



# The Holy See

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**LETTER OF JOHN PAUL II  
TO ARCHBISHOP CARLO GHIDELLI  
OF LANCIANO-ORTONA (ITALY)**

*To my Venerable Brother*

*Archbishop Carlo Ghidelli of Lanciano-Ortona*

1. I accepted with deep joy your invitation to address a word of exhortation to the beloved Community of Lanciano-Ortona. The memory is still with me of the meeting on 21 April this year when, to strengthen the communion with the Successor of Peter of this particular Church, you accompanied a large diocesan pilgrimage to St Peter's Square.

You now inform me of an event of great importance to the Archdiocese: the celebration of the first centenary of the Dedication of the restored Basilica- Cathedral of Madonna del Ponte, Lanciano (1905-2005). For this anniversary, you have desired to establish a special Marian Eucharistic Year, in response to my appeal in the Encyclical *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* and in felicitous coincidence with the Year of the Eucharist that I am preparing to inaugurate this October. I am delighted with your project and hope that it will produce in abundance the desired spiritual fruits.

2. I very much hope that during the Year of the Eucharist every diocesan Community will publicly renew its act of faith in Jesus present in the Sacrament of the Altar and will draw inspiration for the whole of its life and pastoral action from this Eucharistic spirituality that emerges so clearly from the Gospel accounts. Christ, indeed, who offered his whole self for the salvation of humanity (cf. Mk 10: 45), chose to perpetuate his self-giving, sacrificial dedication in the sacrament of the Eucharist (cf. Lk 22: 19-20). For us Christians the Eucharist is our all: it is the centre of our faith and the source of all our spiritual life.

This is particularly true for the city of Lanciano, custodian of two Eucharistic miracles which, in addition to being very dear to the faithful of Frentania, make it the destination of many pilgrimages

from Italy and the whole world. I would like to recall that when I was the Cardinal of Krakow, I myself visited the Church of St Francis in Lanciano where the relics are preserved of the famous miracle that dates back to the eighth century.

Through you, Venerable Brother, I would like to say to all the faithful of the Archdiocese: be aware of the immense favours that God has granted to you, and do not fail to adore the Holy Eucharist, not only in the church of the miracle but in all the churches of your beautiful region. I also join you especially in asking the Lord Jesus to give you many holy vocations to the priesthood, for the present and future of your diocesan Community. At the same time, I pray so that the Lord may make holy families spring up in your area because, as the Second Vatican Council teaches, they are the best nursery for the different vocations on which the life of the Church depends.

3. In celebrating the centenary of the Cathedral, you intend to venerate your dear Patroness, Queen of the People of Frentania. She is called "Madonna del Ponte" (Our Lady of the Bridge) because of the unique situation of the Basilica itself. I hope that the Marian devotion will be kept alive in the hearts of the faithful. If we want to persevere in constantly doing God's will, the best way is to listen to Mary's pressing and motherly invitation: "Do whatever he tells you" (Jn 2: 5).

I address a special word to the dear young people of Frentania: put your trust in the Lord Jesus, choose him as your special friend, be his disciples by listening to and meditating on the holy Gospel, serve him in your neighbour, especially in your poorest and neediest brethren, and I assure you that you will find what you need to live to the full the ideals of your age.

4. Lastly, I would also like to mention another great gift that a pious tradition claims was granted to your Community: the mortal remains of the Apostle Thomas that are preserved in the Co-Cathedral of Ortona. As an Apostle of Jesus, St Thomas leads us back to the perennial source of the Gospel. May his life be an incentive to all to seek the truth always, even when the darkness thickens around us; to seek it lovingly, in order to share it with our brothers and sisters. Through the intercession of St Thomas, I pray the Lord always to sustain the people of Frentania, especially in times of trial.

I know that your land, moreover, like so many other parts of the Abruzzo, has been through particularly difficult periods in its history. I am thinking especially of the phenomenon of emigration that has involved numerous families over the years. What great suffering! Yet with God's help the past generations were able to resist with great patience and an equal measure of courage. It is now up to you to show that you are children who are worthy of such generous and honourable parents.

5. Venerable Brother, these are the thoughts that well up from my heart I commend them to you with deep trust and ask you to pass them on to your priests and to all the faithful entrusted to your pastoral care. My most heartfelt wish is that all of them, united with their Pastor, under the

protection of the Virgin Mary and the Apostle St Thomas and sustained by the ever timely teaching of the Second Vatican Council, may find in the centenary celebrations the supernatural light that alone can brighten their way and sustain their missionary commitment.

To this end, I wholeheartedly impart to you, venerable Brother in the Episcopate, to your priests, men and women religious and to the entire Community of Lanciano-Ortona, a special Apostolic Blessing.

*From the Vatican, 4 October 2004*

**JOHN PAUL II**

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