

Homily  
Marian Congress Mass  
May 2, 2020

This year as we gather to celebrate our 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual Marian Congress, we do so under very unusual and difficult circumstances. Unlike two years ago when, on the occasion of our 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, we consecrated our diocese to the Immaculate Heart of Mary in a packed Cathedral, today we gather in this empty Chapel, and this Mass is being brought to you by means of livestream. What a difference a couple of years can make!

We could have cancelled this event this year, as many other events have been cancelled or postponed. However, it seems even more necessary and appropriate to celebrate this annual congress, and to look to Mary for her intercession and guidance, given the current times and challenges that we face.

The decision to consecrate the Diocese of St. Petersburg to the Immaculate Heart of Mary two years ago was not a difficult one. It was important to recognize that during our diocese's first 50 years, we have been blessed by God and have received the favor of His Mother. Therefore, it was only right to acknowledge our

dependence on God, and to entrust our diocese and ourselves to Blessed Mother's care.

Due to the large participation at the actual consecration on May 6, 2018, and the tremendous response afterward, I made the decision to hold this Annual Marian Congress as a means of deepening our devotion to Mary, to understanding the role that she plays in our faith journey, and to invite others to entrust themselves to her maternal love.

Today's gospel reading recounts how Jesus, from the cross, entrusted his mother to the care of the beloved disciple, "Woman, behold your son." And, how He entrusted the beloved disciple to his mother, "Behold, your mother." The gospel tells us that "from that hour the disciple took her into his house." In this passage, John, the beloved disciple, can be seen as representing us – the Body of Christ, the Church – being entrusted to Mary as our spiritual mother whom we invite into our homes and our hearts in a relationship of filial love.

Our 1<sup>st</sup> reading today from the Acts of the Apostles gives us a glimpse of what the followers of Jesus did after He ascended to the Father in heaven. The reading tells us that the apostles returned to

upper room in Jerusalem where they “devoted themselves with one accord to prayer, together with some women, and Mary the mother of Jesus.” Here we see the closeness of Mary with the soon to be nascent Church gathered in unity and prayer while awaiting the coming of the Holy Spirit.

The desire of Mary to be close to the apostles is representative of her desire to be close to us. There is no one among us who was closer to Jesus than his mother. From the moment he was conceived in her womb, to raising and caring for him in the home at Nazareth, to witnessing his public ministry and miracles, to his suffering and death from the foot of the Cross, and to the glory of the Resurrection, Mary was there – ever present, ever faithful, ever loving. And she desires to be close to us in the whole of our lives, ever present, ever faithful, ever loving.

All devotion and consecration to Mary must be by its nature Christocentric. In other words, the end of our Marian prayer and devotion must always be the desire to seek a closer relationship with her Son. St. Louis de Montfort stated it this way: *“If, then, we establish solid devotion to our Blessed Lady, it is only to establish more perfectly devotion to Jesus Christ, and to provide an easy and secure means for finding Jesus Christ.”*

St. Louis also said, *“We never give more honor to Jesus than when we honor his Mother, and we honor her simply and solely to honor him all the more perfectly. We go to her only as a way leading to the goal we seek – Jesus, her Son.”*

This is what Blessed Mother wants more than anything else, that we draw ever closer to her Son, and in doing so, that we desire salvation and everlasting life in heaven. We know from scripture that Mary never wanted things to be about her. While she was present and faithful to her Son, Jesus, during his early years at home and then during his public ministry, she remained in the background but always close to Him. Her last recorded words in scripture affirm this desire, “Do whatever he tells you” at the wedding feast at Cana when there was a crisis and a need for more wine.

During this time of pandemic and uncertainty, when so many are suffering and so many have died, it is even more important for us as individuals and as a country to entrust ourselves to Mary’s maternal care and to seek her intercession. Therefore, Archbishop Jose Gomez, President of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, in consultation with other bishops, made the decision to renew the consecration of the United States to Mary, Mother of the

Church, which he did yesterday on behalf of the Conference and the faithful. He also invited the bishops of the United States to join him in this renewal within each diocese by praying the prayer. I will do so after the homily and the prayers of the faithful today.

In 2018 Pope Francis decreed that the Monday after Pentecost each year should be celebrated as the Memorial of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of the Church. The Holy Father did so “to encourage the growth of the maternal sense of the Church in the pastors, religious and faithful, as well as a growth of genuine Marian piety.” It is my hope that this annual Marian Congress in our diocese may be an instrument which brings about growth of genuine Marian devotion and piety in this local Church.

Finally, in March of this year, Pope Francis, realizing the crisis the world was facing, turned to Mary in prayer, trusting in the power of her maternal intercession. He prayed,

*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, Salvation of the Roman People, 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.*

**Mary, Mother of the Church...Pray for us.**