



The Holy See

JOHN PAUL II

REGINA CAELI

Fifth Sunday of Easter, 9 May 2004

1. During the month of May, the People of God feel the need to deepen their devotion to Mary, whose motherly presence sustains Christians and the whole world.

From the moment the Virgin of Nazareth pronounced her "*fiat*", "under the special influence of the Holy Spirit, [her] heart, the heart of both a virgin and a mother, has always followed the work of her Son and has gone out to all those whom Christ has embraced and continues to embrace with inexhaustible love" (Encyclical *Redemptor Hominis*, n. 22). If, therefore, Christ's love is inexhaustible, the Immaculate Heart of his Mother must also have the "inexhaustibility of a mother" (cf. *ibid.*).

2. Jesus on the Cross wanted to extend Mary's spiritual motherhood and make it accessible to all by giving to her as a son the disciple whom he loved (cf. Jn 19: 26). From that moment, generations and generations of believers have called upon her and turn to her with love and hope. And Our Lady expresses her maternity "in its exceptional closeness to man and all that happens to him" (cf. *ibid.*).

Oh, if only human beings were aware of this extraordinary gift! How much more easily would they feel like brothers and sisters, doing away with hatred and violence to open their hearts to forgive those who have wronged them and to unlimited respect for the dignity of every person.

3. In a few days, on 13 May, we will be commemorating the apparition of the Virgin at Fatima and her appeal for conversion. Dear brothers and sisters, let us pray that the people of our time too will accept the pressing invitation of the one who watches lovingly over the Church and the world.

This morning in Rome the *Springtime Marathon* set out from St Peter's Square, in the context of the "Feast of Schools" organized by the *Catholic schools* in the Diocese. Similar events took place in other cities, especially Trent. I cordially greet the teachers, the pupils and their families, and I encourage each scholastic institute to continue its precious service of training the new generations.

Unfortunately, so many of the world's children have no primary education and end by being exploited as manpower. The *World Congress against the Exploitation of Child Workers* that will be taking place in Florence in the coming days will remind us of this. I hope that the meeting will help to promote the effective recognition of childrens' rights.

I greet the pilgrims who have come here, especially the faithful from the Parish of St John the Evangelist in Empoli.

Today is "Mother's Day". May the Mother of Jesus protect and support all mothers throughout the world!

I wish everyone a happy Sunday!

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