



The Holy See

PASTORAL VISIT
OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II
TO VERCELLI AND TURIN (ITALY)
(MAY 23-24, 1998)

**ADDRESS OF POPE JOHN PAUL II
TO THE CITIZENS OF VERCELLI
IN ST ANDREW'S BASILICA**

Saturday, May 23 1998

Mr Minister,

Mr Mayor,

Distinguished Authorities,

Dear Brothers and Sisters of Vercelli,

1. I express my great joy for being in your midst and I extend my thanks to God who has given me the opportunity to visit your illustrious city.

I thank the Mayor for his courteous words of welcome on behalf of the civic community. I thank and cordially greet the Minister, as well as the representatives of the civil and military institutions who have wished to honour this meeting of ours with their presence. I also extend my affectionate greeting to the venerable Pastor of this Archdiocese, dear Archbishop Enrico Masseroni, to his predecessor who now works with me in Rome, dear Archbishop Tarcisio Bertone, and to all of you who are gathered here, as well as to all who have been unable to be physically present but are linked with us through radio and television. I address a respectful greeting to the representatives of the ancient Jewish community and to those of the Islamic community, who are with us today.

2. My first meeting with the people of Vercelli takes place in this ancient church dedicated to the Apostle St Andrew and cared for by the worthy Lateran Canons, represented here by the Abbot General. As a symbol of the city, the basilica is well-known for its splendid artistic beauty: a true masterpiece of Gothic-Romanesque architecture. Recognized as the

city's most important monument, St Andrew's Basilica is a marvellous synthesis of a long tradition *in which the city's two essential dimensions are interwoven*: the civil and the religious. Thus, while it represents a glorious *memorial to the past*, it acquires value as an indication and admonition for a promising *impetus towards the future*.

This "memorial" has crystallized down the centuries and has been expressed in the many forms of art which make Vercelli one of the cities with the greatest number of monuments and paintings in Piedmont. But St Andrew's Basilica, with its dynamic architecture and bold lines, *invites one to look upwards*. This is the first message that comes to us from this church, as well as from the other great symbols of faith built throughout the centuries in the neighbourhoods of your city. They remind us that the meaning of life and human experience is not exhausted in earthly concerns but *needs the light that comes from above*. In fact, the values of faith expressed by these ancient monuments are not foreign to our daily efforts and anxieties. They indicate the right direction and give full meaning to history and to your personal and community projects.

3. Dear people of Vercelli, throughout your city's long history, two souls, two sensibilities, almost two cultures have coexisted here: the *urban* and the *rural*. How can we forget, for example, that in 1228 Piedmont's first university, the *Studium*, which boasted prestigious teachers in the juridical and medical disciplines, was founded here? In recent times this Province has been recognized as one of the rice-producing capitals. What else can we say about the rich cultural resources that illumined your city's past and continue to distinguish its present? The 1,650th anniversary of the episcopal ordination of St Eusebius, with the celebration of the Eusebian Year, was a fitting occasion for refreshing your memory of the glories of the past and for committing the people of Vercelli to keeping alive in the young an awareness of the values which over the centuries have made the city great. It is a priceless heritage to be faithfully handed on to new generations.

To this end, it will be useful for the civil and ecclesial communities to collaborate, with mutual respect for one another's roles and in agreement about meeting the expectations of those who will be adult citizens in the new millennium. Young people need to be strongly committed to solving urgent practical problems such as education and employment. At the same time, they have the right to live in a city where they can tangibly experience harmony, solidarity and acceptance. Only in this way will the inhabitants of Vercelli preserve the image of a peaceful city open to the positive developments of progress.

4. Dear brothers and sisters who live in this city: your history is extraordinarily rich in culture and faith. It is now up to you, as heirs to a glorious past, to dedicate yourselves to passing on to those who will come the torch of such a shining tradition. You well know how urgent it is to instill the Gospel leaven of the Beatitudes in a contemporary culture too often exposed to the icy winds of indifference and selfishness. To form consciences, courageous action is vital. However, experience teaches that nothing succeeds better than faith in keeping a sense of moral values alive in souls. The convinced Christian can responsibly combine competence and integrity in the fulfilment of his duties.

This applies in particular to anyone called to serve in public office. The Church is accustomed to praying to the Lord for those responsible for the common good. In this year dedicated to the Holy Spirit, she especially implores for them the gifts of counsel and fortitude which are so necessary for promoting the fundamental value of justice in society. Indeed, great courage is required of public administrators in preferring the common good to any form of partiality, and in assuming responsibility for the needs of the weakest. This is what people expect, especially from Christians who are

active in the various areas of civil life. Much has been achieved in this direction, but there is still much to be done. I encourage you, dear brothers and sisters, to continue on this road, making the most of the positive energies in the community and accepting the contribution of all people of goodwill.

5. City of Vercelli, thank you for your cordial welcome! I entrust you and your inhabitants to St Andrew, patron of this basilica, and to St Eusebius, the first Bishop of the diocesan community. I commend you to Mary, venerated in the principal shrine of the Archdiocese with the title "Our Lady of the Sick".

To you, Holy Virgin, I entrust the children and the elderly and every inhabitant of this region. Lead each one to the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000 and increase everyone's faith, so that authentic witnesses to Christ and the Gospel may continue to flourish in this land of Eusebius.

To you, Mary, I entrust all who are lonely or in difficulty, the sick and, in a special way, the patients in St Andrew's Hospital, which is historically linked to the origins of this basilica of the same name. Blessed Virgin, who shared the passion of Christ on Calvary, obtain for the suffering the comfort of Christian hope!

I impart my affectionate Apostolic Blessing to you all, dear people of Vercelli, and I hold you close in a great embrace.