



The Holy See

**LETTER OF THE HOLY FATHER FRANCIS
TO MARK THE 80th ANNIVERSARY OF THE
VOW TO MARY "SALUS POPULI ROMANI"**

Dear brother

Bishop Baldassare REINA

Vicegerent for the diocese of Rome

I am spiritually joined with the entire diocesan community, which is celebrating for the first time the liturgical memorial of Saint Mary *Salus Populi Romani*, likewise recalling the Vow the people of Rome, together with their pastor, Pope Pius XII, made to Our Lady on 4 June 1944 to implore the salvation of the city, when the head-on clash between the German army and the Anglo-American allies was about to take place there.

Devotion to the ancient icon preserved in the Basilica of Saint Mary Major has been alive for centuries in the hearts of the Romans, who turned to it to make supplications and invocations, especially during plagues, natural disasters and wars. The salient events of Rome's religious and civil life were echoed in front of this image. It is therefore unsurprising that the Roman people wished to entrust themselves once again to Mary *Salus Populi Romani* when the city was living through the nightmare of Nazi devastation.

Eighty years on, the memory of that event, so loaded with meaning, can be an opportunity for prayer for those who lost their lives in the second world war, and for renewed reflection on the tremendous scourge of war. Too many conflicts are still ongoing in several parts of the world. I think in particular of tormented Ukraine, of Palestine and Israel, of Sudan, of Myanmar, where weapons are still raging and more human blood continues to be shed. They are dramas that affect countless innocent victims, whose cries of terror and suffering call into question the consciences of all: we cannot and must not yield to the logic of weapons!

Twenty years after the end of the second world war, in 1965, Pope Saint Paul VI, speaking to the United Nations, asked: “Will the world ever come to change the selfish and bellicose outlook that has spun out such a great part of its history up to now?” (4 October 1965, AAS 57 [1965], 882). This question, which still awaits an answer, urges us all to work in a concrete way in favour of peace in Europe and all over the world. Peace is a gift from God, which today too must find hearts willing to receive it and to work to be agents of reconciliation and witnesses of hope.

I hope that the initiatives organized to commemorate the popular Vow to the Mother of God, in the four places that were the backdrop to that event, may revive in Romans the resolve to be builders of true peace everywhere, relaunching fraternity as an essential condition for resolving conflicts and hostilities. Those who possess peace within themselves and, courageously and meekly, undertake to create bonds, to establish relationships between people, to smooth out tensions in families, at work, at school, among friends, can be peacebuilders. They thus realize the Gospel beatitude “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God” (*Mt 5:9*).

May Mary, Mediator of grace, always watchful and caring towards all her children, obtain for all humanity the gift of concord and peace. I entrust all the inhabitants of Rome, especially the elderly, the sick, those who are alone and in difficulty, to the maternal intercession of Mary *Salus Populi Romani*. May She, the Virgin of tenderness and consolation, strengthen faith, hope and charity to radiate God’s love and mercy in the world. With these sentiments, I assure you of my prayer, and I impart my heartfelt Blessing.

Rome, Saint John Lateran, 4 June 2024

FRANCIS

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