



Dear Friends,

We are now in May, the month when the Church particularly honours the Mother of God. There are many ways that this is expressed, for example by decorating statues of the Blessed Virgin with flowers or turning to her through the prayers of the Rosary. There are innumerable testimonies, from all around the world, of Christians who have received help and heavenly aid through Mary's intercession. In this edition of the Mirror we tell the stories of Christians who have had confidence in Our Lady and received her assistance.

In a tradition rooted in centuries-old experience, the Church honours St Mary under numerous different titles, such as: "Mother most amiable", "Virgin most merciful", "Virgin most faithful", "Virgin most powerful", "Mother of good counsel", "Health of the sick", "Refuge of sinners", "Consoler of the afflicted", "Help of Christians", "Cause of our joy"...

With this in mind, we invite you this May, to join together in prayer with our President, Cardinal Mauro Piacenza and the ACN pilgrims with him at the Lourdes grotto in the Vatican gardens during our Jubilee pilgrimage to Rome. There he will consecrate ACN, along with all its staff, its project partners and all of you, our benefactors, to Jesus through the Immaculate Heart of Mary with the following words:

O Mary, Mother of God, we come to you at this solemn moment. All the thoughts of our hearts lie open to you. O Mother of Mercy, how often we have experienced your tender loving care, your peaceful presence, in which you lead us always to Jesus, the Prince of Peace.

O Queen of the Holy Rosary, awaken in us once more the desire to pray and to love.

O Queen of the human family, teach all the nations the way of brotherly love.

O Queen of Peace, beseech your Son to grant peace to this world.

O Holy Mother, in so many ways this troubled and wearied human family stands with you beneath the Cross. We feel the need to turn to you, to seek your help and, through you, to consecrate ourselves to Jesus Christ.

We entrust ourselves to you and, through your Immaculate Heart, we consecrate to your divine Son Jesus Christ, Our Lord and God, our charity Aid to the Church in Need, all our staff, our benefactors and all whom we are privileged to serve, together with our projects, plans and travels, our families and our vocations and all for whom we are responsible before God.

Graciously accept this act of consecration which we now make with confidence and love. Grant us the grace to faithfully serve God and all mankind and protect us from all dangers in this time. Accompany us and lead us safely to the true goal of our lives, to perfect communion in God, through Christ our Lord. Amen.

My greetings to you all, united with you in this prayer.



Father Anton Lässer CP
Ecclesiastical Assistant





Turning to Our Lady and Our Eucharistic Lord



Pakistan: Fervently praying to the Mother of God.

In countries racked by violence and persecution, ordinary people know they can rarely expect much help from politicians, army or police. Catholics turn to Our Lord and to Our Blessed Lady.

“We fly to thy protection, O Holy Mother of God. Despise not our petitions in our necessities, but deliver us always from all dangers, O Glorious and Blessed Virgin”. So runs the third-century prayer to St Mary. In their necessities, the persecuted Christians of **Pakistan** do indeed fly to the protection of the Mother of God, and now they want to build a shrine in her honour, dedicated to Our Lady of Peace and Hope. Archbishop Joseph Arshad of Islamabad and Rawalpindi Diocese explains: “As

Catholics, we believe that the Holy Rosary is a mighty protection in all the grave trials, temptations and hardships of life. It is one of the powerful weapons the faithful have been given in the fight against evil.” The shrine will be built in the north of his diocese, in a place it is easy to travel to, where many Pakistanis go in the summer because it is cooler.

It will also be easy for Muslims to reach too, as many Muslims also venerate Mary, who is highly praised in the *Qur'an*. In particular childless Muslim women often come seeking the help of the Blessed Virgin Mary. And so this shrine can become a place of peace and reconciliation.

We are helping with €100,000 for the construction of this shrine, so that Our Blessed Lady can bring peace and hope to the people of Pakistan.

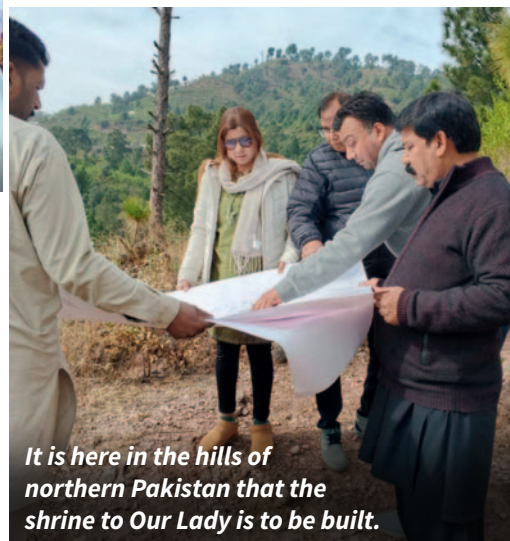
In south-east **Nigeria**, in Amuzi State, the parish church is likewise dedicated to Our Lady. Now they want to build a separate chapel where round-the-clock Eucharistic Adoration can be held. There is already a group in the parish committed to this Perpetual Adoration. “At any time of the day and night you can find someone in our church, adoring before the Lord”, says the



Nigeria: This little girl has a deep love for Jesus.



Pakistani Catholics look to Our Lady for hope and peace.



It is here in the hills of northern Pakistan that the shrine to Our Lady is to be built.

parish priest Father Michael Okafor. But at the moment parishioners' prayers before the Blessed Sacrament are necessarily interrupted by weddings, funerals and other liturgies and events that also take place inside the church.

So a separate Adoration Chapel will mean that Christ can be adored around the clock. “In our catechetical instruction we constantly talk about the power of the Eucharistic Lord, who in the wealth of His Glory can help us in all our needs”, Father Michael adds. The local Catholic faithful have made great sacrifices to pay for the new chapel, but they are very poor and, ultimately, can only supply a small part of the funding needed.

We have promised to contribute €15,000, so that Our Eucharistic Lord, sometimes forgotten in our Western nations, can be given fitting worship and honour in Nigeria, and support and sustain those who hope in His help.



Steadfast in persecution



The convent of the Carmelite Sisters in Sofia is a much loved place of prayer.

Bulgaria is one of the countries where Christians were heavily persecuted in communist times. Many who survived the oppression have related the special help they received from the Mother of God.

Jordan (48) – like most Bulgarians – is Eastern Orthodox. He grew up with his grandmother, a believer. One day a heavily armed Communist militia summoned her to an interrogation. She couldn't leave the four-year-old alone, so he had to come with her. The experience was so traumatic for him that he became dumb. His grandmother was desperate. Then one night Our Lady appeared to her in a dream. "Why are you tormenting the child? Come to see me in the Church of the Dormition of Mary in Pernik." They went there and prayed before the icon of Mary. That very day the child was healed.

Carmelite Sister Blazhenna in Sofia, who died aged 86, also experienced the help of

the Virgin Mary during a time of grave trial. Arrested for her Christian faith, she shaped a tiny statue of Mary from a piece of bread and held it hidden in her hand, night after night, while they tormented her with interrogations. On one occasion the official ordered her to open her hand. "Does that give you strength?", he asked and put the little figure on the table. Afterwards, and for the rest of her life, Sister Blazhenna was convinced that he had "experienced a grace that emanated from it".

The Carmelite convent in Sofia was founded in 1935 to pray for the unity of Christians. It was the first Carmel of the Byzantine rite. In 1957 all the convents were shut down and their property confiscated. But though closed and shuttered, the Churches were not confiscated and so the Carmelites, and the Holy Eucharist Sister who took refuge with them, lived for the next 40 years crammed into the church's organ loft. And the young women who subsequently joined their communities fully accepted that these were to be their living conditions for the foreseeable future.

Today the Sisters can follow their vocation freely. The Carmelites live a strict contemplative life. Their convent has



Sister Vera-Anna of the Precious Blood, taking her perpetual vows.

become a much loved house of prayer in this part of southeast Europe, where Catholics only account for a tiny minority, making up not even 2 percent. But the Holy Eucharist Sisters are an active congregation: they teach the faith, lead prayer groups, do duty as sacristans in the parishes and care for children and young people, the sick, elderly and homeless.

Both communities are facing growing challenges because of the economic crisis. Soaring fuel and energy prices have placed a particularly heavy burden on them.

We are supporting the life and ministry of both communities of Sisters with €9,000 each year. Would you consider giving them a gift during this Marian month of May?



Praying for the unity of Christians and the needs of the world.



Following Mary's example



São Tomé and Príncipe: Staying close to the poor.

Advocate and Helper in Every Need, Mediatrix of Graces, Comforter of the Afflicted – these are just some of the titles given to St Mary. Just as at Cana, when the Blessed Virgin brought the plight of the wedding party to the heart of her Divine Son, so today she brings our needs to His loving attention. Around the world almost 600,000 religious women now imitate her role, identifying the need around them with maternal hearts and striving to help.



India: Sister comes with a smile and a warm meal for the homeless.



Peru: Children in the Andes, learning about God's love for them.



Kenya: With a kind heart, Sister Pas-calina cares for young mothers in need.

“Good morning Sister!” The happy voices of children ring out in innumerable orphanages around the world. Many of these children would not be alive if the Sisters had not taken them. Some were left abandoned when they were newborn babes, others are handicapped or suffered abuse. In many cases the mother died in childbirth, while in others their parents have AIDS or leprosy, or are addicts. Many of the children were left to fend for themselves, sleeping on rubbish tips, in cemeteries or urban drains. Not a few were rescued from the clutches of criminal begging gangs. The Sisters also offer shelter to young girls who were thrown out of their homes for falling preg-

Every year ACN helps over 20,000 religious Sisters in Africa, Asia, Latin America and Eastern Europe, supporting their life and ministry. Would you be willing to show your appreciation of these selfless women by giving them the ongoing help they need so they can follow in Mary's footsteps and assist those in need?



Peru: The women know they can rely on Sister Jessica.

nant – not infrequently as a result of rape. And sometimes the Sisters are able to reconcile and reunite them with their families.

The Sisters also visit the vulnerable old people who live in ramshackle huts and hovels to wash and feed there, praying with them and bringing a rare smile to their lips. They care for the sick, keep vigil with the dying, visit prisoners, rescue prostitutes from the streets, and pull drug addicts out of their despair. They know who needs help, in which house they are crying, and who has buried potential that needs to be nurtured and allowed to flourish. At the sight of the Sisters many a face, marked with pain and sorrow, breaks into a smile of joy.

The great majority of these religious Sisters offer their faithful service for the love of God alone, often unnoticed and unrecognised. Bishop Raymond Mupandasekwa of Masvingo Diocese, in Zimbabwe comments: “Often people only tend to talk about the priests; they say he's doing good work. But frequently it is the religious Sisters who bear the greatest burden, often without recognition.” On one occasion a Sister wrote to the Bishop, thanking him for supporting a young girl who was wheelchair-bound and now had finished her schooling with top marks. But it was the Sister herself who had encouraged him to take an interest in the girl. “It wasn't me as bishop, or the priest, who had singled out this girl, but the Sister herself.”



India: This child struggling with disabilities knows he is loved and supported.



"I can still serve Christ, even with only one foot."

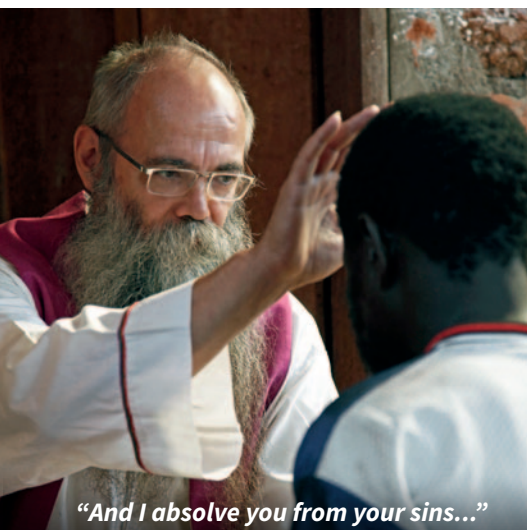
“God wanted me to stay alive for HIM.”

Two years ago, in the **Central African Republic**, 72-year-old Carmelite Father Norberto Pozzi was gravely wounded when his vehicle ran over a landmine. Bleeding heavily, and barely conscious, he was driven 20 km on the back of a motorcycle to the town of Bozoum. There he faced a desperate duel with death, before eventually being flown back to Italy for further treatment and recovery. He survived, but lost his left foot. Recently, he returned, undeterred, to his old mission in Africa.

“As soon as he regained consciousness, Padre Norberto was talking, not about his amputated foot, but about returning to his old mission”, recalls Father Federico Trinchero. For him it is a miracle that his Carmelite confrere even survived. “Father Norberto has a great love for Our Lady and prays the Rosary every day”, he says. “It’s obvious to everyone just how much this

missionary loves Mary. While he lay unconscious we prayed the Rosary for him, along with countless numbers of people. It’s quite clear to us that his life was saved by the intervention of the Mother of God.”

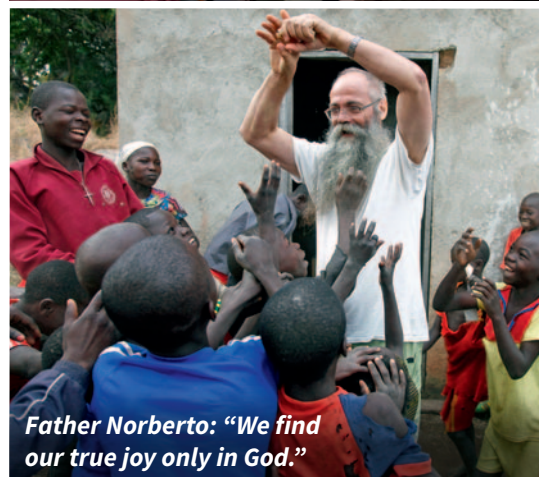
Nevertheless, it was a long and difficult road to recovery. “For six months, I could only lie in bed”, Father Norberto recalls. “As soon as I was able to sit in a wheelchair, I was delighted to be able to hear confessions. And finally I began to take my first steps with the artificial foot.” But that was far from easy, since painful wounds kept forming on the end of his stump. In fact it is still a problem today, for which he may yet need a further operation. But he still says, “I don’t grieve over my lost foot, but, right from the start I have felt calm and at peace. What has happened has happened. The Lord wanted me to stay alive for Him, so He still has a use for me. And so He will continue to help me in whatever I am to do for Him.” Nor does the priest harbour any ill will towards the rebels who planted the mine.



"And I absolve you from your sins..."



*Father Norberto is back!
A rapturous welcome, with flowers.*



*Father Norberto: “We find
our true joy only in God.”*

Father Norberto was welcomed back with great jubilation by the people he was suddenly forced to leave behind. He has no fear, despite the fact that the accident with the landmine was by no means his first brush with death. On two previous occasions, rebel bullets had missed him by no more than a hair’s breadth.

The only thing that saddens him is the thought that the world is far from God. And so his resolution for this Holy Year is to pray that all people will love God more. And at this point the missionary, who was otherwise very reluctant to talk when he was the subject, suddenly becomes really animated:

“What God has done for us is marvelous, incredible, unfathomable, and yet it is true: HE has loved us, even unto death. When I realise how much He loves me, how can I not love Him in return? Our present and future life lies in His hands. HE is the only goal of our life.”



Miraculously protected

Back in September 2024 the city of Lviv in West Ukraine was hit by a nocturnal rocket attack. Seven people died and 51 were injured.

Also damaged was the building shared by members of the congregation of the Little Sisters of the Immaculate Heart of Mary and the Franciscan Family of Mary. The Sisters themselves were unhurt, as they were praying the Rosary in the sitting room at the time. Had they been asleep in their beds, it is likely that some would have been killed. The force of the explosion also blew out the doors and windows of the chapel. The reason the Sisters had not gathered in the chapel was that – woken by the Air Raid alarm at around 4am – they were not dressed in their religious habits and didn't want to appear before the Blessed Sacrament without them. So they were also saved by their respect for Christ in the Eucharist.



Thanks to our kind benefactors, we were able to help with €5,000, so now the sanctuary is resplendent in beauty once more. They send their heartfelt thanks!

Need, love and thanks – your letters

Helping the poorest in their need

I regularly receive ACN's Mirror and love reading it, and I am happy to respond to your requests for donations to your wonderful organisation. My parents were regular supporters of your charity, and since they went to their eternal reward I am happy to help in my turn. So I want to continue helping the poorest of the poor to the best of my ability. I wish every joy and strength, and every blessing of God to the staff and co-workers of your charity who are continuing Father Werenfried's work in the same spirit.

A friend and supporter in Germany

Children of the same Creator

Why is there so much evil among mankind? We are all the same, regardless of where

we live, what colour our skin is or what religion we belong to. We are children of the same Creator – brothers and sisters – so why can't we all respect one another? The hurt we do to others could be the very hurt we could not endure ourselves. How long will humanity continue this way? All I wish for mankind is peace, justice and love. My greetings to you all.

A friend and benefactor in Portugal

News about your work in the world

I'm happy to receive the Mirror every month. I love your newsletter, which brings me so much news about world events and about your beautiful projects. I pray every day for your charity to receive the support it needs.

A friend and benefactor in Belgium



Regina Lynch

Executive President,
ACN (International)

Dear Friends,

I think that most of us have at some time visited our national Marian shrine but how many of us are aware of the other hundreds of Marian shrines that are scattered about the world? One that I would like to mention today is Kibeho in Rwanda, where Our Lady, appearing between 1981 and 1989 to three young schoolgirls, conveyed messages considered to be prophetic, considering the recent tragic history of Rwanda.

In the early years of the apparitions that are officially recognised by the Church, Our Blessed Mother repeatedly called for repentance and conversion, while there is still time. She lamented how the world conducted itself very badly and risked falling into the abyss. During one of the apparitions, the visionaries saw a river of blood and many people being killed. Sadly, just over ten years later in 1994 a genocide resulted in the estimated death of 800,000 people. Today this shrine is dedicated to Our Lady of Sorrows and has become a centre for reconciliation not only for the Rwandan population but for people in other parts of the world marked by conflict.

Bishop Misago, one of the local Rwandan bishops at the time of the first apparitions, said that the messages of the Mother of God should lead us to rediscover the Gospel of brotherly love. It is a message for each one of us.

Regina Lynch

Where to send your contribution for the Church in Need

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