



The Holy See

RECITAL OF THE HOLY ROSARY

ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER POPE FRANCIS

Papal Basilica of St Mary Major

Saturday, 4 May 2013

[Multimedia]

Photo Gallery

I thank His Eminence, the Archpriest of this Basilica, for his words at the beginning. Thank you [Cardinal Santos Abril y Castelló], brother and friend, our friendship that was born in that Country at the ends of the earth! Thank you so much. I am thankful for the presence of the Cardinal Vicar, the Cardinals, Bishops and Priests. And I thank you, brothers and sisters, who have come here today to pray to Our Lady, the Mother, the *Salus Populi Romani* [Health of the Roman people]. For tonight we are here before Mary. We have prayed under her motherly leadership that she guide us to be ever more united to her Son Jesus. We have brought her our joys and our suffering, our hopes and our struggles; we have invoked her by the beautiful title of *Salus Populi Romani* imploring her for us all, for Rome, for the world that she grant us health. Yes, because Mary gives us health, she is our health.

Jesus Christ, by his Passion, Death and Resurrection, has brought us salvation, granting us the grace and the joy of being children of God, to truly call him by the name of Father. Mary is the mother, and a mother worries above all about the health of her children, she knows how to care for them always with great and tender love. Our Lady guards our health. What does this mean: Our Lady guards our health? I think above all of three things: she helps us grow, to confront life, to be free.

1. A mother helps her children grow up and wants them to grow strong; that is why she teaches them not to be lazy — which can also derive from a certain kind of wellbeing — not to sink into a comfortable life-style, contenting oneself with possessions. The mother takes care that her children develop better, that they grow strong, capable of accepting responsibilities, of engaging in

life, of striving for great ideals. The Gospel of St Luke tells us that, in the family of Nazareth, Jesus “grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favour of God was upon him” (Lk 2:40). Our Lady does just this for us, she helps us to grow as human beings and in the faith, to be strong and never to fall into the temptation of being human beings and Christians in a superficial way, but to live responsibly, to strive ever higher.

2. A mother then thinks of the health of her children, teaching them also *to face the difficulties of life*. You do not teach, you do not take care of health by avoiding problems, as though life were a motorway with no obstacles. The mother helps her children to see the problems of life realistically and not to get lost in them, but to confront them with courage, not to be weak, and to know how to overcome them, in a healthy balance that a mother “senses” between the area of security and the area of risk. And a mother can do this! She does not always take the child along the safe road, because in that way the child cannot develop, but neither does she leave the child only on the risky path, because that is dangerous. A mother knows how to balance things. A life without challenges does not exist and a boy or a girl who cannot face or tackle them is a boy or girl with no backbone!

Let us remember the parable of the good Samaritan: Jesus does not approve of the behaviour of the priest or the Levite, who both avoid helping the man who was attacked by robbers, but the Samaritan who sees that man’s state and confronts it in a concrete way, despite the risks. Mary saw many difficult moments in her life, from the birth of Jesus, when “there was no place for them in the inn” (Lk 2:7), to Calvary (cf. Jn 19:25). And like a good mother she is close to us, so that we may never lose courage before the adversities of life, before our weakness, before our sins: she gives us strength, she shows us the path of her Son.

Jesus from the Cross says to Mary, indicating John: “Woman, behold your son!” and to John: “Here is your mother!” (cf. Jn 19:26-27). In that disciple, we are all represented: the Lord entrusts us to the loving and tender hands of the Mother, that we might feel her support in facing and overcoming the difficulties of our human and Christian journey; to never be afraid of the struggle, to face it with the help of the mother.

3. Lastly, a good mother not only accompanies her children in their growth, without avoiding the problems and challenges of life; a good mother also helps them *to make definitive decisions with freedom*. This is not easy, but a mother knows how to do it. But what does freedom mean? It is certainly not doing whatever you want, allowing yourself to be dominated by the passions, to pass from one experience to another without discernment, to follow the fashions of the day; freedom does not mean, so to speak, throwing everything that you don’t like out the window. No, that is not freedom! Freedom is given to us so that we know how to make good decisions in life! Mary as a good mother teaches us to be, like her, capable of making definitive decisions; definitive choices, at this moment in a time controlled by, so to speak, a philosophy of the provisional. It is very difficult to make a lifetime commitment. And she helps us to make those definitive decisions in the

full freedom with which she said “yes” to the plan God had for her life (cf. Lk 1:38).

Dear brothers and sisters, it is so hard in our time to make final decisions! Deciding everything with the total freedom with which she answered “yes” to God’s plan for her life (cf. Lk 1:38). Dear brothers and sisters, how difficult it is take a final decision in our time. Temporary things seduce us. We are victims of a trend that pushes us to the provisional... as though we wanted to stay adolescents. There is a little charm in staying adolescents, and this for life! Let us not be afraid of life commitments, commitments that take up and concern our entire life! In this way our life will be fruitful! And this is freedom: to have the courage to make these decisions with generosity.

Mary’s whole life is a hymn to life, a hymn of love to life: she generated Jesus in the flesh and accompanied the birth of the Church on Calvary and in the Upper Room. The *Salus Populi Romani* is the mother that gives us health in growth, she gives us health in facing and overcoming problems, she gives us the health to make us free to make definitive choices. The mother teaches us how to be fruitful, to be open to life and to always bear good fruit, joyful fruit, hopeful fruit, and never to lose hope, to give life to others, physical and spiritual life.

This we ask tonight, O Mary, *Salus Populi Romani*, for the people of Rome, for all of us: give us the health that you alone can give us, to be ever a sign and instrument of life. Amen.

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Upon leaving the Basilica, the Holy Father spoke the following words from the steps to the people gathered in the Square:

Dear brothers and sisters, good evening! Thank you very much for your presence in the house of the Mother of Rome, of our Mother. Long live the *Salus Populi Romani*. Long live Our Lady. She is our Mother. Let us entrust ourselves to her, because she cares for us like a *buona mamma* [good mom]. I pray for you, but I ask you to pray for me, because I need it. Three Hail Mary’s for me. I wish you a good Sunday tomorrow. Goodbye. Now I give you my Blessing — to you and to your whole family. May God Almighty bless you. Have a good Sunday.