

7 - 5-24-20 Mary Help of Christians

On May 24 all around the Salesian world the Salesian family will celebrate the feast day of Mary Help of Christians. "The Help of Christians" is the title St. John Bosco chose to venerate the Blessed Mother.

There have been certain times and places in history when communities of Christians have experienced the power of Mary's intervention in most dramatic ways. For instance, in 1571 when the Turkish and Moslem forces were turned back from overpowering Christendom in the Battle of Lepanto, Pope St. Pius V gave credit to Mary for saving the Church from destruction. He instituted the celebration of the Feast of the Most Holy rosary, and the addition of the invocation "AUXILIUM CHRISTIANORUM, ORA PRO NOBIS" (HELP OF CHRISTIANS, PRAY FOR US) in the Litany of the Blessed Virgin.

In 1808, Napoleon Bonaparte, the emperor of France, kidnapped and imprisoned Pope Pius VII. He intended to force the Pope to sign a treaty that would grant Napoleon all power over both Church and State in France and all her conquered territories.

From his jail cell, the Pope sent messages to all the Church, calling on the faithful to pray the Rosary for his safe release. The Holy Father also vowed to God that he would institute a special feast in honor of Mary when he returned to Rome and the Vatican.

The eventual collapse of Napoleon's empire forced him to release the Pope, and on May 24, 1814, Pius VII returned to Rome in a joyful and triumphant procession. In thanksgiving, he instituted the Feast of Mary, Help of Christians, in 1815.

In turbulent times of the Church, Mary was seen to be the Help of Christians to keep the true faith alive. Don Bosco lived in turbulent times for the Church as well. There was a strong anti-clerical movement in Italy at Don Bosco's time. The Church was being attacked from many sides.

Don Bosco taught his youngsters to rely on Mary, Help of Christians, to stay focused on the true faith. To Don Bosco, Mary's help was more than ever needed in his day because there were so many lukewarm Christians to make fervent, sinners to convert, and innocent to protect. Don Bosco worked feverishly to spread this devotion, encouraging all to have confidence in Mary's intercession. He often said: "Have a devotion to Mary, and you will see what miracles are."

We, too, live in turbulent times--for our Church and dealing with the world health crisis. The pandemic has closed our churches. When the crisis is over, how many will return to church? Even without the threat of COVID 19, our society proposes health care laws that compromise our Catholic values of respecting all human life from conception to natural death.

The media will jump at any opportunity to deface the Church. Centuries old faith practices of Catholic families are being broken by many young fathers and mothers who choose not to pass the practice of their faith onto their children. Relativism runs rampant on college campuses, and in our popular culture. We need the Help of Christians!

Mary is a true guide, nurturer, and protector. Of course she is, she is our Mother. She is our help to all God wants for us.

