

Fifth Sunday of Easter, Year A (May 10, 2020)

## 1. May Is the Month of Mary

Today is the second Sunday of May, 2020. As it's also Mother's Day in Japan, I would like to offer this Mass with thanksgiving to all the mothers.

The Church dedicates the month of May to the Blessed Virgin Mary. This tradition dates back to the baroque period in the 17th century. Before that, the month of Mary didn't always take place in May. A whole specific month was dedicated to honor the Mother of God to practice thirty daily spiritual exercises. It was in the 17th century that the month of May and Mary were united, and a special devotion was prepared to practice every day throughout the month. This practice spread in the 19th century and continues to this day.

On the occasion of this special month, Pope Francis gives us the following exhortation: "The month of May is ... 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, also from a spiritual point of view." (*Letter of His Holiness Pope Francis to the Faithful for the Month of May 2000*)

## 2. With Mary, the Mother of Jesus, at Our Side, We Strengthen Our Life of Faith

From the time I was very young, my parents passed on to me the devotion: "The mother of Jesus is our mother." Later, when I was a minor seminary student, the Salesian members helped me to understand Mary's presence in the history of salvation, particularly in the life of the Catholic Church, in a deeper way. The Argentine flag has the colors of the Marian mantle, blue and white. I lived in Argentina for 33 years. In the meantime, I realized that Argentine people see Mary as their mother, protector and helper who is always with us, working on us.

Normally, May 31 is the feast of the Visitation of Mary to Elizabeth. This May 31, however, we'll celebrate the Solemnity of Pentecost Sunday according to the liturgical calendar.

Therefore, in the Diocese of Saitama, we would like to strengthen our spiritual communion by offering the rosary prayer every day with all our hearts united, because I think that the social environment brought by this novel coronavirus in a sense calls for a re-examination of our lives, especially our life of faith as disciples of Jesus.

At this stage, it's probably too early to tell. However, I believe that the challenge thrown at us by the novel coronavirus has allowed many priests, deacons, religious and laity to deepen their lives of faith with the meditation on the Word and personal prayer.

The novel coronavirus is not only attacking our physical health but diminishing the zeal for our spiritual life. I myself can't wait until the end of the day to get the latest information, and every half day I find myself trying to get more information I want: How many new cases have been reported in Saitama, Gunma, Tochigi, and Ibaraki Prefectures? How many in all of Japan? And I'm especially concerned about what and how the Japanese government will do in this next week and next month.

### 3. How Can We Strengthen Our Life of Faith in This Historical Crisis?

Responding in spirit is urgently needed. Over the centuries saints have taught that the best sustenance to keep us from dying on the way, losing sight of God, and letting our feelings get us down is "prayer". In the midst of various difficulties, it is important to eat a healthy diet and not miss out on rest and exercise in order to avoid a decline in our health, especially in the mental aspect. At the same time, it is especially necessary to continue the spiritual battle lest we give in to the temptation to discourage the habit of prayer.

Let us keep the spiritual challenge daily. First, I invite all my brother priests in the diocese to use this May as an opportunity to make our parish community a community of prayer. In the face of persecution by enemies invisible to the naked eye, let us not only gather before the statue of the Virgin Mary at the chapel but be a community where we remain in unity as a family.

My dear priests, I ask you to pray and listen to the voice in your hearts. What specifically does the Holy Spirit invoke in us to strengthen our life of faith?

One simple suggestion from me: Let us become more united through the rosary prayer, for it can conform our lives to those of Jesus and Mary, the models of faith, by offering each mystery. Let us make each of our parishes into a community united by the rosary prayer as we did after Tohoku earthquake and tsunami on March 11, 2011. When we recite each mystery, let us offer it with intentions such as praying for the sick and the dead or giving thanks to God for the blessings we have received.

My dear priests in the Diocese of Saitama, I invite every one of you to share when to pray the rosary with your own parishioners so that they can join the prayer circle from wherever each of them is to pray with their hearts united.

May the life of the Holy Spirit shine in our community.

May the Blessed Mother Mary be with us and strengthen our life of faith.