

vidually and as a community, our gratitude to God for all his favours. Also for the harvest there is an appropriate Mass. The symbolic offering and the blessing of the first fruits of the harvest to God, in order to praise him for his gifts, is a tradition practiced in many parts of the world and also in some of our communities. Where this offering is not yet practiced it would be good to introduce it.

### Conclusion

The prayer of the Holy Rosary gives us the opportunity to mediate on the mysteries of the incarnation, life, passion, death, and resurrection of Jesus. In other words, it gives us the possibility to contemplate the immense love of Jesus for us and to respond to it in love. “The love of God revealed in the pierced heart of Jesus on the Cross, gives rise to love. Love is light that can always enlighten a world grown dim and give us the courage to keep living and working” (*Deus Caritas Est* 39).

My dear brothers and sisters let us never give in to fear or discouragement, remembering the words of Jesus: “***The world will make you suffer. But be brave! I have defeated the world***” (*Jn 16:33*).

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## PASTORAL LETTER 5

### 7th October 2013 — Feast of Our Lady of the Holy Rosary

“Do not be afraid, I have conquered the world!” (*Jn 16:33*)

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

This Pastoral Letter is published on the feast of Our Lady of the Holy Rosary, a feast that was established in 1571 by St. Pius V to commemorate the naval battle of Lepanto. The victory of the Christians’ fleet over the Turks, in fact, was attributed to the Virgin Mary, whose help was invoked through praying of the Holy Rosary.

Last August 15, 2013, on the solemnity of the Assumption, Pope Francis during the homily asked the people: “**Do you pray the Rosary every day?** ... The Rosary has this ‘suffering’ dimension that is of struggle, a sustaining prayer in the battle against the evil one and his accomplices. The Rosary also sustains us in the battle”.

With the Holy Father I also wish to encourage all our Catholic faithful to pray the Rosary not only during the months of October and May, which are traditionally dedicated to the Mother God, but **every day!**

The Rosary, if recited properly, meditating on the four set of mysteries (of

Joy, of Light, of Sorrow, and of Glory), is a wonderful means of spiritual growth. It is also a very effective instrument of community building. It gathers together the members of the family, groups of families and neighbors, the entire parish and even members of other churches.

Through the prayer of the Rosary let us ask the intercession for Mary to help us grow in love for Jesus, her Son and our Saviour, so that we may be able to draw life from him who said: “I have come that they may have life and have it abundantly” (*Jn 10:10*). Many times Jesus spoke about “life” to his disciples and he still speaks the same words to us today: “I am the bread of life” (*Jn 6:3*); “I am the Way, the Truth and the Life” (*Jn 14:6*); “I am the resurrection and the life” (*Jn 11:25*); “I am the living water” (*Jn 4:11*); “I am the light of life” (*Jn 8:12*); “I am the life-giving vine” (*Jn 15:8*).

In order to give us life Jesus gave up his own. In order to free us from our sins, he took upon himself the sins of the world. No greater love could be experienced than the love of Jesus for us. What is our response to such love? For example, **do we believe that if Christ were with us and within us, no one could be against us?**

This question brings me to the purpose of this Pastoral Letter. One of the concerns expressed during the Diocesan Assembly was “**sorcery**” and the Archbishop was asked to write a Pastoral Letter on this topic”.

It is difficult to define sorcery. The Catechism of the Catholic Church states: “All practices of magic or sorcery, by which one attempts to tame occult powers, so as to place them at one’s service and have a supernatural power over others – even if this were for the sake of restoring health – are gravely contrary to the virtue of religion. These practices are even more to be condemned when accompanied by the intention of harming someone, or when they have recourse to the intervention of demons. Wearing charms is also reprehensible” (2117).

We can certainly say that sorcery feeds on hatred, revenge, jealousy, greed and it can lead to deep and tragic effects. It spoils friendships, destroys relationships, wrecks entire communities, makes people lose their health and actually creates the atmosphere in which sorcery beliefs continue to flourish. In fact it can lead us to do the same thing to others.

Sick” is a sacrament. St. James wrote: “Is there anyone sick among you? Let him call for the elders of the Church, and let them pray over him and anoint him in the name of the Lord. This prayer, made in faith, will save the sick man. The Lord will restore his health, and if he has committed any sins, they will be forgiven” (*5:14-15*). And if a priest is not available, in times of distress, when thoughts are likely to turn to despair, or to revenge and sorcery, these are just the times to go and get one of the community church leaders or catechists who have been trained to lead prayers.

**When somebody has died**, and Catholics visit the family and show concern, they should avoid, nevertheless, all talk about sorcery. Our gossip does not help anybody: it does not help the family of the deceased who needs support and comfort; it does not help the community that could be torn apart by unfounded rumours; and it does not help the dead person who, instead, needs our prayers for the eternal repose of his/her soul. In this regard, I would like to suggest that - where appropriate - the traditional after-burial feast be initiated with the celebration of the Mass for the eternal repose of the soul of the departed.

**When people turn to magic in order to have a good harvest**, it might be good to remember that the Church has special prayers that we can use to praise God and to make holy various situations and events in our everyday life. These prayers can help us to understand God’s goodness not only in the elements of creation but also in the events of human life. At all times, therefore, and in every situation, we have the opportunity for praising God through Christ in the Holy Spirit, for calling on divine help, and for giving thanks in all things, provided there is nothing that conflicts with the letter and the spirit of the Gospel.

For example, there is an appropriate Mass and blessing of the fields (gardens) and of seeds at planting time. Through this Mass and blessing, we want to express our grateful recognition of the blessings of God, who created the universe out of his love and entrusted its care to human labour as the way of providing for common human needs. There is nothing wrong, therefore, if at the beginning of the planting season we seek God’s blessing on our crops. As the seeds are planted, God is asked to protect them from disease and destruction and to bring forth from them an abundant yield.

And, of course, it is surely good if at harvest time we were to express, indi-

right path” (*Deus Caritas Est 36*), so that we will not fall into fear that could prevent us from loving and serving others. **The more we love Jesus, the more we love our neighbour and the less will be our fear.** St. John reminds us: “in love there can be no fear, but fear is driven out by perfect love” (*1Jn 4:18*). In other words, “LOVE OVERCOMES ALL FEAR”.

But how can we love Jesus?

During the Last Supper Jesus said to the Apostles: “Now I give you a new commandment: love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also must love one another” (*Jn 13:34*). A little while later Jesus said: “If you love me, you will keep my commandments” (*Jn 14:15*).

In giving us a new commandment Jesus is calling for the advent of a new era and for a change of deep-rooted cultural traditions that prevent us from loving as he loved. We all know that during his time there was the saying: “An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth” (*Mt 5:38*) and also another saying: “Love your neighbour and hate your enemy” (*Mt 5:43*). Jesus changed all that when he said: “But now I tell you: ‘do not oppose evil with evil’ (*Mt 5:39*) ... ‘Love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you’” (*Mt 5:44*).

In the same way, by looking at our neighbour not as possible adversaries or ‘enemies’ who wish us evil, but as true brothers and sisters, we practice his new commandment and contribute to change our cultural traditions of fear, competition, and enmity. We also prove that we are truly Jesus’ disciples, thus loving him as well. In fact, the love of God is shown through love of our neighbour, and love of our neighbour deepens our love of God.

### Some practical things to do

**When people are sick**, always get a medical report of the sickness and seek professional explanation from doctors, nurses and aid-post workers. If medicines are not available, but some people in the village are knowledgeable of herbal medicines, these can be used. Nevertheless, the administration of these medicines or “so-called traditional cures do not justify either the invocation of evil powers, or the exploitation of another’s credulity” (*CCC 2117*). Let us remember that for Catholics the “anointing of the

### Our God is a God of life and a God of love

With this Pastoral Letter I don’t intend to explain why sorcery is wrong, because almost every Catholic accepts that sorcery is to be condemned. Unfortunately, almost everybody also believes in the efficacy and power of sorcery.

My intention with this Pastoral Letter is **to impress on everybody that our God is a God of life and a God of love.**

God created us in his image and likeness and, therefore, he wants us to live and to love. In fact he promised us an eternal life. He gives us all the means and the power to live our life fully and well. God did not give us the power to do harm simply by wishing evil to others. He did not give us the power to kill with our mind. At times we hear people, angry at their neighbour, say: “I wish he/she were dead”. But this cannot happen simply because one wishes it.

Yes, it is true that because of anger, jealousy, envy and hatred we could cause moral and physical damage and even death through the use of our words and actions, but we cannot kill just by wishing it or by cursing.

Not even the Devil has such power. The Devil can surely tempt us to do and cause physical harm, but the devil has no power to kill us, because if he did no good people would be alive, simply because the Devil hates anyone who is good. The story of Job can be enlightening. To Satan who challenged Him to take away everything Job had, God said: “All right, everything he has is in your power, but you must not hurt Job himself” (*Job 1:12*)

**“Do not be afraid, I have conquered the world!”** (*Jn 16:33*)

Unfortunately, when tragedies, natural calamities, man-made disasters and even illness and natural death happen, the tendency is to attribute them to the presence of an evil power, which, in some places, is identified with an evil creature which takes possession of a person; sometimes with a power “magically and mechanically obtained” by nature or ancestral spirits. **This causes fear in people.**

When we are paralysed by fear what should we do?

***Our first step should be to pray*** - We must constantly beseech and call upon God that He may be with us, as we go about our daily lives. “The Christian who prays ... seeks an encounter with the Father of Jesus Christ, asking God to be present with the consolation of the Spirit to him and his work” (*Deus Caritas Est* 37). A personal relationship with God can help us from falling prey to fear and despair. I believe that we all have experienced the powerful help of prayer in moments of danger, when tried by circumstances and situations in life and especially when overcome by fear.

When I was in Alotau, I was told the story of a man from Rossel Island who had a dream that terrified him, predicting sorcery. In the dream, a shrill bird, a messenger of death, warned him of the presence of sorcery, and he saw a lot of colours and a deep black hole. Terrified, now half awake, he tried to scream, but nothing came out of his mouth, for he seemed completely paralysed. Nevertheless, automatically and soundlessly he called on God and the dream went immediately away. The dream thus contained both the fear and its medicine, echoing the Psalm, “The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want ... Although I walk in the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil, for you are with me. Your rod and your staff are there to comfort me” (*Ps 23: 1.4*).

Equally encouraging and helpful are some of the words from the Book of the Prophet Isaiah: “Thus says Yahweh, who created you and formed you: fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by your name; you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you. When you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; neither will the flames consume you. For I am your saviour ... Fear not, for I am with you” (*Is 43:1-3.5*).

In our difficulties, problems, temptations, and fear we must not simply ask ourselves: “where do these come from?”; let us, instead, react positively and invoke the Lord. Let us cry out the name of Jesus: “**Jesus help me!**” And we are sure that he will help us, because “the Lord is close to those who invoke him, to those who seek him with a sincere heart”.

***We must put more faith in Jesus, our Lord!*** Jesus said: “Do not be worried and upset, believe in God and believe also in me” (*Jn 14:1*).

During his life Jesus proved his power over people and things; he healed

people from their infirmities and even from evil spirits; he raised some from death; he multiplied bread and fish; he cursed the fig tree (*Mt 21:18-20*), which dried up immediately. So many times Jesus showed his disciples why they needed to believe in him. When the Apostles were tossed by the waves, he told them: “Courage, it is I, do not be afraid” (*Mk 6:50*). He got into the boat with them and the wind dropped. Above all, with his passion, death and resurrection Jesus taught us that he is more powerful than the Evil one, that he is stronger than death. In other words, no man has ever done what Jesus did and this is the reason why we should believe in him and know that with him we are secure both here in this world as well as in the next.

Let us recall some encouraging words of Jesus: “I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?” (*Jn 11:25-26*).

“For those who believe in Jesus and in his resurrection there is a force for good stronger than all the forces of evil” (*Pastoral Plan 10*). Our Christian faith holds that the power of Good is greater than the power of Evil, and that within each of us we have the power to overcome the fear that breeds the very evil that terrifies us.

At times I wonder why some of our brothers and sisters have more fear of sorcerers - who have no power over us - but seem not to fear God’s judgement and continue to live in the state of sin or to live a life contrary to his commandments. Jesus said: “I tell you, my friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot afterwards do anything worse. I will show you whom to fear: fear God, who after killing has the authority to throw you into hell. Believe me, he is the one you must fear!” (*Lk 12:4-5*). This is the only time Jesus refers to “fear of God” which, nevertheless, is very different from the fear of some evil men or of sorcery. God does not really threaten to throw us into hell; rather he reminds us that to lose him because of our life of sin is to lose ourselves, and this is hell.

***Above all, we must deepen our love for Jesus.*** It is not enough to believe in Jesus, we must love him!

“A living relationship with Christ is important if we are to keep on the