



The Holy See

**MESSAGE OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THE BISHOP OF SUSA (ITALY) ON THE FIRST CENTENARY
OF THE ERECTION OF THE STATUE OF THE MOTHER OF THE LORD
ON THE SUMMIT OF MOUNT ROCCIAMELONE**

*To my Venerable Brother
Bishop Vittorio Bernardetto of Susa*

1. I was pleased to learn that this year the Church in Valsusa is celebrating the first centenary of the statue of the Mother of the Lord erected on Mount Rocciamelone. Remembering with gratitude the festive welcome I was given on 14 July 1991 during my Pastoral Visit to Susa, and the profound moment of prayer in the Cathedral of St Justus in front of the triptych that Bonifacio Rotario, a citizen of Asti, carried to that peak on 1 September 1358, I would like to join spiritually in the celebrations by which the entire diocesan community intends to mark this significant anniversary.

A hundred years ago, in spiritual continuity with the ancient act of faith that gave birth to Marian devotion on Rocciamelone, Canon Antonio Tonda, provost of the cathedral, and Prof. Giovanni Battista Ghirardi, encouraged by Bl. Bishop Edoardo Giuseppe Rosaz, thought of erecting a statue of the Blessed Virgin on the highest peak of the western Alps, which was later done with the generous contribution of 130,000 "children of Italy". With this project, imitating the disciple whom Jesus loved (cf. Jn 19:27), the Church in Valsusa showed her desire to welcome Mary "into her home", so that she would repeat to the sons and daughters of this land what she once said at Cana in Galilee: "Do whatever he tells you" (Jn 2:5).

Mary's presence has thus made Rocciamelone a centre of evangelization where the faithful, receiving the message of salvation as if from their Mother's lips, can rediscover and experience with new freshness their joy and dignity as adopted children of God. How many things could the

image of the Virgin recount! Victories over selfishness and sin, forgiveness given and received acts of reconciliation and altruism which have made the history of Rocciamelone a unique "history of souls" whose chapters are jealously guarded in their Mother's heart.

2. At the foot of the Cross, Jesus spoke those words which amount to a testament: "Woman, behold, your son!" (Jn 19:26). "The Mother of Christ, who stands at the very centre of this [paschal] mystery - a mystery which embraces each individual and all humanity - is given as mother to every single individual and all mankind. The man at the foot of the Cross is John, "the disciple whom he loved". But it is not he alone. Following tradition, the Council does not hesitate to call Mary "the mother of Christ and Mother of mankind"" (*Redemptoris Mater*, n. 23).

From that moment, no one on earth would any longer be "an orphan". Well aware of this, the Church has never stopped drawing beneficial consequences from Mary's "motherhood". In particular, she recognized at the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council that the Virgin of Nazareth's participation in the work of redemption made her for the Christian people "mother, model ... a pre-eminent and unique member of the Church" (cf. *Lumen gentium*, n. 53), attributing to her intercession a universal dimension in space and time: She is Mother to all and Mother for ever. The goal of her mission is to reproduce in believers the features of her first-born Son (cf. Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Marialis cultus*, n. 57), bringing them at the same time to recover ever more clearly that image and likeness of God in which they were created (cf. Gn 1:26).

The faithful know they can count on the heavenly Mother's concern: Mary will never abandon them. By taking her into their own home as a supreme gift from the heart of the crucified Christ, they are assured a uniquely effective presence in the task of showing the world in every circumstance the fruitfulness of love and the authentic meaning of life.

3. May the centenary therefore become a privileged opportunity for this diocesan community to adore "the wise plan of God, who has placed within his family (the Church), as in every home, the figure of a woman, who in a hidden manner and in a spirit of service watches over that family 'and carefully looks after it until the glorious day of the Lord'" (Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Marialis cultus*, Introduction).

An important initiative, in the context of the celebrations, will be the *peregrinatio* of the venerated image to all the parishes of the Diocese. I warmly hope, as was formerly the case in 1948 at the end of the Second World War, that thanks to the practical cooperation of priests, religious and the whole ecclesiastic community, this event will be a privileged moment of evangelization, formation and Christian commitment. May the journey of Our Lady's statue through the various Vicariates be a favourable time to celebrate the mystery of Christ in union with his Mother and help to increase faith, hope and charity in the peoples of Valsusa!

Recalling the marvels wrought by the Lord in the People of God, may the Virgin inspire in the

faithful a deep desire for contemplation and praise, which will increase their zeal and open the heart of each one to the material and spiritual needs of his brethren.

May the Blessed Virgin's example foster a deep love for Sacred Scripture and prompt a readiness to do the Lord's will. May the *peregrinatio* be a time of grace and of fervent celebration of the sacraments of Christian life. Reconciled with the heavenly Father and nourished with the Body and Blood of the Lord, may Christians gathered round their Mother receive an abundant shower of gifts from the Spirit, which will make them apostles of the third millennium and authentic witnesses of the risen Christ in the family, the workplace, school and every other context in which people are striving to build the civilization of love together.

4. I would like to entrust you, venerable Brother, the priests, religious, families, youth, the sick and all the faithful to Our Lady of Rocciamelone, who for centuries has accompanied the Church in Valsusa with her constant protection, so that the whole diocesan community, supported by the heavenly Mother's love, can follow Christ with renewed dynamism and witness to him with a zealous life and works on the threshold of the new millennium.

As pledge of these hopes, I affectionately impart a special Apostolic Blessing to you all.

From the Vatican, 8 March 1999.

JOHN PAUL II