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POPE PAUL TURNS TO MARY

Mense Maio (The Month of May) is Pope Paul's second encyclical. Very short as encyclicals go, it is concerned principally with the Church and with world peace. With the fourth and final session of Vatican Council II now in preparation Christians might expect Pope Paul to ask for prayers that its work for the Church will be brought to a successful conclusion. And in the light of hostilities in Viet Nam, in the Dominican Republic, on the border between India and Pakistan, it is not surprising that the Holy Father should make a plea for world peace.



What many Christians might consider unusual about the encyclical is that Pope Paul puts such great stress on the intercessory power of Mary, an emphasis which certainly rubs the wrong way those Catholics and Protestants who consider Mary a stumbling block to Christian unity. It is a Marian encyclical almost as much as it is a plea for the Church and for world peace.

"Mense Maio," the encyclical begins. . . "As the month of May draws near [the encyclical was issued on April 30], a month which the piety of the faithful has especially dedicated to Our Blessed Lady, we are gladdened at the thought of the moving tribute of faith which Catholics in every part of the world will soon be paying to the Queen of Heaven.

"For this is the month during which Christians, both in church and in the privacy of the home, offer up to Mary from their hearts an especially fervent and loving homage of prayer and veneration. In this month, too, the gifts of God's mercy come down to us from her throne in greater abundance.

ROSARY AND HYMNS. . . .

. . . at the Grotto. . .

. 6:45 p.m.

Tonight Cavanaugh Hall
Monday Lyons Hall
Tuesday St. Ed's Hall

"This pious practice, by which the Blessed Virgin is honored and the Christian people enriched with spiritual gifts, gladdens and consoles us. Mary remains ever the path that leads to Christ. Every encounter with her can only result in an encounter with Christ Himself.

"For what other reason do we continually turn to Mary than to seek for the

Christ she holds in her arms -- to seek in her, through her, and with her the Saviour to whom men, in the perplexities and dangers of life here below, must of necessity have recourse, and to whom they feel the ever-recurring need of turning as to a haven of safety and an all-surpassing source of life?

"It is precisely because the month of May is a powerful incentive to more fervent and trusting prayer, and because during it our petitions find their way more easily to the compassionate heart of Our Blessed Lady, that it has been a custom dear to our predecessors to choose this month dedicated to Mary, for inviting the Christian people to offer up public prayers, whenever the needs of the Church demanded it, or whenever danger hovering menacingly over the world."

By way of this long introduction extolling Mary Pope Paul gets to the central message of his encyclical -- the needs of the Church and the dangers hovering over the world.

In "this historic moment in the life of the Church, the period of the ecumenical council" the Church is faced, in the words of Pope Paul "with the immense problem of how to renew herself in accordance with the needs of the times." It may well be a long time after the present Council Fathers adjourn for the last time that the full effect of this latest universal synod will be felt in the Christian community. We are asked to pray that the family of the Church -- clergy, religious, laity -- will respond to all the conciliar decrees, as well as to their post-conciliar instruments of implementation, in a spirit of obedience, loyalty and charity.

Next the Holy Father commends to our prayers the cause of world peace. He describes the international situation as "darker and more uncertain than ever, now that grave new threats are endangering the supreme benefit of world peace." Specific types of inhumanity are cited by Pope Paul VI as deserving of severest censure. All of them can be summed up in a single atrocity, an utter disregard for the dignity of human life. "We cannot fail," he says specifically, "to condemn acts of guerrilla warfare and of terrorism, the practice of holding hostages and of taking reprisals against unarmed civilians."

And while he urges "all who hold responsibility in public life" to "do all in their power to preserve the peace that is threatened and continue at all times to foster and encourage conversations and negotiations at all levels so that the dangerous resort to force with all its lamentable consequences, material, spiritual, and moral, may be halted," Pope Paul reminds the world that peace "is not merely of our own making," that it is "a gift from God."

And at this point Pope Paul once more turns to Our Lady. "Therefore, we will do our utmost to obtain this incomparable blessing by prayer, praying indeed with constancy and watchfulness, as the Church has always prayed from her earliest days, and in a special way calling on the intercession and protection of the Virgin Mary, who is

the Queen of Peace."

"So, venerable brothers [the members of the hierarchy to whom an encyclical is always addressed], let our prayers ascend to Mary in this month of hers, to implore her graces and favors with increased fervor and confidence. . .

"May she, who knows the sufferings and troubles of life here below, the weariness of every work, the hardship and privations of poverty, the sufferings of Calvary, bring help to the needs of the Church and the world, heed the appeals for peace rising to her from every part of the world, and enlighten those who rule the destinies of men.

"May she prevail on God, Lord of the winds and storms, to still also the tempests in men's conflicting hearts and 'grant us peace in our time,' true peace based on the solid lasting foundations of justice and love -- of justice granted to the weakest as well as to the strongest and of love which prevents egoism from leading men astray, so that each one's rights may be safeguarded without forgetfulness or the denial of the rights of others.

"Inform the faithful in your charge, venerable brothers, in whatever way you judge best, of our wishes and exhortation, and make provision for special prayers in each diocese and every parish during this coming month of May, devoting in a special manner the feast of Our Lady, Queen of Heaven [May 31], to solemn public prayers for the intentions we have mentioned.

"We would point out that we rely particularly on the prayers of the innocent and the suffering, for their voices more than any others reach Heaven and disarm God's justice.

"And since this is a fitting occasion do not fail to lay careful stress on the saying of the Rosary, the prayer so dear to Our Lady and so highly recommended by the supreme pontiffs. By this means the faithful can most pleasingly and most effectively carry out our Divine Master's command: 'Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and you shall find; knock, and it shall be opened' (Matt. 7:7)."

This latest papal document should dispel all vestiges of the notion that the role of Mary in the Church is to be de-emphasized.

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IN YOUR CHARITY please pray for the following: Deceased -- mother of Leonard Joseph McCue of the Law School; grandfather of Tom Goode-now of Cavanaugh; uncle of Paul Cunney of Dillon; uncle of James Locher of Farley; friend of Terry Daily of Sorin; Leo C. DeOrsey, father of Robert, '52; father of John E. McHale, Jr., '50; D. Richard McAuliffe, '25; Joseph J. Trucco, '54; friend of Fred Morelli of St. Ed's; mother of John A. Czerwiec, '47; father of John C. Bruno, '63.

KARL RAHNER on "The Appeal to Conscience"

It goes without saying that a man must obey his conscience. For conscience is the most immediate giver of moral imperatives, and can never be passed over. Even if a conscience were objectively wrong about something, but in the concrete case the error could not be corrected, it would still have to be obeyed, because by its very nature it can never rightly be switched off or set aside or got round. . . . But . . . the conscience is not automatically infallible; it can easily make mistakes and it is very difficult to distinguish its voice -- the real voice of conscience -- from the voice of precipitation, passion, convenience or self-will, or of moral primitiveness which cannot see the finer distinctions or the more remote consequences of the act. And so man has a duty to do everything he can to conform his conscience to the objective moral law, to inform himself and let himself be taught and make himself prepared to accept (how difficult this often is!) instruction from the word of God, the magisterium of the Church and every just authority in its own sphere.

. . . Because the unique individual exists, there exists also an individual morality and a corresponding function of the conscience. But because the individual does not take away the universal, but by God's will lies within what is universally human in him, there is an individual morality only within a universal normative morality (but it is nevertheless there, although it is only too often overlooked); and there are individual moral imperatives only within the framework of universal Christian morality; and they can never go outside it.

It is right that the Christian conscience should be mature. . . . But this maturity of the Christian conscience is not an emancipation from and casting off of the universal norms preached by the Gospel and the Church by appealing to a unique situation and one's own conscience; it is the ability to apply these norms oneself to a concrete situation without needing help in every case, and the ability to see moral duties and obligations also in cases where the official universal norms are too abstract and general to be applied by their official exponents, either without great difficulty or at all.

. . . The fulfilment of the Commandments is an essential part of Christianity as such, and not just an indifferent matter, which is at most a field for faith to manifest itself (which is what a "believing" situation-ethic logically leads to). . . . the Church teaches these commandments with divine authority exactly as she teaches the other "truths of the Faith," either through her "ordinary" magisterium [the normal teaching of the Faith to the faithful in schools, sermons and all the other kinds of instruction] or through an act of her "extraordinary" magisterium in ex cathedra definitions of the Pope or a general council.

It is therefore quite untrue that only those moral norms for which there is a solemn definition (and these are criticized from all sides in the "world") are binding in faith on the Christian as revealed by God, and must be accepted by him as the rule for his own behaviour. MORE TO COME. from Nature and Grace (Sheed & Ward, 1964)