



The Holy See

PASTORAL VISIT TO ANCONA (ITALY)

HOMILY OF JOHN PAUL II

Cònero Stadium

Sunday, 30 May 1999

1. *“Glory to the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit: to God who is, who was and who is to come” (Gospel acclamation; cf. Rv 1:8).* We praise God for the providential coincidence of these two events, different in intent but convergent in meaning, that we are celebrating today: the Solemnity of the Holy Trinity and the 1,000th anniversary of your cathedral. This splendid building, which overlooks the city from the top of a hill, is really a symbol of the People of God in the Ancona region, who have been brought into unity, to use St Cyprian's vivid expression, “from the unity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit” (*De Orat. Dom.*, 23: PL 4, 553). Thus as we celebrate the cathedral's 1,000 years, we are also celebrating the marvels of grace and love that in 10 centuries of history the Holy Trinity has poured out upon generations of Christians in this region who have believed in the Gospel and have striven to live it. With this awareness our liturgical assembly, gathered in this festively decorated stadium, cries out in joy: *“Blessed be God the Father and his only-begotten Son and the Holy Spirit: for he has shown that he loves us”*. 2. God's love for each of us is truly great! Great is God's love for each of you, dear brothers and sisters of Ancona, and your beautiful cathedral dedicated to St Cyriacus is a tangible sign of it. Viewed from the outside, with its elevated position over the city, it symbolizes well the reassuring presence of the Trinitarian God, who from on high guides and protects the life of human beings. At the same time, the cathedral is a powerful reminder to look upwards, to rise above the routine of daily life and from everything that weighs down earthly existence, to fix our gaze on heaven in a continual pursuit of spiritual values. It is, so to speak, the meeting-point of two movements: the descending movement of God's love for humanity and the ascending movement of the human longing for communion with God, the source of joy and peace. 3. *“Blessed are you in the temple of your holy glory, praiseworthy and glorious above all forever”*. I am pleased to greet you, dear brothers and sisters, with this invocation of the responsorial psalm, as I recall with gratitude to divine Providence the 1,000 years of your magnificent cathedral. We are commemorating a millennium rich in history, religious and cultural traditions, and active Christian life interwoven with the vicissitudes of the city and the region. I affectionately greet everyone present, beginning with your Pastor, dear Archbishop Franco Festorazzi, whom I thank for the cordial words he spoke to me in your name at the start of our celebration. With him I greet the prelates of the Marches, the Archbishop of Zara and the other Bishops present. I extend a respectful greeting to the Vice-President of the Council of Ministers, who is here representing the Italian Government, to the Mayor of Ancona, the Prefect, the President of the region and the civil and military authorities who have wanted to

honour this solemn anniversary by with their presence. I also extend an affectionate greeting to the priests, religious and laity who are actively involved in the apostolate, with a special mention of the pilgrims who have come from other areas to celebrate this historic occasion with us, especially the group of Croatian and Bosnian faithful. Dear faithful of the Archdiocese of Ancona-Osimo, I embrace you all spiritually and thank you for the gracious welcome you have given me, marked by the sensitivity and warmth that are so traditional in the Marche.⁴ We have just heard the words of the Apostle Paul: *“Brethren, rejoice. Strive for perfection. Encourage one another. Live in harmony and peace, and the God of love and peace will be with you”* (2 Cor 13:11). I address these same words to you, brothers and sisters, with heartfelt warmth and affection. First of all to you, young people! With St Paul I say to you: *“Strive for perfection”!* Such a demanding invitation presumes that its recipients are capable of enthusiasm. Is this not typical of people your age? So I say to you: know how to think big! Have the courage to dare! With God's help, *“strive for perfection”!* God has a plan of holiness for each of you. With you today is the “Young People's Cross” which has accompanied the Church's most important youth gatherings since the Holy Year of 1984. The Cross invites you to bear courageous witness to the faith you have inherited from Stephen, Cyriacus and Leopardus, the patrons of your communities. Be ready to carry on the new evangelization and to enter the third millennium with the victorious Cross of Christ.⁵ *“Live in harmony”*. Dear families, and especially you, dear young couples, accept this invitation to be of one heart and to live in full communion with God. He is calling you to be families that are open to life and love, able to impart hope and trust in the future in the face of a society which sometimes seems to lack them. *“Rejoice!”*, the Apostle Paul says again to you today. For Christians, the deepest reason for inner joy is found in God's Word and in his unfailing love. Strengthened by this knowledge, the Church continues on her pilgrimage and proclaims to all: *“The God of love and peace will be with you”*.⁶ My gaze extends now across your city which, overlooking the Adriatic Sea, has always been, so to speak, a “bridgehead” to the East. Ancona's history is steeped in apostolic daring and missionary spirit. One need only think of St Stephen Protomartyr, to whom the first cathedral was dedicated, and of Primianus, Greek by birth and the city's first Bishop. And then there is St Cyriacus, whom we recall in a special way during these millennial celebrations of the cathedral dedicated to him: he came from Jerusalem. Liberius was Armenian and the martyrs of Osimo — Florentius, Sisinius and Diocletius — also came from the East. Your city truly looks out upon a vast horizon! A transit point for merchants and pilgrims, for centuries Ancona has experienced the peaceful coexistence of Greek and Armenian communities, which built their own places of worship and established relations of mutual respect and cooperation with the Catholic community. Let us thank God that down the centuries the Church in Ancona has acquired a cosmopolitan character and has fostered a burning missionary zeal, eloquent proof of which is the work done in China by Bishop Antonio Maria Saccone and by Bishop Riccardini in the Middle East. This spiritual heritage has never been interrupted and continues to bear fruit. Proof of this, among others, is the missionary cooperation that the Archdiocese offers the Ecclesial Community of Anatoja, Argentina. I am sure that your Church will be open to new, promising horizons, instilling in all the Christian people of Ancona a renewed apostolic zeal for service to the Gospel. This will be one of the most significant results from the jubilee celebrations of your cathedral.⁷ *“Live in peace”*, St Paul advises. Dear friends, the cathedral is a symbol of the Church's unity. Here in Ancona too, as in neighbouring Osimo, it has been a place for the whole city to praise God, the site of renewed harmony between the moments of worship and civic life, the reference-point for restoring peace to hearts. Prompted by memory, you want to live this present moment of history. Just as your ancestors were able to build a splendid church of stone to be a sign and call to communion of life, it is your task to make the meaning of this sacred building visible and credible by living peaceably in the ecclesial and civil community. Mindful of the past and attentive to the present, but also looking to the future, you Christians of the Archdiocese of Ancona-Osimo know that the spiritual progress of your ecclesial communities and the very promotion of the common good of your civil communities calls for

arduous effort and an ever more vital involvement of your parishes and associations in the region. May the road you have traveled thus far and the faith that motivates you give you the courage and enthusiasm to continue.⁸ *“The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all”* (2 Cor 13:13): these were the Apostle Paul's closing wishes to the Christians of Corinth. Today the Successor of Peter would like to extend this same Trinitarian wish to your community as you celebrate the millennium of your cathedral. Christians of Ancona, emulate your ancestors and be a living Church of Gospel service! A hospitable and generous Church, whose persevering witness can give vital expression to God's love for every human being, especially for the needy and the suffering. I know that this is your commitment. It is demonstrated by, among other things, a project that the Church in Ancona is undertaking in remembrance of the millennial celebrations: the remodeling of the Annunziata complex, which will be used for services of solidarity and for the pastoral care of young people. The Pope praises you for this and encourages you. May Mary, whom you venerate in your cathedral with the beautiful title of “Queen of All Saints”, watch from the top of the hill over each of you and the people of the sea. And you, Queen of Saints, Queen of Peace, hear our prayer: make us credible witnesses of your Son Jesus and tireless peacemakers. Amen!