



To the Most Reverend
Fr. ANTONIO PICCOLO
Rector general
of the Order of the Clerics Regular of the Mother of God

The joyous occasion of the 1500th anniversary of the cult of the venerated image of Santa Maria in Portico - *Romanae Portus Securitatis*, protector of the Eternal City, is for me a happy opportunity to join in prayer with your religious family, which has been entrusted with its care since 1601, and which wishes to praise Her, a loving and caring Mother, a luminous beacon guiding Her children to a safe harbor. Therefore, I extend my heartfelt thoughts to each of you and to all who participate in this event, which is highly significant for the entire Church of Rome.

By providential coincidence, the year 2024, a year of preparation for the Jubilee of Hope, is a time of special grace as you also commemorate the 450th anniversary of the founding by Saint Giovanni Leonardi, a devotee of the Heavenly Mother, chosen as the faithful guardian of the Leonardian charism.

The veneration of Santa Maria in Portico in Campitelli originated following a miraculous manifestation of the Mother of God on July

17, 524, in the house of Santa Galla, a Roman patrician, in the presence of Pope Saint John I. Since then, the Portico where the noble Galla welcomed the poor and pilgrims, became a Marian Sanctuary and a hospice of charity. This is an invitation for you, the spiritual heirs of Saint Leonardi, to care for and promote the value of welcoming the poor and the marginalized, so that the places we inhabit and the churches themselves may become an open portico to the world, offering consolation and aid to the many forms of need that characterize our lives.

Moreover, the Holy Virgin revealed Herself at a particularly difficult time for the Church, spreading Her mantle over Pope John I, who would suffer and die for peace without renouncing his faith, being taken hostage by political plots and fratricidal wars. In view of the current scenario, how can we not feel the urgency to foster peace, to pray for peace? Invoke peace and be peacemakers, starting within your reconciled and reconciling communities. Let the example of fraternal life be evangelically attractive to the faithful to whom you offer 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 where one can take refuge; She, in fact, continually gives us Her Son as the only source of concord, hope of salvation, and path to peace, an absolute imperative of human striving.

In this spirit, Saint Giovanni Leonardi, the Holy Pharmacist, founded the “Congregation of the Reformed Priests of the Blessed Virgin Mary”, precisely to restore to the Church the apostolic brilliance of its origins. “Christ first of all”, he would say, Christ at the centre of everything, Christ as the measure of everything! Christ, the only remedy capable of curing the ills of the Church and humanity.

This commitment, with Mary lovingly accompanying the journey of the Congregation dedicated to Her, is renewed today and calls all of you to ever greater missionary zeal and continuous progress in the spiritual life, embracing the exhortation of the Holy Founder, who strongly reminded, *“before the eyes of the mind and heart only the honor and glory of Christ and Him crucified”* (Saint Giovanni Leonardi, Hymn to the Cross).

Finally, may the jubilee celebrations you are about to experience, under the gaze of the Virgin of the Portico, bring to mind the evangelizing work of Saint Giovanni Leonardi, who also wrote the first Constitutions of the Urban College of Propaganda Fide, to form priests capable of meeting the missionary challenges of the time. I encourage you, therefore, to also care for the integral formation of the Religious, in a path of progressive conformity to the Risen Crucified One, the first fruits of redeemed humanity (see, 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, while entrusting everyone to the intercession of the Holy Virgin, lovingly invoked as *Romanae Portus Securitatis*, and Saint Giovanni Leonardi, I gladly send my paternal Blessing, trusting in your prayers for me.

Fraternally,

Francesco

Rome, from Saint John Lateran, June 29, 2024

Solemnity of Saints Peter and Paul, Apostles

Patrons of the Soul City of Rome