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Good Shepherd Sunday

Peace in the Risen Lord!

Rejoicing in the light of Christ's victory over sin and death, our hearts are filled with thanksgiving as we observe the growing return among our people to communal liturgical celebrations and devotional exercises in these post-pandemic times. Similarly, we continue to joyfully honor and invoke the name of Mary as *Regina Coeli*, daily during these "fifty great days" of Easter Season. We are now approaching the Marian month of May, hoping to experience anew the fervor of our Marian piety of *Flores de Mayo*. This time though, with the change of school calendar, the usual catechetical instruction for our children before the Marian devotion may not be possible as in the past when May was a summer break. Nevertheless, the children can perhaps still be encouraged to participate actively in the *Flores de Mayo*, for example, if it were scheduled a bit later in the afternoon, i.e., after school. As we observe the World Day of Prayer for Vocations today, the Good Shepherd Sunday, let us not forget that to many of our priests and religious, their vocation stories included their childhood experiences of *Flores de Mayo*.

Furthermore, I would like to strongly recommend to all pastors that *Flores de Mayo* should now be more genuinely promoted in a way that involves not just the children, but also the grown-ups, including especially the parents themselves. In fact, some pastors in view of the varying school summer calendars have considered moving the daily regular Masses on May to the afternoon, so that this Marian devotion every day is fittingly concluded with the Eucharistic celebration, involving the greater members of families. This, indeed, is an exemplification of authentic Marian piety. As the old maxim goes, "*Ad Jesum per Mariam*" - "**to Jesus through Mary**". Genuine, orthodox veneration of Mary is always Christological. Mary loves being a means to an end, the end being her Son.

Our joyful Easter Marian hymn of *Regina Coeli*, however, is not without discordant voices. Against the hopeful signs of religious vibrancy is the disturbing panorama of deplorable loss of human lives. I am referring to the seeming upsurge of suicide cases which mark our recent times in the whole country including our archdiocese. In fact, a horrible incident also took place recently when a charred body was dumped and discovered somewhere in the city. Mindful that we as followers of Christ should share in "the grief and anguish of the men of our time" (GS 1), I make this letter of appeal to all that the present exigencies should find an echo in our hearts. Similarly, I sincerely ask that an important dimension of our devotion to Mary this time is to pray for all the victims, and to support and nurture all those who are suffering from various forms of anxieties in life or mental health issues. We pray that we may reclaim once again the precious dignity of each one as we are all God's beloved children.

In the Upper Room, Mary was in the midst of the post-resurrection community of believers, in the role the early Church loved to identify as hers, the *Orante*; she who prays. The Mother of Jesus is the Mother of Life. As St. John Paul II says, Mary is model and guide of the effective proclamation of "the Gospel of Life":

she "places herself between her Son and mankind in the reality of their wants, needs and sufferings. She puts herself in the middle, that is to say, she acts as a mediatrix not as an outsider, but in her position as mother. She knows that as such she can point out to her Son the needs of mankind, and in fact, she has the right to do so. Her mediation is thus in the nature of intercession: Mary intercedes for mankind. And that is not all.

As a mother, she also wishes the messianic power of her Son to be manifested, that salvific power of his which is meant to help man in his misfortunes, to free him from the evil which in various forms and degrees weighs heavily upon his life" (Redemptoris Mater, n. 21).

It would thus be truly meaningful if a special feature of our month-long Marian devotion during these troubled times would be to pray for all our brothers and sisters who experience suffering in particular ways, and to find our inspiration to become ourselves bearers of the Gospel of Life in Mary, Mother of life, love and human pain. May I strongly recommend that part of our daily spiritual bouquet to Mother Mary during the *Flores de Mayo* would include the following prayer-intentions:

1. For all persons dealing with mental health challenges such as depression, those who live with thoughts of taking their lives and those who love and care for them.
2. For families and friends, colleagues, and co-workers, who have been affected by the suicide of a loved one and to pray for the souls of those who have taken their lives.
3. For those who live in despair and without hope because of poverty or discrimination, those suffering of an unjust situation.
4. For counselors and therapists, psychologists and psychiatrists, for pastors, priests, and religious, and for all who seek to help.

We pray for ourselves that the Risen Lord may give us the courage and wisdom to be there for others in distress, to offer our love and our care, to be the Lord's own listening ear, his hands, and his heart for others.

*The Archdiocesan Psycho-Spiritual Support Group (APSG) headed by Fr. Warren Tagupa of San Jose de Mindanao Seminary have in their own small ways responded to this situation. They have mobilized the youth for psycho-spiritual support to small communities, intensified referral mechanisms for cases that the counselling ministry cannot handle. aired programs in response to this situation and organize Parish Psycho-Spiritual Support Circle (PPSC) in some parishes. You may contact him with this number # 0975 725 8661 or 0917 805 0238. Let us also include them in our prayers.*

"Do not worry about this illness or about any other misfortune. Am I, your Mother, not here at your side? Are you not protected by my shadow? Am I not your safety?" The humble Indio, Juan Diego of Cuautlilán, heard these words on the lips of the Blessed Virgin, in December 1531, at the foot of Tepeyac Hill, today called Guadalupe, after asking for the healing of a relative. May we hear in our own times these comforting words of our Mother as we sincerely pray for our suffering brothers and sisters, and confidently turn to her who is "Health of the Sick" and "Comforter of the Afflicted".

In obedience to Christ and filial devotion to Mary,



Archbishop Jose A. Cabantan, D.D.