

April 28, 2020
Tuesday of the Third Week of Easter

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

The grace and peace of the Risen Lord be with you and your families! I'm praying every day for you, especially those of you who are fighting the coronavirus or have lost loved ones to this terrible disease.

I'm writing to share with you two important spiritual initiatives that will begin in a few days, one coming from our Holy Father, Pope Francis, and the other a joint effort of the Catholic bishops of the United States and Canada.

Last week, in a letter to the whole Church, Pope Francis wrote, "The month of May is approaching, a time when the People of God express with particular intensity their love and devotion for the Blessed Virgin Mary. It is traditional in this month to pray the Rosary at home within the family. The restrictions of the pandemic have made us come to appreciate all the more this "family" aspect ... For this reason, I encourage everyone to rediscover the beauty of praying the Rosary at home in the month of May, either as a group or individually ... contemplating the face of Christ with the heart of Mary our Mother will make us even more united as a spiritual family and will help us overcome this time of trial." The Pope has composed two prayers, either of which can be said at the conclusion of the Rosary and which can be found at the end of this letter.

On Friday, May 1, the bishops of the United States and Canada will offer prayers for the renewed consecration of both countries to Mary, under her title "Mother of the Church," asking her "to look with tender mercy and compassion on the struggles, sickness, suffering and death that many have experienced in these past weeks due to the COVID-19 pandemic" (Letter of Bishop Checchio). Our bishop will lead these prayers for our diocese on Friday at 4 pm, during a Mass live-streamed from the Cathedral of St. Francis of Assisi in Metuchen (www.stfranciscathedral.org). Prior to the Mass, at 3:30, there will be live-streamed recitation of the Rosary led by religious sisters of our diocese. The Bishop writes, "We must never doubt that our daily concerns are [Our Lord's] concerns too. And no one knows our needs better than Jesus' own mother, Mary."

As a faith community bearing Mary's name for nearly 175 years, let us enthusiastically accept the invitations of our Holy Father and our bishop and implore the protection and guidance of our patroness!

Yours in Christ,

Msgr. Benwell

Prayers of Pope Francis to be said after the Recitation of the Rosary

First Prayer: O Mary/You shine continuously on our journey/as a sign of salvation and hope/We entrust ourselves to you/ Health of the Sick/who, at the foot of the cross/were united with Jesus' suffering/and persevered in your faith.

You know our needs/and we know that you will provide/so that, as at Cana in Galilee/joy and celebration may return/after this time of trial.

Help us, Mother of Divine Love/to conform ourselves to the will of the Father/and to do what Jesus tells us/For he took upon himself our suffering/and burdened himself with our sorrows/ to bring us, through the cross/to the joy of the Resurrection. Amen.

We fly to your protection/ O Holy Mother of God/Do not despise our petitions/in our necessities/ but deliver us always/from every danger/O Glorious and Blessed Virgin.

Second Prayer: "We fly to your protection, O Holy Mother of God." In the present tragic situation, when the whole world is prey to suffering and anxiety, we fly to you, Mother of God and our Mother, and seek refuge under your protection.

Virgin Mary, turn your merciful eyes towards us amid this coronavirus pandemic. Comfort those who are distraught and mourn their loved ones who have died, and at times are buried in a way that grieves them deeply. Be close to those who are concerned for their loved ones who are sick and who, in order to prevent the spread of the disease, cannot be close to them. Fill with hope those who are troubled by the uncertainty of the future and the consequences for the economy and employment.

Mother of God and our Mother, pray for us to God, the Father of mercies, that this great suffering may end and that hope and peace may dawn anew. Plead with your divine Son, as you did at Cana, so that the families of the sick and the victims be comforted, and their hearts be opened to confidence and trust.

Protect those doctors, nurses, health workers and volunteers who are on the frontline of this emergency, and are risking their lives to save others. Support their heroic effort and grant them strength, generosity and continued health.

Be close to those who assist the sick night and day, and to priests who, in their pastoral concern and fidelity to the Gospel, are trying to help and support everyone.

Blessed Virgin, illumine the minds of men and women engaged in scientific research, that they may find effective solutions to overcome this virus.

Support national leaders, that with wisdom, solicitude and generosity they may come to the aid of those lacking the basic necessities of life and may devise social and economic solutions inspired by farsightedness and solidarity.

Mary Most Holy, stir our consciences, so that the enormous funds invested in developing and stockpiling arms will instead be spent on promoting effective research on how to prevent similar tragedies from occurring in the future.

Beloved Mother, help us realize that we are all members of one great family and to recognize the bond that unites us, so that, in a spirit of fraternity and solidarity, we can help to alleviate countless situations of poverty and need. Make us strong in faith, persevering in service, constant in prayer.

Mary, Consolation of the afflicted, embrace all your children in distress and pray that God will stretch out his all-powerful hand and free us from this terrible pandemic, so that life can serenely resume its normal course.

To you, who shine on our journey as a sign of salvation and hope, do we entrust ourselves, O Clement, O Loving, O Sweet Virgin Mary. Amen.