

The Holy Rosary

by Father Francis Spirago

The suppliant who prays fervently is wont to repeat over and over again words which come from the depth of the heart. Our Lord did this on Mount Olivet; David, in Psalm 135, exclaims no less than twenty-seven times “His mercy endureth forever,” and St. Francis of Assisi spent whole nights repeating: “My God and my all.” The devout servants of Mary used to address Her frequently in the words of the archangel, adding one *Ave Maria* to another, as one places roses in a wreath.

1. The Rosary is a prayer in which the Our Father, followed by ten Hail Mary's, is repeated five or fifteen times, accompanied by meditation on the life, the Passion, and the exaltation of the Redeemer.

We begin the Rosary with the Creed and three Hail Mary's, for the increase within us of the three theological virtues. While reciting the Rosary everyone must hold his own rosary in his

hand, and touch the beads as he says the prayers; but if several persons join in saying it, it is only necessary for one to hold the rosary, in order thereby to regulate the number of prayers.

The Rosary is divided into the joyful, the sorrowful and the glorious mysteries; in the first we honor God the Father, Who sent us the Saviour; in the second, God the Son, Who redeemed us; in the third, God the Holy Ghost, Who sanctifies us.

2. The Rosary owes its origin to St. Dominic.

The hermits of the first centuries, who could not read the psalter, used to recite one Our Father and one Hail Mary in the place of every psalm; and in order to note the number they had said, they made use of small stones, or of seeds strung on a cord. St. Dominic was the first who made the custom general of substituting one hundred and fifty Hail Mary's for the one hundred and fifty psalms; hence the Rosary used to be called the Psalter of Mary.

When, about the year 1200, the heresies of the Albigenses wrought great mischief in the south of France and the north of Italy, St. Dominic was commissioned by the Pope to preach in refutation of their erroneous tenets. His efforts availed little, and he besought the aid of the Mother of God. She appeared to him, and bade him make use of the Rosary as a weapon against Her enemies. He accordingly introduced it everywhere, and before long it had effected the conversion of more than a hundred thousand heretics.

The use of the Rosary soon spread throughout Christendom, and it became a most popular devotion. It is a method of prayer at once simple and sublime; the prayers are so easy that a child can repeat them, and the mysteries are so profound that they supply a subject for meditation to the most learned theologians. It is a prayer of contemplation as well as a prayer of supplication, for it places before the mind the principal truths of the faith.

The Rosary is a compendium of the Gospels; a complete and practical manual of instruction wherein the chief points of Christian doctrine are presented under the guise of prayer. By

meditation on the events of Our Lord's life, faith and charity are increased; from the example of our divine Redeemer we learn to be humble, gentle, obedient; we are incited to imitate the virtues which the mysteries teach, to strive after what they promise us.

Moreover the union of vocal and mental prayer makes the Rosary easy, pleasant, and profitable. As a method of prayer it is unrivalled; the longer and more devoutly it is practiced, the more one appreciates its excellence and becomes convinced of its supernatural origin.

3. The Rosary is well pleasing to God, because of its humility, and because it is an imitation of the unceasing song of praise sung by the angels.

The Rosary is the prayer of the humble, for in it well-known truths are simply stated and constantly repeated. The proud despise it, but God, Who looks down on the low things (Ps. 112:6), approves it. It is an imitation of the angel's song: we read in Holy Scripture that the angelic choirs cry to one another: "Holy, holy, holy, Lord

God of hosts; all the earth is full of His glory” (Is. 6:3). And when we recite the Rosary, we praise the Mother of God in a similar manner.

It is beyond a doubt that this form of prayer is most acceptable to the Mother of God, for when She appeared at Lourdes She had a rosary in Her hand. Pope Pius IX unhesitatingly asserts that it is Her gift to men, and She loves no other prayer as well.

4. The Rosary is a most useful devotion, for by it we obtain great graces and sure help in time of trouble; many indulgences are besides attached to it.

The Rosary is a very treasury of graces. Many sinners owe their conversion to it. It possesses marvelous power to banish sin and restore the transgressor to a state of grace. By it the just grow in virtue. All the saints who have lived subsequently to the institution of the Rosary have been assiduous in its use,

and this may have contributed largely to their sanctification.

Several holy bishops and servants of God are known to have pledged themselves by vow to recite it daily; St. Charles Borromeo, despite the numerous and pressing duties of his position, recited it every day with the seminarians and the members of his household. Blessed Clement Hofbauer was accustomed to say the Rosary while passing through the streets of Vienna, and rarely did he recite it in vain for the conversion of a sinner. It is recorded of several distinguished officers and victorious commanders that they never engaged in battle without first saying the Rosary, and to this they attributed their military successes.

The Rosary has been called “the thermometer of Christianity,” for the reason that where it is diligently recited faith is ardent, and good works are manifest; and where it is neglected religion is at a low ebb. In seasons of general calamity,

“We have to pray that the Pope may soon consecrate *explicitly* Russia to the Immaculate Heart of Mary, then She will win, as the Church prayed since the old times: “Rejoice O Virgin Mary, for Thou alone hast destroyed all heresies in the whole world.”

... Bishop Athanasius Schneider of Astana, Kazakhstan

Rome’s Chief Exorcist agrees. (See page 9.)

miraculous aid has been granted to Christendom by means of the Rosary; this was especially the case in wars with the Turks, the victory of Lepanto (1571), the deliverance of Vienna (1683), and the victory of Belgrade, which were all owing to the power of the Rosary. It was said that the beads of the chaplet did more execution than the bullets of the soldiers. It was in thanksgiving for these victories that the Holy See instituted the Feast of the Holy Rosary on the first Sunday in October. Pope Sixtus IV declared that many dangers which threatened the world are averted, and the wrath of God is appeased by the prayers of the Rosary.

Our Holy Father Leo XIII says that, as in St. Dominic's time, the Rosary proved a sure remedy for the evils of the age, so it may now effect much towards the amelioration of the ills that afflict society. Everyone who recites the Rosary must feel its supernatural power; there is no prayer which affords more consolation in affliction, more tranquility to the troubled breast. It soothes in sorrow, it imparts the peace spoken of in the Gospel.

Another proof of its excellence is the hatred and contempt wherewith unbelievers regard

it. The devil incites them to decry what is a fruitful source of grace to the Christian, and by which souls are wrested from his grasp.

The Rosary has been richly indulged by the Holy See, and the recital of it strongly urged upon the faithful. An indulgence of a hundred days may be gained for every *Pater* and *Ave*, if five consecutive decades be said on a properly indulgenced rosary. Our Holy Father Leo XIII has decreed that every day during the month of October, the Rosary, together with the Litany of Loretto, be said in church either during the parish Mass, or in the afternoon, with the Blessed Sacrament exposed. For every time of assisting at this devotion seven years and seven quarantines are granted.

Pope Pius IX bequeathed, as a legacy to the faithful, this admonition: "Let the Rosary, this simple, beautiful method of prayer, enriched with many indulgences, be habitually recited of an evening in every household. These are my last words to you; the memorial I leave behind me." Again he said: "In the whole of the Vatican there is no greater treasure than that of the Rosary." **FC**

- Taken from *The Catechism Explained* (out of print).