

Pope launches monthlong recitation of rosary praying for end of pandemic

Under the gaze of a seventh-century icon of Mary, Pope Francis launched a monthlong, global recitation of the rosary, pleading for Mary's intercession for the end of the COVID-19 pandemic.

And he prayed May 1 that Mary would move people's consciences "so that the enormous amounts spent to increase and perfect weapons are instead used to promote research to prevent similar catastrophes in the future."

The pope and about 160 young adults and families from Rome prayed in St. Peter's Basilica and were joined remotely by people at the National Shrine and Basilica of Our Lady of Walsingham in England, the first of 30 Marian shrines around the world that will lead the rosary every day throughout May.

Each day in May, there will be a livestream from one of 30 chosen Marian shrines or sanctuaries to guide the prayer at 6 p.m. Rome time (10 a.m. Alberta time) on all Vatican media platforms.

The Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception was scheduled to lead the prayers "for all world leaders and for all heads of international organizations" May 17, and the Quebec Shrine of Notre Dame du Cap was to lead prayers for "for all law enforcement and military personnel and for all firefighters" May 23.

"At the beginning of the month dedicated to Our Lady, we join in prayer with all the shrines around the world, the faithful and all people of good will to entrust to our holy mother all of humanity so harshly tried by this pandemic," the pope said, introducing the recitation of the glorious mysteries of the rosary.

The Pontifical Council for Promoting New Evangelization coordinated the rosary marathon, the scheduling of the shrines and the assigning of a specific prayer intention for each day of the month traditionally devoted to Mary.

The pope said those intentions would include people who have died or fallen ill with the virus, their loved ones and the medical personnel who cared for them, people who had lost their jobs and students who longed to return to school and to their friends. The prayers, he said, also would remember "the people, especially women, who endured violence within the home" during the pandemic lockdowns.

"Mother of Succor, welcome us under your mantle and protect us, sustain us in times of trial and light in our hearts the lamp of hope for the future," the

pope prayed, standing before the Marian icon.