



THE ARCHDIOCESE *of* BIRMINGHAM

Office for Ethnic Chaplaincies and Eastern Catholic Churches
Co-ordinator: Monsignor Daniel McHugh

Embracing the Spirit at a Time of Crisis

Reflection for the 7th Week of Easter

17 May 2026

Mgr Daniel McHugh

“Holy Father, keep them in your name, which you have given me.”

(John 17: 11)

Pope Leo celebrated his first year in office on Friday last 8 May with a visit to the Shrine of Our Lady of the Rosary, Pompeii. I had not realised that there was the Feast of this Shrine, and it was significant that Pope Leo had chosen an opportunity to pray with Mary on that historic day. I first discovered the Basilica of Our Lady of the Rosary Pompeii when visiting the famous ruins of Pompeii, the remains following the eruption of Mount



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Vesuvius in 79 AD. Many tourists go to see Pompeii and don't know about the historic Basilica next door. The town of Pompeii was covered with the volcanic ash and remained undisturbed for more than 1000 years and was not repopulated until the middle of the 19th Century. Today it is a UNESCO world heritage site and is among the most popular tourist attractions in Italy with approximately 2.5 million visitors annually.

In an article for 'Commonweal', a lay-led Catholic magazine based in New York, Vanessa Corcoran writes: "In 1876, the ancient city gained a major Marian Shrine because of the unlikely patronage of Bartolo Longo, an Italian lawyer. Longo experienced a crisis of faith and suffered from depression while he was studying at the University of Naples, and he was ordained a Satanic priest. During his mental health crisis, a friar and a nun reached out to him, offering him a rosary. Longo wrote in his memoir that it was "through the intercession of our great mother, whom we venerate in Pompeii by her title of the Rosary" that he returned to the Catholic Church.

Longo established a Confraternity of the Rosary in Pompeii; lay and religious commit to praying the Rosary on a weekly basis. I was reminded of the Rosary Prayer groups that I see in many parishes as I read this article; we see in the reading from the Acts of the Apostles on the 7th Sunday of Easter on encouragement to pray with Mary. This is what the Disciples did



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after the Ascension of Our Lord as they sought to fulfil the mission they had been given.

We are told in the Acts of the Apostles that “after Jesus was taken up into heaven the Apostles returned to Jerusalem... all these with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer, together with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus.” (Acts 1: 12-14) These words follow those in St Matthew’s Gospel Chapter 28 which we read on the Solemnity of the Ascension; “Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Mt 28:19).

When Pope Leo began his Pontificate, he asked for Mary’s guidance in his first public address on 8 May 2025, saying: “Today is the day of the Supplication to Our Lady of Pompeii... Our blessed mother Mary always wants to walk with us, to be close to us, she always wants to help us with her intercession and her love. So let us pray together for this mission, and for all the Church and for peace in the world.” Dr Vanessa Corcoran continues her article; “Since these first words a year ago, Pope Leo has continued to affirm the importance of Mary for both his personal devotion and for the Church at large.” And she concludes: “Focussing on his pastoral ministry, Pope Leo has chosen an opportunity to pray with his spiritual mother on this historic day – and invites us to do the same.”



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The Sunday Connection commentary of the Gospel for the 7th Sunday of Easter concludes, “In today’s Gospel we also note the distinction found in John’s Gospel between the world and his disciples. The disciples are in the world, but they are separate from it because they are given to Jesus. They are chosen from the world to be in service to the world for its salvation. This salvation has been accomplished in Jesus, because Jesus has revealed the Father to the world, but the disciples will be sent by Jesus to make both the Father and Jesus known to the world. Jesus’ prayer is for the disciples’ work in the world.”

As Father Ferlita says in his commentary, Jesus “is glorified in them when they are filled with his Spirit (at Pentecost) and thereby share in the very life of God and they bear witness in the Spirit to him and the word he spoke, the word entrusted to him by his Father and which he now entrusts to them – and to us... and that word must be spoken – by us – again and again.” At a time of crisis when the world we live in is ever more fractured, we ask Mary to be with us in prayerful preparation for Pentecost when the Holy Spirit led those of different languages and different cultures to hear the message of peace.

“Holy Father, keep them in your name, which you have given me.”