



The Holy See

MESSAGE OF POPE JOHN PAUL II TO ITALIAN CISTERTIANS

13 May 1997

*To my beloved Brother Luigi Rottini
Abbot President of the
Italian Congregation of the Cistercian Order*

The Cistercian Congregation of St Bernard in Italy is joyfully preparing to commemorate the fifth centenary of its foundation on 23 December 1497, when Pope Alexander VI, with the Apostolic Constitution *Plantatus in agro dominico*, definitively approved its beginning. Recalling the union of the two Cistercian provinces of Tuscany and Lombardy in the new congregation gives us the opportunity to praise God for the divine favours granted to the Cistercian Order in the past 500 years. It is also an appropriate occasion for encouraging the monks to continue with renewed commitment on the path marked out by their founders, St Robert of Molesme, St Alberic and St Stephen Harding, in fidelity to the Rule of St Benedict passed down to them by the great Abbot Bernard.

The Italian Congregation of the Cistercian Order is celebrating this joyful anniversary as mankind prepares to cross the threshold of the third millennium. God entered into time through the Incarnation of his only-begotten Son, and it is precisely to Christ that this first year of the triennium of preparation for the Jubilee of the Year 2000 is dedicated. St Bernard gave great importance to the person of Christ, stressing his total "kenosis" in the mystery of the Incarnation. The eternal Word of God came among us, made himself obedient even unto death and guides us to the fullness of eternal life on the path of humble and constant obedience to the Father's will. Believers, and in particular those who are called by divine Providence to a special mission in the Church and in the world through the consecrated life, seek to be faithful to his example. As for Cistercian monks, it is precisely through their humility and obedience that even in times of trial they have preserved the unity of the congregation over the centuries, to the great benefit of its individual

members.

On this happy occasion I am therefore pleased to extend my good wishes to you, Venerable Brother, and to the whole monastic congregation, in special remembrance of the warm welcome you gave me during my Pastoral Visit to the Basilica of the Holy Cross in Jerusalem on 25 March 1979.

May the Jubilee you are preparing to celebrate be an invitation to discover ever more deeply your special charism. During the five centuries of its life, the congregation has experienced how divine Providence has guided the monks in an authentic spiritual life, or as St Gregory said of St Benedict of Nursia, to "live with themselves", diligently attending to their own purification in penitential asceticism.

Under the impulse of the Benedictine concept of life, many monks faithful to the *opus Dei*, without "preferring anything to the love of Christ" (*Rule of St Benedict*, chapter 4, 21), have spent holy lives in seeking God, sustained by the belief that time given to him is never wasted.

My cordial wish is that you will continue with renewed fervour and zeal on this high road, tested by centuries of spiritual fruitfulness, without ever letting discouragement or weariness sap the enthusiasm of your commitment to the Gospel.

May the Virgin Mary, to whom St Bernard turned with the most ardent love, singing her praises with the greatest fervour, help you and guide your steps. May she obtain from her Son a new outpouring of heavenly gifts on your monastic family so that the Congregation of St Bernard in Italy may be an oasis of evangelization for the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000.

With these wishes, I impart a special Apostolic Blessing to you, Venerable Brother, to the entire monastic community and to those under the pastoral care of the Cistercian monks.

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