

Five Reasons We Turn to Mary in Times of Crisis

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Earlier this year when the devastating effects of the COVID-19 pandemic became clear, and thousands—then millions—of people throughout the world were effected by physical, spiritual, economic and psychological hardships, including severe sickness and death, I began to implore the Blessed Virgin Mary, Health of the Sick, on a daily basis for her intercession and help. Throughout the ages, Christians have turned to Mary in times of war, pestilence and famine. In troubled times like these, she is a sure refuge, a source of comfort and hope.



My religious order, the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer (Redemptorists) maintains a particular devotion to Mary under the title *Mater de Perpetuo Succursu* (Mother of Perpetual Help). As guardians of the 15th century Byzantine icon that bears this holy name, for more than 150 years my community has promoted devotion to Our Lady of Perpetual Help as a means of helping people in all regions of the world draw closer to Mary, the Mother of God and our mother.

Pope Francis has frequently said that his favorite image for the Church is her motherhood. “The Church is feminine,” Pope Francis says. “She is a mother.” Of course, Mary is the model, the inspiration for the Church’s motherhood and for all that is holy, compassionate and loving in the Church’s life and ministry. When Mary’s influence is missing or weak, the Church no longer acts as a loving mother.

That’s why we should turn to Mary in both good times and troubled times. As Mother of Perpetual Help, she is always ready to assist us, always there for us, constantly prepared to seek her Son’s guidance and support for all her children. Especially in times of grave danger, such as the current pandemic, Mary offers hope, healing and comfort to all who are in need of her maternal care.

As I reflect on our current crisis, and the serious challenges it presents to individuals, families, communities and nations in all regions of the world, I see five major reasons (among many more) why we should turn to Mary our mother for her intercession and help.

Here are my five reasons.

1. People are sick and dying. Throughout the Church's history, Christians have sought Mary's intercession in times of serious illness including pestilence and plagues. As a loving mother, Mary always responds with comfort and the healing grace of her Son.

Most Holy Mother, Health of the Sick, please stay close to all who are suffering from the effects of this deadly virus. Comfort those who mourn the loss of loved ones. Encourage caregivers, first responders and all who provide essential services often at great risk to themselves.

2. People are frightened, lonely and depressed. Mary's loving presence offers courage and hope during frightening times, especially when we are isolated from family and friends. She reassures us and reminds us that we are never alone, never without the consolation and hope won for us by her Son's suffering, death and resurrection to new life.

Mother of Holy Hope, inspire us by your perseverance and courage. Help us see that we are not going through this time of trial alone. Show us the way to Jesus, and help us to accept your loving presence as a sure sign that even in this time of social distancing, your Son holds us in his loving embrace and says to each one of us: "Be not afraid!"

3. People are out of work or afraid they will lose their jobs. Mary is alternately invoked as Our Lady of Abundance and as Mother of the Poor. She stands with us when the economy is growing and when there is widespread poverty and unemployment. She reminds us to be good stewards of all God's gifts and to share generously with others, especially the poor.

Our Lady of Guadalupe, patroness of all the Americas, you know the riches and the poverty of the lands we share with all our sisters and brothers here. Teach us to be grateful and generous stewards. Intercede for all who are poor. Reassure all who are frightened. Help us to help each other so that no one has to go without his or her share of God's abundance.

4. People are longing for the sacraments, especially the Eucharist. Mary shows us the way to her Son. She is a sacrament of God's presence in the world, the Gateway to Grace and a model for the Church's prayer and worship. Deprived of access to the sacraments, and to liturgy *cum populo* (with our sisters and brothers), we understandably turn to Mary in the Rosary and other devotional prayers to help fill the spiritual gaps that exist in our lives.

Mary, Mother of the Church, pray for us. Teach us to seek and find your Son, Jesus, in the prayer and worship of the Church, in the sacraments and in intercessory prayers to you and all the saints. Queen of the Most Holy Rosary, help us to be patient and understanding until the day we can safely reopen our churches and once again make the sacraments available to all.

5. People need wise, prudent and compassionate leadership—now more than ever. Mary is the Mother of the Good Shepherd. His teaching and example powerfully illustrate the meaning and vital importance of servant leadership. We implore the Mother of our Lord to help all our leaders in society and in the Church set aside their personal and political agendas so that they can place the needs of others first and foremost.

Mother of Justice and of Mercy, pray for all who are leaders. Inspire us by your obedience to God's will and your readiness to sacrifice your own needs and desires for the good of all. Open our minds and hearts to the selfless witness given to us by your Son so that we can lead our people with humility, wisdom and courage.

In conclusion, I would like to once again make my own Pope Francis's prayer to Our Lady, Health of the Sick, which uses the words of an ancient prayer, *Sub tuum praesidium*, actually the oldest hymn to Mary, the Mother of God, to implore her protection during the coronavirus epidemic:

O Mary, you shine continuously on our journey as a sign of salvation and hope. We entrust ourselves to you, Health of the Sick. At the foot of the Cross you participated in Jesus' pain, with steadfast faith. You know what we need. We are certain that you will provide, so that, as you did at Cana of Galilee, joy and feasting might return after this moment of trial. Help us, Mother of Divine Love, to conform ourselves to the Father's will and to do what Jesus tells us: He who took our sufferings upon Himself, and bore our sorrows to bring us, through the Cross, to the joy of the Resurrection. Amen.

We seek refuge under your protection, O Holy Mother of God. Do not despise our pleas – we who are put to the test – and deliver us from every danger, O glorious and blessed Virgin. Amen.

Holy Mary, we entrust to your maternal care the health and safety of all our brothers and sisters here in the Archdiocese of Newark and throughout the world. Help us to trust in the healing power of your Son and to stay close to one another spiritually even as we are required to maintain a safe distance physically.

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