



The Holy See

**LETTER OF JOHN PAUL II
TO ARCHBISHOP DOMENICO UMBERTO D'AMBROSIO
NEW DELEGATE OF THE HOLY SEE FOR THE SHRINE
AND WORKS OF SAINT PIO OF PIETRELCINA**

To my venerable Brother

*Archbishop Domenico Umberto D'Ambrosio of Manfredonia-Vieste-San Giovanni Rotondo
Delegate for the Shrine and Institutions of Saint Pio of Pietrelcina*

1. The spiritual movement inspired by the charism of St Pio of Pietrelcina did not end with his earthly death; on the contrary, it has continued to grow, becoming significantly important to the life of the entire Church. The secret of these far-reaching echoes is certainly to be found in the humble Capuchin's total immersion in the mystery of the Cross. Throughout his life, Padre Pio sought to conform ever more closely to the Crucified Christ, with a clear awareness that he was called to collaborate in a very special way in the work of Redemption.

Rediscovering the value of the Cross of Christ to make it the inspirational centre of his own life: this was a fundamental feature of the holy Friar of the Gargano. He was able to recognize the Suffering Christ not only in the interior colloquium of prayer, but also in his encounters with people visited by illness, and he strove to bring them comfort. He thus became a moving example of human sensitivity, presenting anew in himself two characteristics peculiar to the Franciscan and Capuchin tradition: contemplative prayer and effective charity. The Prayer Groups he founded are an expression of the former; the *Casa Sollievo della Sofferenza* is a rare witness to the latter.

Prayer and charity are a very concrete synthesis of the spiritual heritage left by the humble Friar, educated at the school of the *Poverello* of Assisi. All who intend to keep his spirituality alive in the world today must continue to live it and witness to it.

2. The centre that radiates the message of the holy Friar of the Gargano is San Giovanni Rotondo or, rather, the modest Capuchin convent in which he lived his earthly life surrounded by the Friars

of his beloved religious Community. He is buried in San Giovanni Rotondo, and it is there that most of the institutions he inspired and desired are located. It is therefore from that place that the evangelizing action fostered by Padre Pio continues to spread throughout the world, awakening in the hearts of many a new surge of love of God and neighbour, especially those in greatest need.

Responding to this spiritual outreach, countless people, not only from Italy and Europe but from all the continents, come to San Giovanni Rotondo. They are not only members of the "Prayer Groups". They are also followers of other religions and sometimes also non-believers who are drawn there by the fame of the holy Capuchin Friar.

Today it can be said that the boundaries of the devotion to this humble son of St Francis have become, as it were, the boundaries of the world. For years the Capuchin Community has cherished in its heart like a precious pearl the marvellous treasure of Padre Pio's holiness; with a generous impulse it has become more and more open to the universal dimension that is characteristic of the Church.

In this regard, I would like in particular to draw attention to the pastoral work that the Capuchin Friars of the Province of Foggia have carried out in recent decades. Giving proof of apostolic zeal, they have assimilated Padre Pio's spiritual heritage and preserved it to our day, thus contributing to its dissemination throughout the world.

In this perspective and in light of the vast radius of influence that the devotion to the Saint of the Gargano has acquired across the globe, the fittingness of a closer connection between the Shrine and the Holy See can be more and more clearly seen.

3. This is why, revered Brother, in appointing you Archbishop of the Church of Manfredonia-Vieste-San Giovanni Rotondo with the Bull of 8 March 2003, I deemed it appropriate also to name you my Delegate for the Shrine and Works of St Pio of Pietrelcina. I intend with this Letter to give you certain precise instructions to enable you to carry out your respective duties in the best possible way.

As Delegate for the Shrine, you must first of all devote special care to that place of worship to which so many pilgrims of every nationality stream every year. In fact, if it is the task of the whole Church to safeguard and develop the spiritual heritage of Padre Pio, it goes without saying that this should be especially entrusted to the Bishop who has pastoral responsibility for the places where the saintly Capuchin lived. Therefore, after due consideration, I said to you at the Audience on 25 March 2003: *"You will be guardian of the heritage of Padre Pio of Pietrelcina"*.

As Bishop of the Church of Manfredonia-Vieste-San Giovanni Rotondo, it is your task to preserve the charisms that the Spirit has brought to life and continues to inspire in this beloved portion of God's holy Church. It will be part of your pastoral solicitude to safeguard as well as to multiply the

fruits of this precious legacy, which must not be neglected. Indeed, according to the discipline of the Church, Bishops *"are entrusted with the duty of caring for religious charisms, all the more so because the very indivisibility of their pastoral ministry makes them responsible for perfecting the entire flock"* (*Mutuae Relationes*, n. 9c).

4. You will therefore have authority over everything that is associated with *"public worship, without prejudice, however, to the diversity of rites; the care of souls; preaching to the people; the religious and moral education, catechetical instruction and liturgical formation of the faithful, especially of children... the comportment proper to the clerical state and also the various activities relating to the exercise of their sacred apostolate"* (*Christus Dominus*, n. 35).

As diocesan Bishop, you must also foster apostolic activities, having due regard for those linked to the figure of Padre Pio and carefully directing their orderly coordination (cf. *CIC*, cann. 394 1; 680). Moreover, you will also be watchful *"lest abuses creep into ecclesiastical discipline, especially concerning the ministry of the word, the celebration of the sacraments and sacramentals, the worship of God and devotion to the saints, and also the administration of property"* (*CIC*, can. 392 2).

Your main task, venerable Brother, will be the pastoral care of the pilgrims who come to San Giovanni Rotondo. You will try to proclaim to them the comforting and enlightening Word of God, ensuring that each person is enabled to draw abundantly from the sources of grace through fervent participation in the sacraments, especially in the Eucharist and in Penance.

In this regard you will not fail to avail yourself of the help of the Capuchin Community. It has generously carried out the ministry of preaching the Word and celebrating the Sacraments for many years with zeal and a self-sacrificing spirit, and will continue to do so in its own particular capacity.

5. Moreover, you will take pains to harmonize the pastoral work of the Shrine with the other activities of diocesan pastoral ministry. This will be a help to the Capuchin Community of San Giovanni Rotondo which will be stimulated by pastoral commitment to live its own spirituality more and more authentically. Indeed, as I said in my Address to the Union of Superiors General of Religious Orders and Congregations at my Meeting with them on 28 November 1981: *"Fidelity to the charism of consecrated life must bring forth in Religious a deep and sincere ecclesial awareness and therefore a constant effort to live with the Church, for the Church and in the Church. If the doctrine of religious life is part of ecclesiology, religious life lived is even more an expression of ecclesial life. On this is based the attitude of faith, love and docility of Religious towards the pastors set to govern the Church, as well as the duty of taking their part in the life of the particular Church, enriching it with their own specific gifts, working within it and as part of it, and not merely as complementary forces"* (n. 2; *L'Osservatore Romano* English edition [ORE], 14 December 1981, p. 9).

This is particularly true for Religious who are priests. Thanks to your fatherly guidance, venerable Brother, they will be able to feel more keenly that they belong to the one priesthood active in the local Church. The Second Vatican Council appropriately recalled that Religious Priests "may be said in a certain sense to belong to the diocesan clergy inasmuch as they share in the care of souls and in the practice of apostolic works under the authority of the Bishops" (*Christus Dominus*, n. 34).

In this perspective, the Decree cited here outlines the appropriate norms of behaviour that Religious must abide by (cf. n. 35). As Bishop you will not fail to refer constantly to these provisions.

6. As Delegate for the Works of Padre Pio you are at present also President of the Foundation *Casa Sollievo della Sofferenza-Opera di Padre Pio da Pietrelcina* and, at the same time, General Director of the International Association of "Prayer Groups" with the rights and duties indicated by their respective Statutes. It will be your task, therefore, to guide the apostolate of these Groups, providing suitable directives for their chaplains, whether they are Religious or diocesan priests. For initiatives that go beyond the boundaries of the Archdiocese, you will obviously consult the Ordinaries of the places concerned, to decide together which projects to implement in the respective particular Churches.

I trust that these preliminary directives will enable you to start a fruitful collaboration with the beloved Capuchin Community of San Giovanni Rotondo, so laudable for their willing service to the multitude of pilgrims from every region of the world. I pray God, through the intercession of the Virgin Mary and of Padre Pio himself, to grant you the necessary zeal and discernment to fulfil the task entrusted to you while, as a pledge of abundant heavenly favours, I impart a special Apostolic Blessing to you, to the Capuchin Religious and to the faithful.

From the Vatican, 22 February 2004, Feast of the Chair of St Peter

JOHN PAUL II