



The Holy See

*MESSAGE OF JOHN PAUL II
TO BISHOP LUIGI MORETTI
THE GENERAL ECCLESIASTICAL MODERATOR OF UNITALSI*

To my Venerable Brother

Bishop Luigi Moretti General Ecclesiastical Moderator of UNITALSI

1. I learned with joy that the National Italian Union for Transporting the Sick to Lourdes and International Shrines (UNITALSI) holds its national convention at Rimini on the occasion of its centenary. On this happy occasion, I am pleased to greet you affectionately, Dr Antonio Diella, the national President, and all your volunteers. I thank the Lord for all the good he has done and continues to do, through this charitable organization, for so many brothers and sisters who are sick and in difficulty.

It is important to note that this Jubilee occurs in the Year of the Rosary, considering that the origins of UNITALSI are linked to a Marian Shrine: Lourdes. It was in that place, blessed by the presence of Mary, that your founder, Giovanni Battista Tornassi, found light and comfort. He had gone to the Grotto of Massabielle in the grip of exhausting physical and spiritual suffering, resolved to put an end to his life; but was deeply impressed by the loving and disinterested work of the volunteers. Simultaneously, he received the clear consciousness of his own vocation to serve the suffering, a vocation supported and encouraged by the secretary of the Bishop of Bergamo who was leading that pilgrimage, Fr Angelo Roncalli, the future Pope John XXIII, now raised to the glory of the altars.

2. So it was that an ecclesial association came into being that is still appreciated for all the good it does and for the Gospel spirit that permeates it.

The first protector of UNITALSI was my holy Predecessor, Pope Pius X, who, on several occasions, blessed it and encouraged its expansion. Later, venerable Cardinals and Bishops succeeded one another as the spiritual guides of the Association. Among them I can recall the late

Cardinals Luigi Traglia and Ugo Poletti. I also wish to mention Archbishop Alessandro Plotti, who was Archbishop of Pisa and Vice-President of the Italian Bishops' Conference and whom, Venerable Brother, you succeeded as General Ecclesiastical Moderator. So many bishops and priests in Italian dioceses work generously, with the volunteers of UNITALSI, to enable the sick and disabled to experience the motherly closeness of the Church.

3. Dear brothers and sisters, thanks to you in the past 100 years a great many persons have been able to visit the Lourdes Grotto, to pour out their troubles to the motherly heart of our Lady and receive enlightenment and comfort from her.

In these happy circumstances, I am eager to express my warm appreciation of the service you continue to carry out generously in full communion with your Bishops. Persevere in the work that others before you have undertaken under Mary's motherly gaze. Continue it with generosity, impartiality and a spirit of service. Learn at the school of the Gospel to be artisans of peace, justice and mercy, wherever the Lord calls you. Respond to God's love, strong in the consciousness that he loved you first. In fact, we have received from him all that we have and are (cf. I Cor 4,7), and for this reason we must dedicate ourselves generously to others.

4. Firmly rooted in your history, look to the future with confidence and foresight. Charity impels you to open up ever new fields of action, to undertake new initiatives of human advancement and evangelization in favour of the sick, the little ones and the lowliest. This presupposes an intense spiritual life nourished by daily prayer, recourse to the sacraments, and serious personal ascetical effort. This is the soil in which you must sink the roots of your being and action.

As I urge you to persevere in your generous dedication, I assure you of my constant prayer to the Virgin of Nazareth, whom I would like to contemplate with you as, prompted by the Spirit, she pays a visit to her elderly cousin Elizabeth. May the Blessed Virgin, Our Lady of the Visitation, sustain you so that you may witness to the love of God who is willing to embrace and heal the human being and asks nothing in return.

To you, Venerable Brother, to the President, the sick, the volunteers, the chaplains and the entire family of UNITALSI, I impart my Apostolic Blessing, as a pledge to you all of abundant heavenly favours.

From the Vatican, 26 February 2003.

JOHN PAUL II

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