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The Pope asks Our Lady to obtain peace and salvation for all

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At 9:30 a.m. today, solemnity of the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary and the 150th anniversary of the dogmatic definition, the Pope presided at a Eucharistic

concelebration with members of the College of Cardinals in the Vatican Basilica. The principal celebrant was Cardinal Camillo Ruini, vicar general of the Holy Father for the diocese of Rome, who celebrated the 50th anniversary of his priestly ordination today.

After recalling that Blessed Pius IX proclaimed "this admirable dogma of the Catholic faith" on December 8, 1854 in St. Peter's Basilica, John Paul II greeted representatives of the National Mariological Societies who have been participating in an International Marian Mariological Congress organized by the Pontifical Marian Academy. He congratulated Cardinal Ruini for his priestly jubilee, and expressed his gratitude for "the service that he has rendered and continues to render with generous dedication to the Church as my vicar general for the Diocese of

Rome and as president of the Italian Episcopal Conference."

"With what a special blessing God referred to Mary from the beginning of time!" he exclaimed. "Truly blessed, Mary, among all women! The Father chose her in Christ before the creation of the world, so that she would be holy and immaculate before him in love, predestining her as the first fruit to filial adoption through Jesus Christ."

The Holy Father affirmed that Our Lady's "yes to the Angel's annunciation is situated in the concreteness of our earthly condition, in humble gift to the divine will of saving humanity not from history, but in history. In fact, immune from every stain of original sin, the 'new Eve' benefited in a singular way from the work of Christ as most perfect Mediator and Redeemer."

Addressing Mary, the Pope today renewed in a special way "the entrustment of the whole Church" to her and asked her to "guide your children on the pilgrimage of faith, making them ever more obedient and faithful to the Word of God. May you accompany every Christian on the path of conversion and holiness, in the struggle against sin and in the search for true beauty, which is always the sign and reflection of divine Beauty. May it be you, again, to obtain peace and salvation for all peoples."

At noon, the Pope appeared at the window of his study to pray the Angelus with the thousands of people in St. Peter's Square. The Holy Father emphasized that the Immaculate Conception "is like a beacon of light for humanity for all times. At the beginning of the third millennium, she leads us to believe and hope in God, in His salvation, and in eternal

life. She illuminates particularly the path of the Church committed to the New Evangelization."

After the Marian prayer, John Paul II referred to violence in Mosul, Iraq and to the destruction of both an Armenian-Apostolic Church and the Chaldean archbishopric. "I express my spiritual closeness to the faithful, shaken by the attack, and implore the Lord, through the intercession of the Immaculate Virgin, that the beloved Iraqi people may at last know a time of reconciliation and peace."

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