



The Holy See

**LETTER OF JOHN PAUL II
ON THE OCCASION OF THE FOURTH CENTENARY
OF THE DEATH OF ST SERAPHINO OF MONTEGRANARO,
PATRON OF ASCOLI PICENO**

To my Venerable Brother

Bishop Silvano Montevicchi of Ascoli Piceno

1. I am particularly pleased to offer my cordial greeting to you and to the Diocesan Community. Together with the Friars Minor Capuchin of the Religious Province of the Marches your Diocese is preparing to commemorate the fourth centenary of the death of St Seraphino of Montegranaro, who died in the Capuchin Friary at Ascoli Piceno on 12 October 1604. I will be present in spirit at the Jubilee celebrations. I am certain that they will help make better known not only the example of Gospel life set by this humble son of St Francis, but also the timeliness of the message that his human and spiritual life convey. This will not fail to give a fresh impetus to the commitment to the new evangelization in Ascoli and Loreto, as well as in the different Ecclesial Communities in which he lived.

As time passes, holiness does not lose its magnetism but rather shines out with greater brilliance. This became obvious in Friar Seraphino, a simple, illiterate friar whom everyone, lowly and powerful alike, felt to be a genuine "brother". For this very reason he bears an eloquent witness to that universal vocation to holiness on which the Second Vatican Council insisted (cf. *Lumen Gentium*, nn. 39-40). In this perspective, at the end of the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000, I presented holiness anew to the whole Church as a "high standard of ordinary Christian living" (*Novo Millennio Ineunte*, n. 31).

2. St Seraphino of Montegranaro rightfully belongs among the hosts of saints who have enriched the Capuchin Order from the outset. He had so deeply absorbed the Gospel exhortation, "*always*

to pray and not lose heart' (cf. Lk 18: 1; 21: 36), that his mind was usually so deeply immersed in things of the spirit that he was often oblivious to what was going on around him. He would pause to contemplate the divine presence in creation and in people, and find in it a starting point for constant union with God.

His prayer lasted for hours in the silence of the night, in the flickering light of the lamp that burned in front of the Tabernacle in the friary church. With what deep devotion did the lowly friar participate in the Eucharistic celebration! And how long he would remain in ecstatic adoration before the Holy Sacrament, letting his prayers rise like incense, pleasing to the Lord!

Enlivened by ardent love for Christ's Passion, he would take the time to meditate on the suffering of the Lord and of the Virgin Most Holy. He used to like to recite the *Stabat Mater* and, in reciting it, would burst into tears, to the distress of those who heard him. He always carried with him his brass crucifix, which is still preserved today as a precious relic; he would bless the sick with it, imploring physical and spiritual healing for them.

3. His humble way of life, reduced to the essentials in a bare and narrow room and his shabby, patched clothes, bore eloquent witness to the love he felt for "Lady Poverty". His conviction of his smallness that gradually became connatural to him as the years passed enabled the true greatness of his soul to shine forth. He had clearly understood the Gospel passage that proclaims: "*Whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all*" (Mk 10: 43-44).

He freely chose to do constant penance, including the wearing of a hair shirt and scourging, and he combined the daily practice of sacrifice and renunciation while he trudged along dry and dusty paths, collecting alms and sharing the hardships of so many of his contemporaries. He liked to be with the poorest and most marginalized of the population to discover even their hidden needs and alleviate their troubles, both physical and spiritual. He showed the same availability to those who knocked at the door of the friary. He was a great peacemaker in families, wisely alternating, according to the circumstances, forceful appeals, loving gestures of solidarity and words of encouraging consolation.

4. Venerable Brother, I warmly hope that the fourth centenary of the pious passing of St Seraphino will be a favourable opportunity for the entire Church in Ascoli to strive for holiness with ever greater determination, making the very most of the various gifts and charisms that God never ceases to lavish on his faithful people.

I also hope that the "*peregrinatio*" (pilgrimage) of the Saint's urn to the various pastoral districts of the Diocese of Ascoli Piceno and other Ecclesial Communities in the Region, the organization of the International Congress on the Saint and his spirituality, as well as other suitable initiatives and the religious and cultural events planned, will serve to deepen the message, still timely in our day,

of this humble Capuchin of Montegranaro.

May the heavenly Mother of God, of whom he proclaimed himself a devoted son, protect this beloved Community of Ascoli Piceno and the dear Capuchin Friars of the Marches! May the intercession and protection of St Seraphino be for each one a comfort and an incentive to follow Christ generously, so that the passion for Gospel perfection and the courage to witness to the values of the spirit that marked the entire life of your local Saint may develop in one and all, thanks to the centenary celebrations.

With these sentiments and wishes, I gladly send to you, venerable Brother, to the Capuchin Friars and to everyone who will be taking part in the various Jubilee celebrations a special Apostolic Blessing, which I willingly extend to all those who have a special devotion for St Seraphino of Montegranaro.

From the Vatican, 3 June 2004

JOHN PAUL II

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