



# The Holy See

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**LETTER OF THE HOLY FATHER  
JOHN PAUL II  
TO BISHOP MARIO PACIELLO  
FOR THE 300th ANNIVERSARY  
OF THE DEATH OF POPE INNOCENT XII**

*To my Venerable Brother Mario Paciello  
Bishop of Altamura-Gravina-Acquaviva delle Fonti*

1. I am pleased to express my closeness and best wishes to you, Venerable Brother, and to the entire diocesan community of Altamura-Gravina-Acquaviva delle Fonti, which is preparing to commemorate with joy and gratitude the person and work of Pope Innocent XII, a distinguished son of this noble land, 300 years after his death.

This significant anniversary is a particularly timely occasion to stress the strong spiritual, human and ecclesial personality of my venerable Predecessor, whose service to the Church and society of the 17th century was constantly inspired by sound principles, courageous reforms, sensitivity to the weakest social classes and pastoral prudence. These gifts characterized the many important offices in which he was called to serve the People of God, first as Papal Vice-Legate, Nuncio to various Governments and a member of the Roman Curia; then as a wise and enlightened Pastor in various Italian Dioceses, in particular as Archbishop of Naples, where he was distinguished for the zeal of his ministry and his charity to the poor. It was precisely during his governance of the Neapolitan Archdiocese that he was elected to the Chair of Peter, which he occupied during the last decade of the 17th century, crowned by the celebration of the Holy Year of 1700.

2. Thinking back over his long and intense apostolic service, it can be said today that the entire human and spiritual life of this esteemed Pontiff presents surprisingly modern features. Pope Innocent XII's rediscovery and study of doctrine, his spirituality and his commitment to reform can be a powerful encouragement to the task of the new evangelization, to which this Diocese, honoured to number him among her most illustrious sons, is also called.

As I express to you, Venerable Brother, and to the diocesan community of Altamura-Gravina-Acquaviva delle Fonti my appreciation of your efforts in preparing to celebrate this significant centenary, I invite everyone to draw from the event zeal and inspiration for renewed pastoral activity in view of a more effective Gospel witness that will respond to the pastoral challenges of our time.

The anniversary celebrations occur during the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000, which sees the entire Christian community involved in a profound journey of spiritual renewal, reconciliation and solidarity. As I stressed in the Apostolic Letter *Tertio millennio adveniente*, "personal and community Jubilees have an important and significant role in the lives of individuals and communities" (n. 15). Thus I would like to express my pleasure at your careful preparation of the centenary, in which the great Diocesan Mission takes on special importance.

This praiseworthy initiative, which relies on the involvement of numerous lay faithful, is a particularly fruitful way of seeking and hearing the Word of God, of strengthening ecclesial communion and of giving new zeal to the work of evangelization. I ardently hope that the Diocesan Mission can also effectively support the efforts of the *Diocesan Pastoral Project*, with constant attention to families and young people.

3. The Holy Year not only involves intra-ecclesial life, but also has significant implications at the social and civil level. As I recalled in my above-mentioned Apostolic Letter, the Jubilee Year includes among its aims the restoration of equality and just social conditions (cf. *Tertio millennio adveniente*, n. 13). Are not the examples and teaching left by Pope Innocent XII along these lines? I was very pleased, then, to learn that your Diocese intends to make the witness of charity a priority commitment, by looking carefully at the region's needs, aiding the creation of local cooperatives, forming and supporting young people who wish to enter the world of work and business, and broadening its horizon at a more general level by taking part in initiatives for the peoples of Kosovo, by intensifying your twinning with the Diocese of Awassa in Ethiopia and by promoting projects for the cancellation of the external debt of poor countries. How could I not encourage you generously to pursue this genuinely evangelical path?

4. The rediscovery of the spiritual, cultural and social heritage of Pope Pignatelli will certainly help to make your ecclesial communion stronger, your proclamation of Christ, man's only Saviour, more effective, and your acts of solidarity more courageous. Three hundred years after his death, the outstanding personality and generous ecclesial ministry of Pope Pignatelli spur you to face the great challenges of the third millennium with courage and trust.

As I offer my cordial wishes for the centenary celebrations in honour of Pope Innocent XII, that they may bear abundant good fruits for this beloved Ecclesial Community, I invoke upon you, Venerable Brother, and upon the portion of the People of God entrusted to your pastoral care, the heavenly protection of the Mother of God, and I affectionately impart a special Apostolic Blessing,

which I extend to all who will take part in the Jubilee celebrations.

*From the Vatican, 29 June 2000.*

IOANNES PAULUS PP. II

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