



The Holy See

**LETTER OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THE BISHOP OF ASCOLI PICENO
ON THE OCCASION OF THE 17th CENTENARY
OF THE DEATH OF ST EMIDIUS**

To my Venerable Brother

Bishop Silvano Montevercchi of Ascoli Piceno

1. This year, the Ecclesial Community in Ascoli is commemorating the 17th centenary of the martyrdom of St Emidius, its first bishop. I am delighted to join you in spirit, venerable Brother, and the clergy, the men and women religious and all the faithful of Ascoli, on this important anniversary that will be commemorated with various liturgical, pastoral and cultural events, culminating in the solemn celebration this 5 August, the patronal feast day of the Diocese.

The memory of the martyr St Emidius, who is especially loved and called upon in this city and in other parts of Central and Southern Italy as Protector against disasters caused by earthquakes, is a pressing invitation to the Christian Community of Ascoli to revive the spirit of their origins in order to give a new impact to Gospel proclamation in our time, promoting also in our epoch the values of Christian civilization.

2. Attested by a long-standing and sound tradition, the earthly life of St Emidius offers us an eloquent testimony of the effects of Christianity on the lives of the European peoples. St Emidius was born in Trier. Having converted to Christianity and received baptism, this Saint sought refuge in Milan, where he was ordained a priest. Subsequently, he went to Rome where he was consecrated Bishop by Pope St Marcellinus, and sent to the town of Ascoli.

Thanks to him, an important bond exists between the city of Trier and Ascoli Piceno: to emphasize it, a group of young people from Trier, led by their Pastor, Bishop Reinhard Marx, will join you to pay homage to your holy Patron. In the same spirit, the young people of Ascoli and their peers in Trier will set out together on the journey of preparation for the World Youth Day that is to be held

next year in Cologne. I sincerely hope on behalf of St Emidius that these bonds of communion and ecclesial sharing may be increasingly deepened.

3. The Diocese has desired to prepare for this important Jubilee with historical and historiographical meetings and events, complemented by an iconographic exhibition. Appropriate catechetical and pastoral initiatives for the different age groups have also been organized: for children who are beginning their formation, for the youngsters who are preparing to receive the sacrament of Confirmation, for young people, adults and families. They aim at helping each one, especially lay people, to rediscover the beauty of being disciples of Christ and of belonging to his Church, a People of God that is "not only an assembly of various peoples, but in itself is made up of different ranks", as the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium* emphasizes (n. 13). The formation of the lay faithful is more necessary than ever to enable them to play an active role in the new evangelization, collaborating with their Pastors to bring the Good News of the Gospel to all social milieus.

4. Venerable Brother, I would like to repeat to the Church which is in Ascoli what I had the opportunity to write in my Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte* to the entire Christian people at the end of the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000. In it I pointed out the path to a more intense contemplation of the face of Christ as a condition for a more and more courageous apostolic and missionary commitment. The main road to it is holiness. Hence, the beloved Church of Ascoli should strive for holiness with every possible means, following in the footsteps of its august Patron.

"The time has come to re-propose wholeheartedly to everyone this high standard of ordinary Christian living: the whole life of the Christian community and of Christian families must lead in this direction. It is also clear, however, that the paths to holiness are personal and call for a genuine 'training in holiness', adapted to people's needs" (n. 31).

I cordially hope for you, Venerable Brother, and for all those whom the Lord has entrusted to your pastoral care, that the celebration in honour of St Emidius will nourish a constant desire for holiness in each one, and to this end I assure you of my constant remembrance in prayer.

With these sentiments, as I invoke the heavenly protection of the holy first Bishop and martyr, I willingly impart to you, to the clergy, to consecrated persons, to committed lay people and to all the faithful of the Diocese of Ascoli a special Apostolic Blessing.

From the Vatican, 26 June 2004

JOHN PAUL II

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