



The Holy See

PASTORAL VISIT
OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II
TO CHIAVARI AND BRESCIA (ITALY)
(SEPTEMBER 18-20, 1998)

EUCCHARISTIC CELEBRATION

HOMILY OF JOHN PAUL II

Saturday, 19 September 1998

1. "*Blessed are those who hear the word of God and keep it*" (Lk 11:28).

Christ's words, which we have just heard in Luke's Gospel, place *at the centre of our celebration the figure of Mary most holy*, icon of the perfect disciple and of holy Church. Replying to the exclamation of a woman in the crowd, Jesus makes a statement that at first may seem surprising, but which, when examined more closely, reveals Our Lady's true greatness: Mary is truly blessed, not merely because she bore and raised Jesus, but because *she faithfully accepted the Lord's will* and put it into practice. This is Mary's authentic greatness and her blessedness: *the blessedness of faith*, which opens man's life to the action of the Holy Spirit and enriches it with blessed fruits for the glory of God.

Your diocesan community, the Church in Chiavari, dear brothers and sisters, is reflected today in this icon. It is reflected in Mary as its sublime model, and looks to her in the hope of hearing applied to it the words spoken that day by Jesus: "Blessed are you, Church of Chiavari, who hear the word of God and keep it!".

So, dear friends, the Pope has come among you for this reason above all: to bring you the saving word of the Gospel and to help you in this self-reflection.

2. Dear people of Chiavari, it is a great joy to be here among you today. I affectionately greet your Bishop, Alberto Maria Careggio. I sent you a Pastor who has accompanied me on mountain trails, so that he might accompany you on the paths that lead to heaven! Help him to be a good guide for you all! With him I also embrace Bishop emeritus Daniele

Ferrari, who did so much for this Diocese. I cordially greet the Cardinal Archbishop of Genoa and the entire Ligurian Episcopate. I also greet the visiting Bishops and thank them for coming.

I extend an especially warm greeting to the *priests and religious*, complimenting them on their generosity in performing their ecclesial service, without heeding the difficulties or hardships. I extend this greeting to the *committed laity*, whose valuable assistance is essential for pastoral activity in the various communities.

A respectful greeting also goes to the *civil authorities*, whom I thank for their presence at this celebration. My thoughts also turn to all who have joined us by radio and television. I am thinking particularly of the elderly and the sick, who are following us from their homes. To all of them, my assurance of a special prayer.

3. *The Blessed Virgin is particularly loved and venerated in the community of Chiavari.* Mary is patroness of the Diocese, under the title of Our Lady of the Garden. But who does not know the beautiful shrine of Montallegro, above Rapallo? There too a famous statue calls to mind the spiritual presence of the Mother of God. Well-known too is the shrine of Velva, dedicated to Our Lady of the Guard.

According to the teaching of the Second Vatican Council, this rich heritage of popular Marian piety needs to be preserved and appreciated so that, through the Blessed Virgin, the new generations may also meet Christ, the one Mediator between God and man, and in him find salvation.

4. In practice, what can the commitment to hear and keep the word of God mean to you, the Ecclesial Community of Chiavari? It certainly means reading and meditating on it in the Bible, but it also means hearing it and putting it into practice in the way indicated by the *Diocesan Synod*, which concluded in 1992, 100 years after the foundation of this particular Church.

As the Successor of Peter, I invite you to *grow in unity and mission awareness*, following the Synod's directives. May you be increasingly united with one another and, at the same time, open yourselves to the vast horizons of evangelization: you must be concerned about all who have not yet met Christ and the Church, from your territory to the mission countries.

Always remember the word of Christ: "All men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (Jn 13:35). In the community this means to carry, share, collaborate and feel jointly responsible for one another's burdens. Everyone is called to create this form of communion: the Bishop, priests, religious and laity; associations, movements and groups. The first place to make a community is the parish: like the tesserae of a mosaic, parishes form the diocesan community; the latter, in turn, forms part of the living body of the universal Church.

In your territory, two categories of people deserve special attention: *tourists and the elderly*. It is important that holiday-makers, who come in great numbers to spend time, even long periods, at the seaside, find living, welcoming communities where they can feel at ease, in a family atmosphere. On the other hand, it is important not to neglect the many local elderly, who are a priceless human and spiritual treasure.

5. The Blessed Virgin Mary is the good and fertile soil where the seed of the word of God was welcomed with faith and bore its messianic fruit, the blessings of salvation for the whole human race. The Church is reflected in this model: every diocesan community can be compared to the *garden* of which the prophet Isaiah speaks, *in which many charisms flourish*, revealing the action of grace and enriching the People of God.

I am thinking of the numerous *saints and blessed of this land*: the Bishop, St Anthony Mary Gianelli, and St Caterina Fieschi Adorno; Bl. Alberto and Bl. Baldassarre of Chiavari, Bl. Agostino Roscelli and the new blessed, Brigida Morello, foundress of the Ursuline Sisters of Mary Immaculate. In addition there are some venerables and servants of God.

I am thinking of the various female and male *institutes of consecrated life*, and I invite young people to come to know them, because they may find in one of them the charism that answers their search for meaning and for the gift of self to God and their brethren.

I am also thinking of the *associations, movements, communities and lay groups*, which make an essential contribution to the Church's mission through their formation and their spiritual, charitable, social and cultural leadership. For each one of these ecclesial groups I implore the strength of the Holy Spirit and I invite them always to work in harmony with the diocesan pastoral ministry according to the Bishop's direction.

I encourage you to continue your already intense activity in the *pastoral care of young people*, forming those who are "near", while at the same time seeking out those who are "far". I hope your many initiatives, both old and new, will grow fruitfully, particularly the formation courses of Catholic Action, the interparish catechesis for the sacrament of Confirmation and — like a flourishing "plant" in the garden of the Diocese — the work of Boys' Town.

I invite you to promote in an increasingly thorough and systematic way the *pastoral care of the family*, which has the "Madonnina del Grappa" spirituality centre as one of its focal points. The family is the structural basis of society and it is only by working hard and effectively with families that the fabric of the ecclesial community and of civil society itself can be renewed.

6. Dear brothers and sisters of Chiavari, at this solemn Eucharist *I entrust you all to the Mother of God and of the Church*. May she always be at the centre of your community, as she was among the first disciples in Jerusalem. Through her intercession, in this second year of immediate preparation for the Jubilee of the Year 2000, let us together ask for a renewed outpouring of the Holy Spirit on this young Diocese, that it may always hear God's Word and put it into practice, that it may be ever richer in faith, hope and love in addition to its natural beauty. "As a bride adorns herself with her jewels" (Is 61:10)!

Blessed are you, Church in Chiavari, if you hear the Word of God and strive to keep it (cf. Lk 11:28).

May you be the garden of which the prophet Isaiah speaks: may the Lord God make justice spring up among you, which will earn you "praise before all the nations" (cf. Is 61:11).

Amen!

At the end of Mass the Holy Father said extemporaneously:

We have celebrated the Holy Eucharist against this wonderful panorama of the Ligurian coast, a panorama which has accompanied so many centuries and so many generations of Chiavari's residents. I now hope that it will also accompany you, young people, in being courageous and faithful as were your ancestors. Carry on this beautiful tradition of your land and your country. Praised be Jesus Christ!

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