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Pope Francis Prays for an End to the Pandemic

Pope Francis left the Vatican on Sunday to visit two important pilgrimage sites in Rome to pray for the world in the midst of the coronavirus outbreak.

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Two intense moments of prayer: one before the ancient icon of *Maria Salus Populi Romani* at the Basilica of Saomt Mary Major, and the other at

the foot of a wooden crucifix that protected Rome from a great plague.

Pope Francis spent his afternoon on the Third Sunday of Lent seeking to underline his closeness to those who suffer by imploring the special protection of Our Lady.

The Director of the Holy See Press Office, Matteo Bruni, announced the Pope's visits in a communique on Sunday:

“This afternoon, just after 4 pm, Pope Francis left the Vatican and made a private visit to the Basilica of Saint Mary Major, to offer a prayer to the Virgin Mary, *Salus Populi Romani*, where her icon is kept and venerated. Then, after taking a walk along the Via del Corso – as if making a pilgrimage – he visited the church of San Marcello on the Corso, where a miraculous crucifix is housed. In 1522 it was carried in procession throughout the neighborhoods of the

city so that the 'Great Plague' might cease in Rome. With his prayer, the Holy Father pleaded for an end to the pandemic that has struck Italy and the world. He also implored the healing of the many sick people, remembered the numerous victims of these past days, and asked that their families and friends might find consolation and comfort. His prayer intention was also extended to healthcare workers, doctors, nurses, and all those working in these days to guarantee the smooth functioning of society. The Holy Father returned to the Vatican around 5:30 pm.”

In the morning, after his usual recitation of the Angelus (which was streamed online under the circumstances), the Pope addressed the global health emergency:

"These days, Saint Peter's Square is closed so my greeting goes directly to you who are connected through the media.

"During this pandemic in which we find ourselves living more or less isolated, we are invited to rediscover and deepen the value of communion that unites all members of the Church. United with Christ, we are never alone, but we form a single Body, of which He is the Head. This union is nourished by prayer, and also by spiritual communion in the Eucharist, a highly recommended practice when it is not possible to receive the sacrament. I say this for everyone, especially for people who live alone.

"I renew my closeness to all the sick and those who care for them; the many health care workers and volunteers who help people who cannot get out of the house; as well

as those who satisfy the needs of the poorest and the homeless.

"Thank you very much for all the effort that each one of you makes to help in this difficult moment. May the Lord bless you and Our Lady watch over you; and please don't forget to pray for me. Happy Sunday and have a good lunch! Thank you."

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A week earlier, on the occasion of the Day of Prayer and Fasting, the Holy Father recited this prayer:

"O Mary,

You shine continuously on our journey

as a sign of salvation and hope.

We entrust ourselves to you, Health of the Sick,

who, at the Cross,
united with Jesus' pain,
keeping your faith firm.

You, Salvation of the Roman people,
know what we need,
and we trust that you will provide
for those needs so that,
as at Cana of Galilee,
joy and celebration may return
after this moment of trial.

Help us, Mother of Divine Love,
to conform ourselves to the will of
the Father
and to do what Jesus tells us.

He who took our suffering upon
Himself,

and burdened Himself with our sorrows

to bring us, through the Cross,

to the joy of Resurrection. Amen.

*We seek refuge under your protection,
O Holy Mother of God.*

Do not despise our pleas — we who are put to the test —

and deliver us from every danger. O glorious and blessed Virgin."

VaticanNews; RomeReports

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