



**Message on the Month of the Blessed Mother
His Grace Most Reverend Francis Leo
Metropolitan Archbishop of Toronto**

1 May 2024

In her, through her, and with her¹

My Dear Brothers and Sisters in the Lord,

May Jesus and Mary be in your souls.

In our Catholic devotional life, Holy Mother Church, for many centuries now, has assigned special devotions to each month of the year to help us grow closer to the Lord and advance along the path of holiness. May, of course, is the month dedicated entirely to the Mother of Jesus, Mary most holy. Let me begin my reflection by highlighting the inspiring words of Pope St. Paul VI with respect to this extraordinary month of grace: “The month of May is almost here, a month which the piety of the faithful has long dedicated to Mary, the Mother of God. Our heart rejoices at the thought of the moving tribute of faith and love which will soon be paid to the Queen of Heaven in every corner of the earth. For this is the month during which Christians, in their churches and their homes, offer the Virgin Mother more fervent and loving acts of homage and veneration; and it is the month in which a greater abundance of God’s merciful gifts comes down to us from our Mother’s throne.”²

Consequently, we intentionally and wholeheartedly honour, celebrate and venerate the Blessed Ever Virgin Mary, who was entrusted to us by Our Lord on the Cross as our spiritual Mother and entrusted us to her as her beloved children (cf. Jn 19:25-27). The tradition of dedicating the month of May to Mary goes back as far as at least the thirteenth century. Pilgrimages, prayers, various devotional practices, and liturgical rites in veneration of Our Lady during this month have long been a mainstay of Catholic piety, including May crownings. As Pope St. Paul VI had intuited: there is an even greater outpouring of God’s graces showered upon us this very month thanks to Divine Providence who wills that these blessings come to us through the Mother of Christ. It is truly significant and vital to have filial recourse to The Mother so as to benefit more abundantly from the mercy, generosity and help of the Lord.

Consecration to Our Blessed Mother is another meaningful form of Marian piety.³ When we consecrate ourselves to Mary, we offer the entirety of ourselves along with the merits of our

¹ Pope St. Paul VI, *Mense Maio*, 29 April 1965, 1.

² Pope St. Paul VI, *Mense Maio*, 29 April 1965, 1.

³ The Holy Father, Francis asked that the faithful renew their consecration to the Blessed Virgin Mary annually on March 25-Solemnity of the Annunciation: “I would therefore like to invite every believer and community, especially prayer groups, to renew the act of consecration to Our Lady every 25 March, so that she, who is Mother, may preserve us all in unity and peace.” Pope Francis, *General Audience*, 22 March 2023.



prayers⁴ to her as Mother and Queen, Intercessor and Advocate, Sister and Companion. The reason we offer Our Lady all our works is so that we can belong more fully to Jesus, knowing that she can do greater things with our small offerings than we can on our own. She wants only the best for us, and we give her everything so she can present it all to Jesus.⁵ Let us be reminded that true devotion to the Mother of Jesus “consists neither in sterile or transitory affection, nor in a certain vain credulity, but proceeds from true faith, by which we are led to know the excellence of the Mother of God, and we are moved to a filial love toward our mother and to the imitation of her virtues.”⁶

Similarly, numerous Roman Pontiffs have encouraged the faithful to honour the Blessed Mother during the month of May. Pope Pius XII distinguished pious acts devoted to Mary as distinct from the Sacred Liturgy, but nevertheless recommended them because of their “special import and dignity.”⁷ Pope St. Paul VI not only reminded the faithful that May is the specific month we dedicate to her, he also requested special prayers for world peace during this time.⁸ In 2020, at a time of great upheaval and uncertainty with the global pandemic in our midst, Pope Francis continued this tradition, requesting that we seek Mother Mary’s loving and powerful intercession and recommending the Rosary be prayed at home, in families.⁹ Pope St. John Paul II likewise referred to the month of May as a “*Marian month*,” encouraging the faithful to celebrate it with “many devout liturgical, catechetical and pastoral initiatives.”¹⁰

It is the Church’s faith that at the heart of all Marian devotion is Our Lord Jesus Christ himself. This makes sense because at the heart of every mother is their child. The Church has long recognized this reality; namely that the surest path to Jesus is through Mary - the surest path to Mercy is the Mother of Mercy.¹¹ Spiritual writers and theologians alike have often sought clarity and insight into the life of Jesus and Mary in a complimentary way. Vatican II taught that: “Mary, in a way, unites in her person and re-echoes the most important doctrines of the faith: and when she is the subject of preaching and worship she prompts the faithful to come to her Son, to his sacrifice and to the love of the Father.”¹²

⁴ St. Louis-Marie Grignion de Montfort explained that true devotion “consists in giving oneself entirely to the Blessed Virgin, in order to belong entirely to Jesus Christ through her.” (*True Devotion*, 121).

⁵ “The act of consecration is a conscious recognition of the singular role of Mary in the Mystery of Christ and of the Church, of the universal and exemplary importance of her witness to the Gospel, of trust in her intercession, and of the efficacy of her patronage, of the many maternal functions she has, since she is a true mother in the order of grace to each and every one of her children,” Dicastery for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, *Directory on Popular Piety and the Liturgy: Principles and Guidelines*, 204.

⁶ Vatican Council II, *Lumen Gentium*, 67.

⁷ Pope Pius XII, *Mediator Dei*, 20 November 1947, 182.

⁸ Pope St. Paul VI, *Mense Maio*, 29 April 1965, 1.

⁹ Pope Francis, *Letter of His Holiness Pope Francis to the Faithful for the Month of May 2020*, 25 April 2020.

¹⁰ Pope St. John Paul II, *General Audience*, 1 May 2002, 2.

¹¹ St. Louis-Marie Grignion de Montfort encouraged the faithful to go “To Jesus through Mary” (*True Devotion* 121, 123, 124).

¹² Vatican Council II, *Lumen Gentium*, 65.



This relationship has led the Church to clearly profess that what it “believes about Mary is based on what it believes about Christ, and what it teaches about Mary illumines in turn its faith in Christ.”¹³ The Council of Ephesus (AD 431) is a good example of this complementarity. At Ephesus the Council Fathers affirmed that the two natures of Christ, divine and human, are hypostatically united in his one Divine Person; consequently, Our Lady is and can be rightfully called the “Mother of God,” or “*Theotokos*.”¹⁴ Our communion with God and with others is enriched immeasurably when we seek out the Mother of God, Mother of unity, who gathers, protects, guides and teaches us most profoundly about her Son, Our Lord Jesus Christ.¹⁵

As the first, the model and the most perfect disciple of Christ, Mary demonstrates a path to sanctity even in the face of adversity. As the Vatican Council teaches: “by her maternal charity, she cares for the brethren of her Son, who still journey on earth surrounded by dangers and difficulties, until they are led into the happiness of their true home.”¹⁶ Moreover, Mary is THE way to get closer to the Saviour and when we have a deep, authentic and personal relationship with her, she leads us, without fail, directly to him. This is her vocation, her mission, her calling as willed by the Lord’s loving providence. Having recourse to Our Lady and experiencing the act of “bringing her home” as the Beloved Disciple did¹⁷ (cf. Jn 19:27) - into our lives, our faith, our relationships, families and our communities - she will care for us by her maternal mediation in Christ¹⁸ and lead us to a more profound relationship with her Beloved Son as well as a renewed sense and vigour of building his kingdom of peace and justice on earth.

In addition, let us consider the following, stirring words by Pope St. Paul VI, who in an almost poetic fashion proclaims the Church’s faith in Mary: “We are delighted and consoled by this pious custom associated with the month of May, which pays honor to the Blessed Virgin and brings such rich benefits to the Christian people. Since Mary is rightly to be regarded as the way by which we are led to Christ, the person who encounters Mary cannot help but encounter Christ likewise. For what other reason do we continually turn to Mary except to seek the Christ in her arms, to seek our Savior in her, through her, and with her? To Him men are to turn amid the anxieties and perils of this world, urged on by duty and driven by the compelling needs of their heart, to find a haven of salvation, a transcendent fountain of life.”¹⁹

Our world is filled with competing worldviews and ideologies that can lead to feelings of being overwhelmed and discouraged. While this reaction is understandable, it need not be our only recourse. We root ourselves, our very existence and daily living, in Christ Jesus, and we hold true that in the midst of turmoil and upheaval - Jesus is the answer; consequently, seeking the

¹³ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 487.

¹⁴ Council of Ephesus, *Ep. II Cyrilli ad Nestorium*, (431): DS 250, 251.

¹⁵ Pope St. John Paul II, *Rosarium Virginis Mariae*, 16 October 2002, 1,3,14,43.

¹⁶ Vatican Council II, *Lumen Gentium*, 62.

¹⁷ Pope St. John Paul II, *Redemptoris Mater*, 25 March 1987, 23-24, 45-47.

¹⁸ Pope St. John Paul II, *Redemptoris Mater*, 25 March 1987, 21-22 and Part III – Maternal Mediation.

¹⁹ Pope St. Paul VI, *Mense Maio*, 29 April 1965, 2.



Blessed Mother's intercession is the key to achieving this answer. When faced with uncertainty and perplexing events in her own life, Myriam of Nazareth did not "wonder" but "pondered," not fully understanding, yet always remaining faithful (Lk 2:19). Like Mary we are called to "ponder," the uncertainties and perplexities, the mysteries and the callings of this life in a way that leads to a deepening faith and trust in God. It was Mary's unwavering faith, trust, humility and charity that led to her "*fiat*," (Lk 1:38); and it was her "*fiat*" that would eventually lead her to seek to not only "magnify" the Lord with her entire being, but to "rejoice" in God her Saviour as well (Lk 1:46-47).

Dear Brothers and Sisters, during the entirety of this blessed month, I encourage you to take the time to re-read and meditate upon this Marian reflection whether alone or with others in community asking ourselves what kind of relationship we have with Mother Mary and what are the next steps we are prompted to take on this journey. Finally, I humbly urge all the faithful in the Archdiocese of Toronto, our families and parishes, schools and other faith, religious and ecclesial communities and institutions, to get to know Our Lady in a deeper, personal way; to approach her with filial devotion, speaking with her daily with all our hearts; to experience her motherly closeness as we share everything with her; and to emulate her virtuous life of faith, so that in spending time *pondering* with complete faith and trust the great things that the Lord accomplishes in our lives and throughout the archdiocese, we may truly, with her, *magnify* Him each day *joyfully*.

Blessings upon you in Jesus with Mary!

Sincerely Yours in Jesus with Mary,

Most Rev. Francis Leo
Metropolitan Archbishop of Toronto