



The Holy See

PASTORAL VISIT
OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II
TO CHIAVARI AND BRESCIA (ITALY)
(SEPTEMBER 18-20, 1998)

***ADDRESS OF POPE JOHN PAUL II
ON HIS ARRIVAL IN CHIAVARI***

Friday, 18 september 1998

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

1. I am grateful for the welcome you have given me to this beautiful city of yours, which is located in the centre, or better, at the heart of the Gulf of Tigullio, famous all over the world for its sea, its cliffs, its olive groves, its pine trees and, especially, its good and hard working people.

I am particularly grateful to the Minister who has come here as the Government's representative, to the Mayor for his noble words of greeting, and to all the other authorities who with your Pastor, Bishop Alberto Maria Careggio, have honoured me with their presence.

I cordially thank and greet every one of you, dear citizens of Chiavari, and all the friends who have come here for the occasion. I greet you as a people of this privileged city and region, but also as the *People of God*, gathered in this *local Church* whose centre is the cathedralshrine of Our Lady of the Garden. I am about to enter this shrine and will pray there before the icon of Mary painted in 1493 by an artist of Chiavari: an icon therefore which is present among you and has been venerated here for over half a millennium.

2. I confess to you that, if I feel great joy every time I visit the cathedral of a local Church, since I have the impression of strengthening that Church's bonds of communion with the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church which we profess in the Creed, my joy becomes even deeper when I enter a church expressly dedicated to Our Lady. In this case then, it is a cathedral whose dedication to Mary involves the whole Diocese of Chiavari, which has 10 other Marian shrines in its territory, among which I am pleased to mention at least that of Our Lady of Montallegro in the neighbouring region of Rapallo.

The title of *Our Lady of the Garden*, which derives from the fact that Borzone's painting was found on the wall of what used to be called the *Captain's Garden*, calls to mind the gardens and orchards found in the history of salvation: from the Garden of Eden, the place of our first parents' innocence and happiness, but which soon became a place of disobedience and sin, to that of Gethsemani, where the New Adam, Christ Jesus, began the decisive phase of redemption, suffering to the point of sweating drops of blood (cf. Lk 22:44), to the garden that every Christian's soul should be, in order to be worthy to receive Christ, together with his Mother.

Fortunate then is this Diocese which, in its visible structures but especially in the invisible mystery of its spiritual reality, aspires to be Mary's garden: *Hortus conclusus*, as you gladly sing, especially during the "July Celebrations", *fons signatus*, *O Maria! Emissiones tuae paradisus*. "Paradisus": a new garden of innocence and joy.

3. This vision of heaven does not distract us from the problems and difficulties that accompany daily life on earth. I am thinking in particular of the *problems affecting society as a whole*. Nor does your gulf lack serious reasons for concern, at least as a reflection of a more widescale crisis. You are asking yourselves, for example, about the future of your noble traditions of craft work, trade and agriculture, which have not been adequately replaced by the new work methods and technology. If the tourist trade, attracted by the beautiful scenery, continues to prosper, the periods of rest and vacation are often substantially reduced because of ever higher costs.

Consequently, here too there are notable difficulties in finding suitable jobs for everyone, especially for young people with academic qualifications. For business and trade, the difficulty stems from the lack of adequate financial resources. Lastly, there is a risk of the so-called "family poverty" which, according to recent statistics, is growing due to the increasing number of people who are elderly and alone.

4. You will understand me if on this occasion I also recall the ethical-social problems to which many of the phenomena mentioned above are linked. How can we not mention, for example, the decline in the *culture of life*, with the resulting drop in the birth rate, when seeking the underlying causes of the current economic crisis? And who cannot see that insufficient social solidarity is at the root of the lack of co-operation in dealing with the new, imposing economic, social and political problems? Going even deeper, it is in the lack of religious sense and the related ethical sensitivity that we must look for an explanation of the many family and social difficulties afflicting our time.

You people of Chiavari are all linked to this city and its inhabitants for various reasons; in your own history you have experienced the need for and benefits of religion as symbolized in Our Lady of the Garden: in her smile as a good and kind Mother, in her hand raised in blessing together with her Child's. You all know that, although each of us must be committed with all our energy to ensuring that a society of solidarity is reborn in justice and love, it is still necessary to have constant recourse to the One who, as a powerful and kindly Mother, can guarantee the fruitfulness of our efforts. You have often experienced this firsthand in your history.

Here I would like to recall that 25 August 1835 when in this very square St Anthony Mary Gianelli, then archpriest of Chiavari, was able to proclaim that the grace of protection from cholera had been obtained by Our Lady of the Garden and the Holy Crucifix carried in the penitential procession. The archpriest had seen and announced the return of the swallows. Since then you have spoken of the "miracle of the swallows", to which one of your distinguished musicians,

Maestro Campodonico, the cathedral organist for many years, dedicated an inspired oratorio, *The Swallows of Our Lady*, performed several times within these walls.

5. Let us all pray for that “miracle” to occur again in our society, as a deliverance from “pestilence, famine and war”, in the words of the ancient petition of the Litany of the Saints. Today more than ever, we need to be delivered from old and new epidemics, from old and new forms of war. We need a well-organized economy, but we especially need to restore morality as the necessary premise for a society of greater justice and solidarity.

We ask Our Lady for all this in the Litany of Loreto: *Auxilium Christianorum, ora pro nobis*. And you, people of Chiavari, by an ancient indult of the Holy See, add: *Regina Advocata nostra, ora pro nobis* (cf. S. Congregation of Rites, 1 September 1782).

I will place you all in the hands and heart of this Queen and Advocate, as I kneel before the throne you have erected in the old “Captain’s Garden”. “Protect”, I will ask her, “all your children filled with hope in you: O clement, O loving, O dear Lady of the Garden, O sweet Virgin Mary!”.