



The Holy See

**MESSAGE OF JOHN PAUL II
ON THE OCCASION OF THE 17th CENTENARY
OF THE DEATH OF THE MARTYR ST AMBROSE,
PROTECTOR OF FERENTINO AND CO-PATRON OF THE DIOCESE**

To my Venerable Brother

*Bishop Salvatore Boccaccio of Frosinone-Veroli-Ferentino*¹. Last August, under your guidance, venerable Brother, the Chapter of the Cathedral of Ferentino proclaimed a commemorative year to celebrate the 17th centenary of the death of the martyr St Ambrose, Protector of the city and Co-Patron with St Maria Salome of the beloved Diocese of Frosinone-Veroli-Ferentino. The Jubilee Year ends on 1 August this year. On this happy occasion, I wanted to join in the joy of those who are thanking the Lord for the marvels wrought through the heroic life and martyrdom of the holy centurion Ambrose, killed according to tradition on 16 August 304 during the ferocious persecution of the Emperor Diocletian. Since then, the memory of that outstanding witness of Christ has continued to accompany the Christians of Ferentino and of this diocesan Community on their journey through life. In expressing my sentiments of fraternal closeness to you, venerable Brother, I extend my thoughts to the priests who are your closest collaborators, to the men and women religious and to all the members of the People of God entrusted to your pastoral care. The patronal feast of St Ambrose the Martyr falls on 1 May in the liturgical context of the Easter Season. It is a particularly favourable time for celebrating a holy martyr, a witness par excellence of the Lord Jesus who died and rose. The passion of the Lord reveals its full salvific power in the light of the Resurrection, making it easier to understand the significance and value of Christian martyrdom. Blood poured out in communion with Christ's redemptive sacrifice is a seed of new Gospel life: of faith, hope and charity. For the Church it is a life-force, the first fruits of humanity, renewed in love and actively striving to find the kingdom of God and of his justice. St Ambrose the Martyr represents all this for the Church which believes, hopes and loves, in Ferentino and throughout the Diocese.² Many things have changed in the past 17 centuries of history. The world is profoundly different and the many human and social breakthroughs that have been achieved were due partly to the beneficial influence of the Gospel message and the generous contribution of so many generations of Christians. In our day, however, secularism is advancing, threatening to introduce even to societies evangelized in ancient times forms of agnosticism that are a real challenge to believers. In this context, the witness of those who did not hesitate to give up their lives out of fidelity to Christ and his Gospel becomes extraordinarily eloquent. By their example, they encourage Christians to be courageously consistent to the point of heroism. Only those who are ready to follow him to the very end will be able to put themselves unreservedly at the service of the human person, "the primary and fundamental way" for the mission of believers in the world (cf. Encyclical *Redemptor Hominis*, n. 14). In this regard, dear Brother, the pastoral priorities that you have chosen to put before the Ecclesial Community in this centenary year seem particularly appropriate. You rightly invite all the

baptized to seek new awareness of their missionary vocation and highlight certain priority areas for apostolic intervention: peace, young people, families, poverty, immigrants. I ask the entire diocesan Community to set out on this path intentionally and enthusiastically, motivated by the desire to make the Gospel proclamation ring out in our time and witnessing concretely to God's love for every human being. May Christians recognize in every person's face, irrespective of race or culture, and especially in the faces of the most wretched and deprived, the luminous face of Christ.³ In offering up their life, the martyrs witness to the fact that only if we keep closely united to Christ can we carry out effectively this passionate service to the human cause. This will be possible as long as we endeavour to be well-grounded in prayer, nourished by the Eucharist and the Word of God and constantly renewed in the sacrament of Reconciliation (cf. *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, part III). By his own example the martyr reminds us that the true priority of the baptized person is to strive for holiness, as the Second Vatican Council teaches in chapter V of the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*. Since the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000, I have emphasized this "pastoral urgency" several times as an indispensable condition for an authentic renewal of the Christian community. Holiness demands that we keep the eyes of our hearts fixed on the face of Christ, in imitation of Mary, the model for every believer. It is likewise necessary that each person find in the sacraments, and especially in the Eucharist, the strength to accomplish his or her own mission. Indeed, without a profound renewal of faith and holiness, without constant divine support, how could the Ecclesial Community face the great challenge of the new evangelization?⁴ May the memory and example of St Ambrose the Martyr be an encouragement and incentive for all to follow Christ in complete and docile fidelity. To help the priests, Religious and faithful of this Diocese to take this Christian journey with deeper awareness and coherence, in union with believers in every part of the world, I would like in spirit to present anew to everyone the Apostolic Letters *Novo Millennio Ineunte* and *Rosarium Virginis Mariae*, together with the Encyclical *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*. I set down in these Documents what I thought were the most indispensable instructions to help each person to enter the third millennium with hope. I gladly renew this gift to the beloved Diocese of Frosinone-Veroli-Ferentino, and invoke the heavenly intercession of its holy Patron, Ambrose the Martyr, as well as the motherly protection of Mary Most Holy, as I cordially impart a special Apostolic Blessing to you, venerable Brother, and to the faithful entrusted to your pastoral care. *From the Vatican, 27 April 2004* JOHN PAUL II