



The Holy See

**LETTER OF THE HOLY FATHER
JOHN PAUL II
TO FATHER GIACOMO BINI,
MINISTER GENERAL OF THE ORDER OF FRIARS MINOR**

To the Most Reverend Father Giacomo Bini, O.F.M.

Minister General of the Order of Friars Minor On the occasion of the inauguration, on 8 July next, of the Franciscan Hermitage on the Hill of Crosses in Siauliai, Lithuania, I would like to extend my best wishes and greetings to you, to your confrères in the Tuscan Province of the Stigmata of St Francis and in the Province of St Casimir in Lithuania, as well as to everyone who will be taking part in the sacred celebration, assuring them of my spiritual closeness and deep gratitude for making this important project a reality. The building of this Hermitage in a place so filled with memories reminds me of the moment of prayer I spent on the Hill of Crosses on 7 September 1993, during my Apostolic Visit to Lithuania. At the same time, I recall the pilgrimage to La Verna which I had the opportunity to make a few days later on 17 September of that same year. On those special occasions I understood even more profoundly how fruitful it is, at the dawn of a new millennium, for humanity and for Europe to make a spiritual pilgrimage to Siauliai and La Verna, sites marked by the mystery of the Cross, in order to meditate with deeper awareness on the Lord's passion, death and resurrection and to open themselves to the grace of conversion. Bonds of fraternal cooperation have linked the Lithuanian and Tuscan Provinces of the Friars Minor since before the advent of communism, when the young people of Lithuania, eager to follow the Franciscan charism, were sent to Tuscany for formation in the religious life. These bonds have been strengthened in the past decade and I am now pleased to see that La Verna and the Hill of Crosses will be even more closely joined by this providential Franciscan Hermitage. The crosses on the Hill of Siauliai continue to bear witness to the tremendous suffering caused by a dictatorial regime and are at the same time a sign of the spiritual greatness of a people who knew how to draw from their own spiritual and cultural traditions the necessary strength to continue hoping in a better future. In the harshest moments of Lithuania's history, the crosses of Siauliai were an inexhaustible source of strength, an inner bulwark of faith in Christ and of fidelity to the Church. I ardently hope that through the Hermitage's presence the Hill of Crosses will become an ever more eloquent sign of the mercy and salvation that are found in the Cross and Resurrection of our Redeemer. I entrust to St Frances and St Clare this Franciscan institution and all who will stay there for moments of prayer, silence and meditation. May the Sorrowful Virgin, and St Casimir, patron of Lithuania, intercede so that this initiative, whose development I encourage with my Apostolic Blessing, will yield abundant good fruits. *From the Vatican,*

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