



The Holy See

**LETTER OF POPE JOHN PAUL II
TO H.E. MONS. JOSEPH MERCIECA, ARCHBISHOP OF MALTA,
AND H.E. MONS. NICHOLAS CAUCHI, BISHOP OF GOZO**

*To my venerable and dear Brothers
Joseph Mercieca
Archbishop of Malta
and Nicholas Cauchi
Bishop of Gozo*

“Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ” (*Eph. 1, 2*)

With great joy I join with you, dear Brothers, and with your people, who in these days gather around Our Lady of Ta’ Pinu to celebrate the centenary of her sanctuary with the Ninth International Mariological Congress and the Sixteenth International Marian Congress, organized by the Pontifical International Marian Academy in Rome.

In you, Venerable Brothers, I greet all the participants, scholars and pilgrims, coming from different parts of the world, but, in a particular way, I wish to greet *all the sons and daughters of the Maltese nation*, one of the most ancient Christian nations, which has always borne witness to its acceptance of the Gospel of Christ and to its devotion to Mary.

Your people have been prepared for these international events through a programme of spiritual renewal begun last October. At that time, I invited you to a greater fidelity to Christ and to that fraternal reconciliation which contributes to the well-being of the entire social community, hoping that the Marian celebrations might stir up an *ever greater unity of faith* and love among the sons and daughters of Malta, which with great pride calls itself the island of Saint Paul. I placed this hope under the loving and maternal protection of Mary, the Mother of God and the Mother of the Church.

With you I also greet the pontifical International Marian Academy, in particular its zealous President, Father Paolo Melada, OFM, the members of the Academy and of the Secretariat, entrusted with the organization of both Congresses. I express great appreciation and heartfelt gratitude for the effective contribution to the success of such important ecclesial events which honour Mary and are directed to the glory of the Most Blessed Trinity and to the salvation of souls.

1. From the beginning of Christianity, from the time when the Apostle to the Gentiles announced to your forefathers how “God sent forth his Son born of a woman” (*Gal.* 4, 4), the figure of the Mother of the Son of God has assumed in the consciousness of the Christian people ever clearer features of a mother and protectress for them, an example and model for every disciple of Christ. In Malta, too, just as in other parts of the world, the Virgin Mary has been constantly proclaimed as the *highest realization of the Gospel*. Marian piety has developed among your people as witnessed to by the Marian liturgical feasts, which are so enthusiastically celebrated, by the majestic churches dedicated to Our Lady, by sanctuaries and chapels where her sacred images are venerated and before which still today the faithful come to pray, adorning them with votive offerings as signs of gratitude. So it is that this Marian piety, among you too, became “an intrinsic element of Christian worship” (PAULI VI *Marialis Cultus*, 56), especially in your most famous Marian sanctuary of Ta’ Pinu where, according to the tradition, the Virgin Mother of God appeared a hundred years ago to a young girl, Carmela Grima.

The renewal desired by the Second Vatican Council has also borne abundant fruit in the field of Marian devotion, emphasizing its biblical, Christological, ecclesial and anthropological direction, so that it may become ever more a *devotion that leads to our Lord Jesus Christ*, “origin of all truth, holiness and devotion” (*Lumen Gentium*, 67). Today the expressions of Marian devotion are often manifested more in a communal dimension thus helping the faithful to renew together their fidelity to Christ who is the only way to the Father (Cfr. *Io.* 14, 6).

2. In honouring with filial affection the Mother of God, the Church in Malta has wished to welcome both the Mariological and the Marian Congress. The Mariological Congress, linked to previous gatherings, is dedicated to the study of Marian devotion in the seventeenth and eighteenth Centuries. Entering into the historical, cultural and theological environment of that age, it seeks to present the status of Marian doctrine and devotion in those centuries that were distinguished by great theologians, mystics and saints. How could one not recall the treatise *The True Devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary* of Saint Louis Marie Grignion de Montfort and the initiatives on behalf of the definitions of the Immaculate Conception of Mary promoted by Saint Leonard of Port Maurice? Here the work of scholars will consist in examining *Marian devotion* in the Church during those centuries, as it is found in various religious practices and *as it relates to the whole of Catholic doctrine* and to the faith of the People of God.

The devotional part of the meeting, the Marian Congress, treating as it does *Mary, Mother of Reconciliation*, wishes to emphasize the role of Mary in the reconciliation of the children of God.

Beside her Son, the Redeemer of man, who died to “gather into one the scattered children of God” (*Ibid.* 11, 52), Mary, “with her maternal charity, cares for the brethren of her Son who still journey on earth surrounded by dangers and difficulties, until they are led happily to their homeland” (*Lumen Gentium*, 62). Thus the Virgin of Nazareth appears as a great treasure possessed by the whole people of God and as a tie that links those who are still separated in other ways. In this sense, the ecumenical meeting offers an occasion to reflect together on the *place of Mary in relation to the Church as a communion*.

Other significant results of these international meetings will be effected in the Church in Malta through different religious and cultural events, through the promotion of a theological reflection on the figure of Mary in the history of salvation and of *her mission in the Church*. Thus the Marian manifestations in Malta will be joined to the Church’s great sensitivity for human and Christian problems.

3. Today the Church is conscious of the deep meaning that Mary has in the dynamic growth of ecclesial life and activity. All this can be deduced also from the flourishing of Mariological studies and Marian Congresses, and is emphasized by the experience of faith of the Christian community, to which the Second Vatican Council proposes Mary as the example, the way to follow in restoring hope to humanity (Cfr. *ibid.* 68).

Mary, who in herself is a preparation for the final Coming of the Lord, signifies the dawn of salvation for the whole world. She was fashioned and sanctified by the Holy Spirit (Cfr. *Luc.* 1, 35) and remains the type of the whole Church in faith, hope and charity. In particular, she is *a sign of hope for the pilgrim people of God*, a sign that does not disappoint the deep longings of the human heart, because by her example she shows the triumph of hope over anguish (Cfr. PAULI VI *Marialis Cultus*, 57). In her, the Mother of hope, the vocation to hope becomes universal because it contains the call to eschatological hope and to final salvation.

In this time of tensions, in preparation for the year 2000, the pilgrim People of God appeal to Mary, a sign of sure hope and consolation, personified pledge of the hope of the Church which will obtain full communion with Christ in the glory of the Resurrection. In its historical and eschatological dimension, the Christian community contemplates in Mary *the image and beginning of what it will become in its members*. This contemplation spurs it on and sustains it in the present phase of salvation. Thus all anguish for the future is replaced by the serene hope inspired by the person of Mary.

The Church, guided by Mary, builds the earthly city, while she makes her *pilgrim way* towards that eternal city. She promotes justice, peace, universal reconciliation and fidelity to the love of Christ who is the Beginning and End, the Way, the Truth and the Life (Cfr. *Io.* 14, 6)). With Mary, sign of hope, the people of God live their “fiat” of generous acceptance of the will of the Lord and, full of hope, cry out with the Apostle: “Amen, come, Lord Jesus!” (*Apoc.* 22, 20).

And with deep affection in the Lord Jesus I send my Apostolic Blessing to those who will assemble for these ecclesial events, invoking grace and peace upon all, especially upon those who suffer in any way for the glory of God and the well-being of the Church of Jesus Christ.

From the Vatican, 26 August 1983.

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