



The Holy See

**MESSAGE OF JOHN PAUL II
ON THE OCCASION OF THE CELEBRATIONS
FOR THE 60th ANNIVERSARY OF THE DESTRUCTION
AND RECONSTRUCTION OF MONTECASSINO ABBEY**

To my Venerable Brother

Fr Bernardo D'Onorio, O.S.B.

Abbot of Montecassino Sixty years have passed since the events of the war that dramatically marked the history of Montecassino and its environs, but vivid echoes of them still live on in the minds and vicissitudes of many people and families of this ancient and well-known place. On 15 February 1944, a terrible bombardment razed the abbey to the ground; a month later, on 15 March, the town of Cassino was hit. At last, however, on 18 May, fighting ceased and a new life began in the region. I am grateful to you, Father Abbot, for informing me of the celebrations for which the diocesan and municipal communities are preparing, gathered closely round the venerable tomb of St Benedict and harking back to those months of suffering and pain but also of hope and solidarity. I gladly take this opportunity to address my cordial greeting to everyone, assuring them of my spiritual closeness, reinforced by the constant remembrance of the Visits I have been able to pay to the Abbey and to the nearby Polish cemetery. While the commemoration of the bereavements and destruction are under way, I prayerfully join those who are renewing Christian support for all the victims. At this time, my thoughts also go to all who are making their own contribution to the cause of justice and peace. I would like in particular to fix your gaze on the Abbey of Montecassino, the true coffer of a precious treasure of spirituality, culture and art. That the ancient monastery was destroyed by the war yet later perfectly rebuilt becomes an invitation to hope for us believers, prompting us as it were to see in this event a symbol of Christ's victory over evil as well as of human ability, with the power of faith in God and brotherly love, to overcome the harshest of conflicts to make goodness, justice and harmony triumphant. The Second World War was an abyss of violence, destruction and death unlike anything previously known (cf. *Message for the 37th World Day of Peace*, 1 January 2004, n. 5). What befell Montecassino deserves to be commemorated and held up as a warning to ponder, a reminder to all of their sense of responsibility. The new generations, Italian and European, have the good fortune not to have experienced the war directly. Yet they also know something about the tragedies to which wars give rise because of the victims that the many conflicts in various parts of the world are claiming. Young people are the hope of humanity: they must be able to grow up in an atmosphere of an ongoing and effective education in peace. They must learn from history a fundamental lesson of life and coexistence in solidarity: the law of force is destructive, whereas the force of law is constructive. This is the thought that I entrust for consideration to all who are taking part in these commemorative celebrations. I make myself spiritually present at them with a special prayer to St Benedict who, precisely 40 years ago, was proclaimed Patron of Europe. I also call on Sts

Cyril and Methodius, Co-Patrons of the Continent whose feast we celebrated yesterday, and above all, on the Virgin Mary, Queen of Peace. May the family of Nations experience a renewed and unanimous commitment to peace in justice. To you, venerable Brother, to the Reverend Monks, to the civil and military Authorities and to the entire population I cordially impart the implored Apostolic Blessing. *From the Vatican, 15 February 2004* **JOHN PAUL II**

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