



A Pastoral Letter

On the Month of Mary

To be read at all Masses on Sunday 5th May 2024

Dear brothers and sisters,

I write at the beginning of this month of May, a month devoted to renewing our love for Mary, the Mother of God, who at the foot of the Cross, was given to us as our motherⁱ. It is Mary, full of grace and free from sin, who perfectly lives Christ's command *"To love one another"*ⁱⁱ. As the Second Vatican Council declared: *"By her maternal love, she cares for the brethren of her Son, who still journey on earth surrounded by danger and difficulties, until they are led into their blessed home"*ⁱⁱⁱ. It is in this confidence that we turn to Our Lady amid all the troubles of time saying in the words of Pope Francis: *"God has given you to us and made your Immaculate Heart a refuge for the Church and all humanity. By God's gracious will you are ever with us; even in the most troubled moments of history ..."*^{iv}

Amid the death and destruction of the First World War, the Church not only worked for peace, she joined in continuous prayer together with the Mother of Christ. The Church sensed in that troubled hour the closeness of Mary as an ever-present mother. During this worldwide prayer, Our Lady appeared to three children in the tiny hamlet of Fatima in Portugal, to remind us that the peace of the world demands we turn away from our sins and turn more trustfully to God. As in all the appearances where Our Lady in modern times, she called us to renewed Eucharistic faith and love. This is a message for us to rediscover in a year which Pope Francis has dedicated to *"rediscovering the great value and absolute need of prayer in personal life, in the life of the Church, and in the world"*^v.

In calling us to deeper prayer, the Mother of God invites us to accept her motherly help. Our Lady specifically invites us to pray with her the Gospel prayer we call 'The Rosary', that might draw closer to her Son, by meditating on the mysteries of His life, death and resurrection.

The Rosary, we can say, is a precious gift from Mary herself to help us contemplate Christ in the mysteries of His joy, His sorrow, His light and His glory. In the Rosary, it is with Mary's gaze and Mary's wonder that we keep our eyes fixed on Him. This prayer has accompanied me, and I have come to treasure it more and more along the path of life. At the Chrism Mass, I personally reflected on how the Rosary has formed an unbroken chain linking every scene and moment of my life with Gospel contemplation, intercession, reparation and praise and thanksgiving to the Holy Trinity.

The Church and the witness of her Saints encourages us all to find in the Rosary, *"The depth of the Gospel message in its entirety"* and a prayer *"destined to bring forth a harvest of holiness"*^{vi}. As Pope Saint John Paul noted, this prayer can rightly be called *"Mary's prayer: the prayer in which she feels particularly united with us (for) she herself prays with us"*^{vii}.

The month of May is an opportunity to take up this prayer anew. Let us turn to the Mother of God, who is our mother too, praying in the words of Pope Saint John Paul that amid the darkest shadows of time, *"There be revealed once more, in the history of the world, the infinite saving power of the Redemption: the power of merciful love! May it put a stop to evil. May it transform consciences. May your Immaculate Heart reveal for all the light of Hope."*

May this be so for us with Mary's help.

+ Mark

Bishop of Shrewsbury

ⁱ Cf. Jn. 19: 27

ⁱⁱ Jn. 15:17

ⁱⁱⁱ Cf. Lumen Gentium Dogmatic Constitution on the Church of the Second Vatican Council No. 62

^{iv} Act of Consecration to the Immaculate Heart of Mary, 25th March 2022

^v Angelus Address 21st January 2024

^{vi} Pope John Paul II Apostolic Letter Rosarium Virginis Mariae No. 7

^{vii} Reference needed to Pope John Paul II 13th May 1982