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Mary, Mother of the Church

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The month of May is traditionally dedicated to the Blessed Virgin Mary, with May crownings and other Marian devotions taking place in our parishes. This year Pope Francis has given the Church another way to honor our Blessed Mother by adding a new celebration to the Church's liturgical calendar. From now on, the memorial of Mary, Mother of the Church, will be celebrated on the Monday after Pentecost, and this year it falls on May 21.

This new memorial is especially fitting since Mary was the first disciple of Jesus, the first to believe the Good News that God was sending his own Son as our Savior, and that he would save us from our sins. Throughout her life, she lived this faith and is a model of perfect discipleship. Her words at the wedding feast of Cana say it best: "Do whatever he tells you."

One of the most touching images from the Gospel is of Mary standing at the foot of the cross of Jesus, with John, the beloved disciple of our Lord. As Jesus gives his life for his people, she hears him say "Woman, behold your son." And to John he says, "Behold your mother." From its earliest days, the Church has recognized in this scene an image of Mary's spiritual motherhood. Jesus himself gives Mary to John and John to Mary. John represents all of us who are members of his family, the Church, and Mary becomes our spiritual mother.

In the decree establishing this new liturgical feast, Cardinal Robert Sarah wrote: "Indeed, the Mother standing beneath the cross accepted her Son's testament of love and welcomed all people in the person of the beloved disciple as sons and daughters to be reborn unto life eternal. She thus became the tender Mother of the Church which Christ begot on the cross, handing on the Spirit. Christ, in turn, in the beloved disciple, chose all disciples as ministers of his love towards his Mother, entrusting her to them so that they might welcome her with filial affection."

Mary's motherhood is also seen in her presence with the early Church in the Upper Room, where she prayed with the Apostles while they waited for the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. Mary, who had spent more time with Jesus than any other person, supported his disciples with prayer and with her peaceful faith and presence. And as the Church, the Body of Christ, was sent forth in the power of the Spirit, Mary was there with them.

Quoting St. Augustine, Cardinal Sarah also wrote: "Mary is the mother of the members of Christ, because with charity she cooperated in the rebirth of the faithful into the Church." Mary becomes a mother to us when we are reborn in baptism and receive new life in Christ. She accompanies and guides us on our journey of faith and continues to lead us to her Son. She intercedes for us that the Christ-life within us might deepen and grow.

Without a doubt, the rosary is one of the best ways for us to grow closer to Mary, and through her, to Jesus. In the rosary we reflect on the mysteries of our faith, from his incarnation and birth all the way to his resurrection and ascension. The rosary encompasses the faith of the Church, and with Mary we enter more deeply into the mystery of Christ's love for us. For many centuries the rosary has been a favorite prayer of the faithful because it allows us to walk with Mary, our Mother, through the mysteries of our salvation. The rosary is also a great prayer of intercession, for our families, for friends, for the Church, and for our community. The rosary is especially fitting for families, and allows parents and children to come together and pray *as a family*, each with their own part. The rosary can strengthen marriages, bring together parents and children, and provide a few moments of peace in our busy family lives. Because it draws us so personally into the mysteries of our Lord, the rosary is a powerful spiritual shield against temptation and evil. Even if we only have time to pray one decade of the rosary, we will be blessed with the grace of our Lord and the nearness of his beloved Mother.

Another way we can honor our Blessed Mother is to simply pray and participate actively in the life of the Church. Each one of us has a place in the Church as members of the Body of Christ. Jesus did not intend us to be isolated from one another, and he formed his Church very deliberately. As a communion of the faithful spread throughout the world, we are united in the person of Jesus, and he calls each of us to support the others with our prayer and works of charity. The Church is very human in the

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frailty of its members, so we need to pray for one another every day, entrusting this vast spiritual family to the mercy of God and the intercession of Mary, our Mother.

High above St. Peter's Square in Vatican City, there is a beautiful image of Mary, Mother of the Church – *Mater Ecclesiae*. Placed there by Pope St. John Paul II in 1981, it reminds us that our Blessed Mother always watches over the Church of her Son and offers us her maternal love. This month, as we celebrate Mary, Mother of the Church, let us turn to her with confidence and remember that she will never forget us, her spiritual children.