

**“That which my Father has given me is greater than all.”**

***Jn 10:29***

The whole Catholic world looked on with expectation on Thursday evening as white smoke billowed from the chimney above the Sistine chapel, and indeed more than just the Catholic world. It was, as it always is, a momentous occasion to witness the proclamation to the crowds in the square below, and through live broadcasts to a global population beyond, the name of the new Supreme Pontiff and Vicar of Christ.

But little noticed, and towards the end of his opening words from the balcony, our Holy Father Pope Leo XIV mentioned, almost as if in passing, the feast of Our Lady of Pompeii which fell on the very day that he ascended to the throne of Peter, 8<sup>th</sup> May.

Bartolo Longo, a nineteenth century Italian lawyer, was raised a Catholic but when he was at university in Naples ended up becoming ordained as a Satanic priest. Much troubled in the following years by mental illness, paranoia, and thoughts of suicide, he was eventually introduced to a Dominican priest who led him back to the Catholic Faith through devotion to the rosary, and on 7<sup>th</sup> October, the feast of Our Lady of the Rosary, in 1871, Longo became a Dominican tertiary. Mindful of Our Lady's promise to St Dominic that 'he who propagates my rosary will be saved,' Longo began promoting devotion to the rosary with much fervour, seeking both his own salvation and that of others also.

Longo was encouraged by the local bishop in Pompeii to build a large church which was to become a shrine to Our Lady of the Rosary. The cornerstone of the shrine was laid on 8<sup>th</sup> May 1876 and the church was consecrated fifteen years later in May 1891 in the presence of the personal representative of Pope Leo XIII. The church is now known as the Basilica of Our Lady of the Most Holy Rosary, and enshrined within is a painting of Our

Lady handing the rosary to St Dominic whilst St Catherine looks on. In the presence of this picture, restored by Longo, miracles soon began to take place as devotion to Our Lady – and the Catholic Faith more generally – began to flourish in an area where there had lately been very little faith or devotion at all. Along the way, Longo and his wife undertook great charitable works for local orphaned children and the children of prisoners, their hard work, devotion, and faith, inspiring many others to join in. Longo was twice nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize for his drive for world peace, and for his social and humanitarian works, but the nominations were not considered because they were deemed to spring from a religious motive and were, therefore, dismissed by the committee, even though the nominations had been supported by Pope Leo himself.

Bartolo Longo died in 1926 and was eventually beatified in 1980. His canonization has been approved and all that awaits is for a date to be set.

Perhaps it is not accidental that a new pope was raised up by Almighty God on the anniversary of the laying of the cornerstone of a shrine dedicated to Our Lady of the Rosary, a day which has since become known as the Feast of Our Lady of Pompeii. Perhaps it is not accidental that the new pope has taken the name Leo, whose predecessor wrote no fewer than twelve encyclicals on the rosary. Exactly half way between his election on 8<sup>th</sup> May and his formal inauguration as pope next Sunday on 18<sup>th</sup> May falls the feast of Our Lady of Fatima (on 13<sup>th</sup> May) who promised that peace would only return to the world when there was a proper and widespread devotion to her Immaculate Heart through the prayerful recitation of the rosary. Perhaps this is not accidental either, given the opening words of the new Pope when he prayed that the peace of the Risen Christ, ‘an unarmed and disarming peace,’ might fill the hearts of all, and reassured us, as Christ Himself had promised, that ‘evil will not prevail.’

In a world wracked with violence and hatred of all that is good, and true, and beautiful – in a world that has turned its back on God and the things of God – perhaps we would all do well, especially in this, Mary’s month of May, to take up once more, and with fervour and devotion, the daily rosary, and to pray it for the intentions of Our Lady herself, and for the restoration of all things in Christ.

In John’s Gospel, Our Lord said, ‘That which my Father has given me is greater than all.’ In other words, no one can take from Christ that which the Father has first given to Christ. If we have been given to Christ in Baptism, it is up to us to make sure that we – and our loved ones – remain in Christ, remain grafted onto Him as branches are grafted onto a vine, so that we may be filled with that peace which the world cannot give (Jn 14:27) and so help to sanctify others by our prayers and our charitable works.

May God, in His mercy – and through the intercession of Our Lady of Pompeii – so lead Pope Leo XIV along the way of everlasting salvation that he may, in turn, lead us along the path of peace on earth and towards eternal blessedness in heaven.

A blessing I wish you all.