



Mural on a street in Venezuela: Love for Our Lady is everywhere.

Dear Friends,

Every year I look forward to Mary’s month of May. I have often found that problems I have entrusted to the Mother of God are resolved in the month of May. And I have personally become convinced of what Saint Louis de Montfort wrote: “Mary is the safest, easiest, shortest and most perfect way” to redemption in Christ.

Our Lord’s words: “Woman, behold your son!” and to His disciple “Behold, your mother!” (Jn 19:26-27) have always been taken by the Church to mean that, beneath the Cross, Mary became our mother. When little children are in need, who do they cry out to? Their mother! What does a mother do when she sees her children in danger? She rushes to help them! I think we can interpret the steadily increasing number of Marian apparitions since 1830 as a sign of growing concern on the part of the Mother of God.

The great ideologies and wars of the 20th century claimed millions of human lives. Then there was the pandemic, with its grave consequences; the new wars and

conflicts of our own days; the massive and rapidly developing changes in technology, economy, society and the Church; and the closely associated spiritual displacement of so many people through the destruction of their religious, family and cultural roots; the alarming growth of authoritarian and totalitarian groups and regimes... The dangers and distresses are



“Can you believe that Mary is your shortest and most perfect way to redemption in Christ?”

many, and they are deadly! But the greatest danger is that we will lose faith in a loving God who is the source of all things.

So who can you put your trust in, in these times? Can you believe that Mary is your shortest, easiest, safest and most perfect way to Christ? Will you heed her messages and be guided by them? I greatly hope and pray that you be granted the grace to do so.

During the apparitions in Fatima – which ACN has a special connection with – the

Angel told the children, “Don’t be afraid, I am the Angel of Peace. Pray with me: ‘My God, I believe, I adore, I hope and I love you. I beg pardon for those who do not believe, do not adore, do not hope, do not love you.’”

In May 1917, in the midst of the First World War, Mary told them, “Pray the Rosary daily for peace in the world and for an end to the war.” And she invites us all to consecrate ourselves to her Immaculate Heart.

Nine years studying theology and 25 years ministering in the Church have given me the unshakable conviction that you should take to heart this request of Our Blessed Lady in order to confront the challenges of today.

Yours, in a spirit of shared prayer and gratitude,

Father Anton Lässer CP
Ecclesiastical Assistant



Helping the “prodigal sons”

Christ died for all humanity. On the Cross He promised the repentant thief paradise. An encounter with Christ can be the beginning of a new life for many former criminals – as it is in **Brazil**.



Encounter with Christ in the prison.



Processing with the Sacrament from cell to cell.



God’s blessing brings the strength of conversion.

There are almost a million men and women currently in Brazil’s prisons – more than in any other country in the world. Many slipped into a vicious spiral of poverty, addiction and crime at a very young age and have known almost nothing else but violence. Many of them have committed murder.

There are around 5,000 priests and laity who visit Brazil’s prisons to speak and pray with the inmates. The first step to

redemption is the honest admission of one’s own guilt. This can be a difficult journey, but once they are willing to honestly confess what they have done, then they can truly begin to experience the love of the Merciful Father.

To help them begin a new life, the prisoners need the “spiritual medicine” of the Sacraments and prayer. Only then can they grow and deepen their relationship with God and find the strength for a lasting conversion.

Love for Our Lady also greatly helps them on their path of redemption. So the Brazilian bishops have asked us to supply 12,000 prayer books for the prison apostolate.

None of us knows how our life might have turned out in other circumstances: “There, but for the grace of God go I”. Would you help us raise €15,000 needed for these prayer books? The books will help bring these prodigal sons and daughters home to their loving Father.

Genaro and Our Lady

Father David O’Connor is a missionary working in the prelature of Huancañé, high in the **Peruvian Andes.**



Fervent prayer: There is a strong love for Christ and His mother.

“The people are desperately poor, but they love Jesus and have a profound love for the Mother of God. For them the Blessed Virgin is someone they can talk to”, this priest from Ireland explains. But unfortunately – as almost everywhere in Latin America – the sects are very active. Often, the people’s love for Our Lady is the one



Father David O’Connor, blessing the faithful.

thing that stops them following their spurious promises of healing and salvation. For example, 85-year-old Genaro was seriously thinking of leaving the Church after hearing a preacher on the radio who promised healing to everyone who joined his sect. Genaro was in danger of going completely blind, so he was attracted by the sect’s promise. He was greatly unsettled by the fact that he was losing his vision, despite attending the Catholic church every week. His priest spoke with him at length – but without success. But then, he said: “But Genaro, these people don’t love Our Lady!” “That’s true”, the old man replied. “Then I’m not going there!”

Father O’Connor and the other priests working in the Andes and supporting poor, sick and elderly people like Genaro have barely enough themselves to live on. Will you help them again this year with your Mass Offerings?



Venezuela needs priests who can bring hope.



The image of the “Divine Shepherdess” in Barquisimeto.

“It was through the Blessed Virgin that I felt the call of God”

The image of Mary, the Divine Shepherdess (“Divina Pastora”) in Barquisimeto is one of the most revered in **Venezuela**. Millions of the faithful gather at her shrine each year to honour her and take part in what is believed to be the largest Marian procession in the world. There are many reports of graces being received by participants. And many seminarians – who are supported by ACN – also say they owe a great deal to the “Divine Shepherdess”.

“The Virgin Mary was always with me as I followed my vocation”, says Anderson, a young seminarian in Barquisimeto. “The Divine Shepherdess is our good Mother, who accompanies me and encourages me to follow the Lord. As it says in Saint John’s Gospel, she tells us to ‘Do what *He* tells you!’ My devotion to Our Lady began when I was young. I’d gone with a group of friends to join the procession in honour of the Divine Shepherdess, and on that occasion I felt that my love for her was growing stronger and stronger, and that I wanted to seek her intercession in my times of need. Through her I felt the call of God in my life. She encourages me to renounce many things in this world in order to follow Jesus.”

Greybel, another seminarian, says: “From the very beginning of my life she has always been with me. She is my teacher and friend, and ever since childhood she has shown me the right way. For me she is everything a mother can be

for her son.” And young Jesús likewise confesses: “When I look back, it was she who was always there, at every stage of my life, leading me and supporting me.”

Even though there seem to be few reasons for hope in the country, these young men training for the priesthood are filled with joy and hope. For several years now Venezuela has been going through an unparalleled crisis. Whole sections of the population have been impoverished as a result of the rampant inflation, and many are going hungry. The suicide rate has soared alarmingly, and the crime rate is also high. As a result, over 7 million Venezuelans have left their country – particularly young people, because they can see no future for themselves here.

The 56 seminarians in Barquisimeto intend to stay, as do many other young people all over Venezuela. Led by the Divine Shepherdess, the seminarians also want to be “good shepherds” for their



They want to become priests and inspire new vocations!



Seminarian José playing football.

suffering people. They want to become priests, so that they can proclaim the Good News to everyone.

We usually give the equivalent of about €830 to support each seminarian in Venezuela for a year. Can we count on your support in 2024 as well?



A gift for the Mother of God

Every day, the faithful turn to Mary all around the world. The most sublime hymns of Christian poetry are dedicated to her. The “all-hymned Virgin”, who is “more honoured than the Cherubim and incomparably more glorious than the Seraphim” – as she is honoured in the Eastern churches – is at the same time the Mother of all who seek refuge with her in their need.

“Ave Maria...” In the remote villages of the jungle or the African savannah, in the shanty towns huddled around the big cities, in the refugee camps or from those sheltering from a hail of bombs, from beside the baby’s cradle or from the lips of the sick and dying, these words rise up, just as they do in the great pilgrim shrines, where millions of the faithful find help and comfort.

In **Latin America**, a continent that owes its evangelisation to the apparitions of Our Lady of Guadalupe in 1531, it is often the love of the Mother of God that holds Catholics back from joining the ever-present sects.

In Kibeho, **Rwanda**, following the terrible genocide in 1994, thousands of deeply traumatised people found the strength to forgive those who had murdered their relatives and friends. It was here, in the 1980s, that Our Lady appeared as the Mother of the Word. The apparitions were later recognised by the Catholic Church. Today pilgrims come from many other countries in Africa, and even from Europe and the United States, to visit her shrine. The building of the shrine in Kibeho was supported by ACN from the beginning.

“Salam-a-Mariam” (“Ave Maria”) is fervently prayed by the faithful in **Pakistan**. We have also been privileged to support the national Marian shrine of Mariamabad on several occasions. Love of Our Lady is very strong in this country, where Christians are persecuted and harassed. Father Emmanuel Parvez, parish priest of Pansara, told us: “Everyone comes with their needs to the Mother of God, even Muslims. Many childless women pray for the grace to become mothers. Others lay their children at the feet of Our Lady and say, ‘Please care for my child, just as you cared for the Child Jesus!’”

In **Ukraine** the faithful go on procession and pray at the shrines of Berdytschiw and Sarwanyzja, imploring Our Lady’s intercession for the gift of peace. And in the **Middle East**, which is still torn by suffering, the faithful unceasingly send up their fervent prayers and pleas to the Mother of God.

ACN, which is also consecrated to the Blessed Virgin Mary, supports many projects throughout the world that enable the faithful to express their love and devotion for Our Lady. These projects don’t just include the construction and repair of



La Guaira/Venezuela: Procession in honour of Our Lady of Lourdes.



Processing in honour of St Mary: Young people in Panama.



Syria: Praying to Our Lady for peace.



In South Sudan these children are praying “Ave Maria...”

churches, monasteries and pilgrim shrines dedicated to Mary, but also Rosary campaigns and the dissemination of Marian literature.

Would you consider making a special gift to Our Lady in the month of May, to help one of these projects?



The shrine of Our Lady of Bechouat in Lebanon.



“I left a piece of my heart there”

Father Anton Lässer, ACN’s ecclesiastical assistant, recently visited Christians in Turkey.

What impressed you most?

It was clear to me that many of the places still show the roots of the Christian faith. It was here in this region that the first centres of the early Christian faith began to form. Most of the missionary journeys of Saint Paul led here and some of his letters were written to the people living here – the seven cities directly addressed in the Book of the Apocalypse (Revelation) are also here. And the earliest ecumenical councils, at which the foundations of our faith were first written down, were held here.

Highlights of my visit also included visiting Our Lady’s house in Ephesus and ruins of the Basilica of the “Theotokos”, where we celebrated a Pontifical High Mass with the Archbishop of Izmir (Smyrna). This was an encounter with the wellspring of our faith, and very specially with the mystery of Mary. A revival of the ancient pilgrimages to these places could strengthen the faith of believers throughout the world, as well as helping local Christians.

On 6 February 2023 Turkey was struck by a severe earthquake. Do you see any of the devastation?

We visited Iskenderun and Antakya (Antioch) and witnessed scenes of almost unimaginable destruction. The earthquake killed a total of 60,000 people in Turkey and Syria and injured a further 125,000. In Turkey alone some 230,000 buildings were destroyed or rendered uninhabitable and 560,000 people were left homeless. In Antakya some 80% of the houses were destroyed. It seemed almost like a miracle to us when, in the Old City, we climbed over mountains of rubble and came to stand and pray in front of the



Father Anton Lässer (centre) in the ruins of the Theotokos Basilica in Ephesus.



Iraqi Christians in Istanbul.



The Pontifical High Mass in Ephesus, with Archbishop Martin Kmetec of Izmir.



Iskenderun Cathedral, devastated by the earthquake.

small, but intact Catholic church there. In Iskenderun we also saw extensive destruction. The Cathedral was completely devastated and will have to be entirely rebuilt. Standing amid the ruins of this building, we were deeply moved and felt within us a tremendous desire to help.

What can we learn from the Christians in Turkey, and how can we help them?

Anyone in Turkey who becomes a Christian must accept discrimination and live with a potential risk to life and limb – as the attack on the Franciscan church in

Istanbul at the beginning of this year has shown us. The Christians there impress us with their resolute faith, courage and wisdom, their perseverance and fidelity. The phrase that seems most apt to me is in Romans 4:18: “In hope he believed against hope”. It seemed to me that the Mother of God was inviting us to help them. Many of them are “burning” with zeal for the faith, but they need a great deal of support – material, moral and spiritual – in order to be able to continue growing in Christ. I have to confess: I left a little piece of my heart there.



Regina Lynch

Executive President,
ACN (International)

Dear Friends,

We know that many miracles happen through the intercession of Our Lady. Some of them are very well known, while others are known only in their local environment.

One perhaps lesser-known miracle took place in 2013, when typhoon Yolanda struck the east coast of the Philippines claiming at least 8,000 lives and displacing millions more. The Archdiocese of Palo was one of the dioceses most affected, but while many people there lost their lives, many survivors reported how a beautiful lady dressed in a local costume rescued countless children from the raging storm. They believed that it was Our Blessed Mother, who protected the

children and their families during the terrible typhoon.

Archbishop John Du of Palo then commissioned a statue based on the descriptions given by the survivors and dedicated it to "Our Lady of Hope". She has since become an object of great devotion for the faithful of the archdiocese, who have been rebuilding their lives after such devastation. On 8 November 2023, ten years after the typhoon had struck, Archbishop Du established that day as the official feast day of "Our Lady of Hope".

The Blessed Virgin has many titles, but in times of suffering or distress, perhaps "Our Lady of Hope" is one of the most comforting. May she intercede for all of us and for our suffering brothers and sisters in so many parts of the world.

Regina Lynch



Need, love and thanks – your letters

Birthday wishes and prayers

My heartfelt thanks for your kind birthday wishes and for the picture of Saint Therese of Lisieux, whom we greatly revere in our family. Thanks also for your prayers for our family. I'm happy to send you another donation for ACN and will continue to support you in the future.

**A family
in Austria**

ACN is a part of my life

I'm very happy to have been involved with ACN for over 20 years now. Your charity is a part of my life. I thank you with all my heart and ask God to bless all those who work for

ACN. I also pray for everyone who contributes, and especially for all those whom you have helped, and for those who need help in order to survive. And I also pray for the future of your mission.

**A friend and benefactress
in Brazil**

God will make up the shortfall

Thank you for your recent letter informing all ACN supporters of the Masses of Thanksgiving for us all. This is such a generous offer to us all. Be assured, I will do what I can with a financial donation – it may not be as much as I would like, but I promise you, ACN and its needs for

our suffering Christians will be daily in my prayers, and God our heavenly and merciful Father will make up for the shortfall.

**A religious Sister
in Australia**

For your great work

Dear ACN Team, thank you for your recent Mirror magazine, which I love. Enclosed is a small donation for ACN's great work throughout the world. May God bless you all and Our Lady wrap you in her mantle of love always!

**A religious Sister
in Ireland**

How to make your contribution to the Church in Need:

1. Go to our Head Office website: www.acninternational.org
2. Click the **DONATE** button
3. Either: Go to the National Office of *Aid to the Church in Need* in your country.
4. Or: Make an online donation (if you live in a country without an ACN National Office).



A C N

Responsible Publisher:
ACN International, Postfach 1209,
D-61452 Königstein

De licentia competentis
auctoritatis ecclesiasticae

www.acninternational.org