



**Message for the 15th centenary
since the Apparition of St. Mary in Portico**

Romanae Portus Securitatis

524-2024



Dear Brothers and Sisters,

On July 17, 2024, we commemorate the 1500th anniversary of the miraculous apparition of the image of Santa Maria in Portico, venerated in the city of Rome as *Romanae Portus Securitatis*. This sacred image has been under the care of the religious family of the Regular Clerics of the Mother of God since August 14, 1601, entrusted by Pope Clement VIII directly into the hands of the founder, Saint Giovanni Leonardi. He proclaimed it by composing the "Narration of the Miraculous Image of S. Maria in Portico" in 1605.

It is beautiful to think that this Jubilee of the Church of Rome and our Order prepares and accompanies the greater Jubilee of the Universal Church that will take place in 2025. Mary, drawing us to herself and involving us in her meditative silence, prepares us to encounter and embark on the Path of salvation, the Son Jesus, whom she presents to us as a gift from the heavenly Father.

As Pope Francis reminded us, this path is a way of prayer "to thank God for the many gifts" and is the "voice of the solitary heart and soul, which translates into solidarity and sharing of daily bread." Indeed, the apparition of the image is linked to the experience of the Church as a home of fraternal solidarity.

Mary appears where the Church reveals to the world the charity of Christ, where the Church nurtures fraternal charity. Galla, daughter of the patrician Consul Simmaco, hosts 12 poor people every day to receive daily bread from the hands of the Church. She herself, a sign of the eschatological banquet, serves them. In the pantry "of the humble and fearful Galla who served the poor," Mary appears, dispenser of heavenly grace, Mother of God, Mother of the Church, Mother of the mission.

John Leonardi wanted his religious to gaze upon Mary everywhere to become an image of Christ like her. Therefore, in this solemn year, we are invited to lift our eyes to this image to discover our deepest identity as Christians and as a church.

The sacred image, as narrated in the 16th-century *Legenda*, was delivered by angels into the hands of Pope John I, who rushed there from the Lateran Basilica, which celebrates its 1700 years of consecration. It shows Mary appearing in a blossoming garden, between two wreaths of oak, a clear reference to the primordial garden, the Eden.

She is the new Eve who does not concern herself with taking fruits from the garden for herself but offers the salvific fruit for all on earth, the Son of God descended among us. Thus, she transforms the earth into the new paradise. That fruit ripens every day on the tree of the Church, where charity is not only proclaimed but is concrete and effective action for human life.

Mary presents herself to our gaze in an open portico. When our doors open to welcome, we become a port of shelter, and when the doors of our homes and lives open to sharing, we become a gateway to paradise. The Church becomes an open portico to the world, ready to provide secure shelter from the waves of life for those who are in the shipwreck of existence.

Above, to the right and to the left, Peter and Paul attest that all men are recipients of maternal and daily love, that the love of God is universal, and that the Church is inclusive. They also tell us that the church is one and that only in the synodal journey does it express itself as a sacrament of salvation for all humanity.

Mary, Mother of Christ and Mother of the Church, reflects to us the one timeless Mystery. *Christus heri, hodie et semper, Ecclesia heri hodie et semper* (Christ yesterday, today, and forever, the Church yesterday, today, and forever). Over the centuries, the true essence of the Church, founded on Christ, remains the same. The commandment of love is the only way, the open heart of Christ is the only source, for the Stem on which it is grafted is eternal.

January 1, 2024

Solemnity of the Mother of God

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