



The Holy See

**LETTER OF HIS HOLINESS
POPE JOHN PAUL II
TO BISHOP OF LA SPEZIA-SARZANA-BRUGNATO**

*To My Venerable Brother
The Most Reverend Giulio Sanguineti
Bishop of La Spezia-Sarzana-Brugnato*

I learned with great pleasure that this Diocese of La Spezia-Sarzana-Brugnato is commemorating with fitting activities the sixth centenary of the birth of Pope Nicholas V. For this occasion I am pleased to extend to you, to the entire diocesan community and to all who are taking part in the celebration of the Year of Nicholas my best wishes, delighted as I am that the person and work of this great Pontiff are being remembered.

Born in Sarzana on 15 November 1397, Tommaso Parentucelli put at the service of the priestly ministry the qualities he inherited from his native land of Liguria along the border of Tuscany, together with the preparation he acquired with tenacious effort, prayer and study during his years of formation.

Ordained a priest in 1421, he first served for 20 years as secretary to the Cardinal Bishop of Bologna, Bl. Nicholas Albergati, and then became a master in theology at the University of Bologna, actively participating in two Councils, that of Basel in 1433 and of Ferrara-Florence from 1438 to 1443, regarding union with the Eastern Churches.

Divine Providence later willed that he should be Bishop of Bologna and Cardinal. In March 1447 the Lord called him to lead the universal Church as Successor of the Apostle Peter.

During the years of his Pontificate, he was able to make the precious talents of nature and grace that God had given him bear wide-ranging and effective fruit through a deep spirit of humility and meekness, a burning piety, an extraordinary love of peace, a singular passion for literary culture

and art, and a keen diplomatic ability.

Until his death in 1455, he carried out many activities, making a notable impact on the Church and on society. He was Bishop of Rome in a historical period marked by crucial events: the definitive conclusion of the Western schism, the Peace of Lodi that ended a long period of war in Italy, the Great Jubilee of 1450, the “golden year” of 15th-century Christianity, and the fall of Constantinople.

Nicholas V was fully aware of the times in which he lived, marked by the transition from the Middle Ages to the modern era. He worked diligently so that believers would courageously accept this epochal change, by preparing them to deal with the new era, humanism, also at the cultural level. His apostolic endeavours can be viewed from this perspective: from his notable attention to humanistic culture to the foundation of the first nucleus of the Vatican Apostolic Library, evidence of a vivid interest in the value of books, the cultural “medium” *par excellence* of the modern age.

The Jubilee of 1450 held a special place in his Pontificate; it was a remarkable occasion of renewal in the Church, focused on the new era. He understood that the Jubilee was a favourable moment to reaffirm strongly the unity of the Church and to renew the ecumenical invitation addressed particularly to the Church of the East. He made every effort so that the Church might be united and reconciled in that Holy Year.

Memory of that Jubilee prompts us to think of the one in the Year 2000. Now as then, there is an ardent yearning for unity, the desire for an authentic religious renewal that can embrace Christians of the whole world. Now as then, it is necessary for believers to acquire a mature and responsible awareness of the role they are called to play in this crucial time, which marks the transition from the second to the third millennium.

I firmly hope that the memory of my venerable Predecessor will allow everyone to become better acquainted with the message, wisdom and pastoral boldness that distinguished him. His life and ministry also offer valuable suggestions to the people of today about the commitment needed for the new evangelization. Today, in fact, as in the time of Nicholas V, a consistent Gospel witness, courageous ecumenical progress and an earnest dialogue with various cultures and religions are seriously needed for facing the challenges of the third millennium.

I ask the Lord to fill this commemorative year with abundant spiritual gifts for your diocesan community and, as I invoke the protection of Mary, Mother of the Church, I cordially send to you, Venerable Brother, and to all who are entrusted to your pastoral care, a special Apostolic Blessing.

From Castel Gandolfo, 2 September 1998.

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