel Gandolfo, 6 August 1999, the Transfiguration of the Lord.* **JOHN PAUL II** © Copyright 1999 - Libreria Editrice Vaticana

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