Vatican



Pope Francis prays after leading the recitation of the rosary during a prayer service at the Lourdes grotto in the Vatican Gardens May 30, 2020. (CNS/Paul Haring)

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With a religious sister who survived COVID-19 and a woman who lost her mother to the coronavirus, Pope Francis led the recitation of rosary and asked Mary to intercede to save the world from the pandemic.

More than 100 people joined Francis May 30 for the early evening prayer in the Vatican Gardens at a replica of the grotto at Lourdes, France. More than 50 Marian shrines around the world, including Lourdes and the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington, were connected by satellite.

Francis did not make remarks or offer a meditation during the service. Instead he opened and closed the evening with the prayers he had asked Catholics to pray during the month of May, a month traditionally dedicated to Mary.

He began by entrusting everyone to Mary under the title "Health of the Sick."

Chairs in the little square in front of the grotto were set 5 feet apart, and most people wore a mask.

A brief rain storm, which ended about an hour before the rosary began, seemed to energize the parakeets and other birds in the garden; they accompanied the prayer with their song and zipped back and forth over the little congregation.

Each decade of the rosary was led by a person directly impacted by the virus, including COVID-19 survivors Giovanni De Cerce and Sister Zelia Andrighetti, superior general of the Daughters of St. Camillus.

Tea Pompeo, who is mourning her mother, represented those who lost a loved one during the pandemic. And Federica Polinari and Manuele Bartoli, with newborn Iacopo, represented families who had welcomed a new life into the world during the lockdown.

Two doctors, a nurse, a pharmacist, a hospital chaplain, a television journalist and a civil protection volunteer also represented their peers.

A short reading from Scripture preceded the proclamation of the five glorious mysteries of the rosary: the resurrection of Jesus, his ascension into heaven, the descent of the Holy Spirit, Mary's assumption into heaven and the crowning of Mary as queen of heaven and earth.

Closing the rosary with the second prayer he wrote for Catholics this year, Francis repeated the ancient and traditional prayer to Mary, "Sub tuum praesidium," or "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," the pope recited.

The pope invoked Mary's comfort for those who are distraught or are in mourning, for the sick and their loved ones who cannot be with them for fear of spreading the coronavirus further.

"Fill with hope those who are troubled by the uncertainty of the future and the consequences for the economy and employment," he prayed.

The pope remembered front-line workers, government leaders who must find the best ways to protect their people and scientists working to find a cure and a vaccine.

"Beloved mother," he said, "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," Francis prayed.

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