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Message of the Holy Father on the occasion of the 1500th anniversary of the cult of the venerated image of Saint Mary in Portico – *Romanae Portus Securitatis*

The following is the Message sent by the Holy Father to the rector general of the Order of Clerics Regular of the Mother of God, the Reverend Antonio Piccolo, on the occasion of the 1500th anniversary of the cult of the venerated image of Saint Mary in Portico – *Romanae Portus Securitatis*, protectress of the Eternal City:

Message of the Holy Father

To the Most Reverend
Fr. Antonio Piccolo
Rector General of the Order of Clerics Regular of the Mother of God

The happy anniversary of the 1500 years of the cult of the venerated image of Saint Mary in Portico - *Romanae Portus Securitatis*, patroness of the Eternal City, is for me a joyful occasion to join in prayer with your Religious Family, which has been entrusted with its stewardship since 1601, and who wish to raise praise to Her, loving and caring Mother, luminous beacon who has led her children to safe harbour. I address, therefore, my cordial thoughts to each one of you and to all those taking part in this very significant event for the entire Church of Rome.

By providential coincidence 2024, the year of preparation for the Jubilee of Hope, is a time of special grace since you are also commemorating the 450th anniversary of your founding by Saint John Leonardi, a devotee of the heavenly Mother, chosen as the faithful custodian of the Leonardine charism.

The cult of Saint Mary in Portico in Campitelli was born following a prodigious apparition of the Mother of God on 17 July 524, in the house of Saint Galla, a Roman patrician, in the presence of the Pontiff Saint John I. Since then, the Portico where the noble Galla welcomed the poor and pilgrims became a Marian shrine and hospice of charity. This is for you, the spiritual heirs of Saint Leonardi, an invitation to care for and promote the value of welcoming the poor and the last, so that the places we inhabit and the churches themselves may be a portico open to the world, in which to offer consolation and relief to the many forms of hardship that characterize our life.

Furthermore, the Holy Virgin manifested herself at a particularly difficult moment for the Church, extending her mantle to Pope John I, who suffered and died for peace without repudiating the faith, taken hostage by political plots and fratricidal violence. In view of the current situation, how can we fail to grasp the urgency of promoting peace, of praying for peace? Invoke peace and be peacebuilders first and foremost in your reconciled and reconciling communities. May the example of fraternal life be evangelically attractive to the faithful to whom you direct your pastoral service.

I urge you to look to Mary as a sign of consolation and sure hope, the maternal face of God and a dwelling place of refuge: indeed, she continually gives Her Son as the sole source of concord, hope of salvation, way for peace, absolute imperative of the human quest.

In this spirit, the Saint pharmacist John Leonardi founded the “Congregation of Reformed Priests of the Blessed Virgin Mary”, precisely to restore to the Church the apostolic polish of her origins. “Christ before all else”, he said, Christ at the centre of everything, Christ the measure of everything! Christ the only medicine able to cure the ills of the Church and of humankind.

This commitment with Mary which lovingly accompanies the path of the Congregation dedicated to Her is renewed again today and calls you all to an ever-greater missionary zeal and to continual progress in the spiritual life, accepting the exhortation of the Saint Founder, who emphatically recalled, “ahead of the eyes of the mind and the heart, only the honour and glory of Christ and these crucified” (Saint John Leonardi, Hymn to the Cross).

Finally, the Jubilee celebrations you are preparing to experience, under the gaze of the Virgin of the Portico, bring to mind the evangelizing work of Saint John Leonardi, who also wrote the first Constitutions of the Urban College of Propaganda Fide, to form priests capable of addressing the missionary challenges of the time. I therefore encourage you too to take to heart the integral formation of religious brothers, in a path of progressive conformation to the Crucified and Risen One, the first fruit of redeemed humanity (cf. *1 Cor* 15:20) and, looking to Mary, disciple of Christ and Mother of the Church, may your apostolate be a channel of grace and an instrument for the joyful proclamation of the Gospel.

With these hopes, as I entrust you all to the intercession of the Holy Virgin, lovingly invoked as *Romanae Portus Securitatis*, and of Saint John Leonardi, I gladly send my paternal blessing, trusting in your prayers for me.

Faternally,

*Rome, from Saint John Lateran, 29 June 2024
Solemnity of Saints Peter and Paul, Apostles
Patrons of the beloved City of Rome*

FRANCIS
