

EXPLORING CHRISTIAN FAITH

No. 7

THE ROSARY (An Introduction)



AN INTRODUCTION TO THE ROSARY OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY

What is the Rosary?

The word *Rosary* has two main meanings: the physical object, comprised of a string of beads, a medal, and a cross; and the prayer for which this physical object is used as a guide. You don't need the object to pray the Rosary, but the beads will help you keep track of where you are as you pray. Moreover, the Rosary, as a physical object, is a sacred object, the presence of which in your home or pocket is, in a certain sense, a constant prayer offered to God, through Mary.

When we pray the Rosary, we start with the cross, say a prayer, then move on to the first bead and say a prayer, then move to the second bead and say a prayer, and continue in this manner until all of the beads are covered. The basic configuration of the prayer is simple: the Rosary consists of a Cross, a medal, individual beads, and consecutive beads. For the cross, we pray the Apostles' Creed; for the individual beads, the Our Father, and for the consecutive beads, the Hail Mary. After all of the beads have been covered, it is customary to say some concluding prayers, including petitions (if the petitions have not already been stated).

The Rosary can be divided into three parts:

- ❖ Introduction
- ❖ Five *Decades*, and
- ❖ Conclusion.

The introduction consists of the cross and the four beads following it, which together mean the Apostles' Creed, one Our Father, and three Hail Mary's. The five decades each consist of one individual bead and ten consecutive beads - that is of one Our Father, and ten Hail Mary's. The concluding prayers can be any Marian prayer, related prayers, and the petitions for which the Rosary is prayed

Each decade is devoted to a particular event in the life of Jesus or of the Virgin Mary. For the purposes of the Rosary, these are called *Mysteries*. The focus is always on Jesus. But since the Virgin Mary, as the Mother of Jesus, had (and continues to have) a special relationship with Christ, the Rosary is designed to help us contemplate Christ and His love for humanity through His Mother - and Our Mother - on whom He has lavished so much love.

The Mysteries are the following: *The custom is to pray each set of mysteries on the days of the week indicated*

The Joyful Mysteries:

(Monday and Thursday; and the Sundays from 1st Sunday of Advent until Lent.)

1. The Annunciation to Mary
2. The Visitation of Mary
3. The Birth of our Lord Jesus Christ
4. The Presentation of the Child Jesus in the Temple
5. The Finding of Our Lord in the Temple

The Sorrowful Mysteries:

(Tuesday and Friday; and the Sundays of Lent.)

1. The Agony of Christ in the Garden
2. The Scourging at the Pillar
3. The Crowning with Thorns
4. The Carrying of the Cross
5. The Crucifixion and Death of Our Lord on the Cross

Glorious Mysteries:

(Wednesday and Saturday; and the Sundays from Easter until Advent.)

1. The Resurrection of Our Lord
2. The Ascension of Our Lord
3. The Descent of the Holy Spirit upon the Apostles
4. The Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary into Heaven
5. The Coronation of Our Lady as Queen of Heaven and Earth

When we pray the *Joyful Mysteries*, the first decade corresponds to the Annunciation, the second decade to the Visitation, the third, to the Birth of Our Lord, the fourth, to the Presentation at the Temple, and the fifth, to the Finding in the Temple.

When we pray the *Sorrowful Mysteries*, the first decade corresponds to the Agony of Christ in the Garden, the second, to Scourging of Christ, the third, to the Crowning with Thorns, the fourth, to the Carrying of the Cross, and the fifth, to the Crucifixion and Death of Our Lord.

When we pray the *Glorious Mysteries*, the first decade corresponds to the Resurrection of Our Lord, the second, to the Ascension of Our Lord, the third, to the Descent of the Holy Spirit upon the Apostles, the fourth, to the Assumption of the Virgin Mary, and the fifth, to the Coronation of the Virgin Mary.

How we pray the Rosary

The Introduction:

- kiss the cross, and make the sign of the cross
- at the cross, say the Apostles' Creed
- at the first individual bead, say one Our Father
- at each of the three consecutive beads, say one Hail Mary

At each of the Mystery's:

- state its name
- state the prayer intention for this mystery
- at the individual bead -- say one Our Father
- at each of the ten consecutive beads -- say one Hail Mary
- after the 10th, say Glory Be and O My Jesus

Conclusion:

- a Marian prayer
- if desired, a general prayer, such as a prayer to the Holy Spirit
(The usual concluding prayer is the *Salve Regina (Hail, Holy Queen)*, but other prayers, like the *Memorare* of St. Bernard, are just as suitable.
- finally, make the sign of the cross, and the kiss the cross on the Rosary

Some Reflections on the Spirit of Praying the Rosary

We should always keep in mind that the goal of the Rosary is Christ. When we pray the Rosary, we approach Christ through Mary because of her special connection with Him and with us.

Mary is the Mother of Christ, and therefore is also our Mother, because we are a part of Christ. A family has to be very dysfunctional when the children do not want to honour their mother. In a very real sense, when we honour Mary, we do what the Fourth Commandment expects of us. Also, it was God Himself who kept Mary free from all stain of sin, made her His own Mother and raised her into Heaven after the completion of her earthly life. If God has seen fit to honour Mary so abundantly, we do only what God Himself does when we too honour her. But we do not honour Mary for her own sake - we honour her to glorify God, whose work she is.

After the human nature of Christ, Mary is the creature closest to God. Moreover, while Christ is the mediator of all grace between God and creation, Mary is the mediator of grace between Christ and humanity. Consequently, Mary is a powerful intercessor for all who turn to her.

God usually works through His creatures - people preach the Gospel, Bibles are printed and distributed by people, people build churches. In the same way, many things will not happen unless people pray for them. That is why people need to pray for each other. If we believe that our prayers help each other in this life, why should we doubt that the prayers of those who have reached Heaven can also help us. If a person's prayer is efficacious while they are still in this world, why should their prayer not be even more efficacious when they are face to face with God, in eternal glory?

The history of the Church attests that the intercessions of Our Lady do not fail. When we pray to her, we can be sure that our prayers will be answered. Perhaps the answer will not come exactly in the form that we would like - but in the end we will find ourselves more blest than ever, and we will find ourselves drawing closer and closer to God in worship and in love.

As we pray the individual prayers in the Rosary, we should say them slowly, either concentrating on the meaning of the words themselves, or meditating on the mystery of the decade. We should take great care not to allow praying the Rosary to degenerate into a mere habit, done fast, without much attention. Prayer is not magic. The words will do nothing for us if we do not pray them from the heart. A Rosary said hurriedly, with little attention, will have almost no benefit for us. But a Rosary said sincerely, with genuine devotion, will leave a lasting mark on our spiritual development.

If possible, we should meditate on each mystery either before, or after praying the decade, pausing for a minute or so, in order to reflect on meaning of the mystery. Finally, whenever we pray the Rosary, we should make sure to state our petitions at some point, so that we know what we are praying for, and so that we can respond to Our Lady's desire to grant us more and more graces through the Rosary.

(Adapted from an article by Zoltan Abraham)

The Salve Regina (Hail, Holy Queen)

Hail, Holy Queen, Mother of mercy, our life, our sweetness and our hope.

To thee do we cry, poor banished children of Eve.

To thee do we send up our sighs, mourning and weeping in this valley of tears.

Turn then, most gracious advocate, thine eyes of mercy towards us.

And after this our exile, show unto us the blessed Fruit of thy womb, Jesus.

O clement, O loving, O sweet Virgin Mary.

V. Pray for us, O holy Mother of God.

R. That we may be made worthy of the promises of Christ.

Let Us Pray:

O God, Whose only-begotten Son, by His life, death and resurrection,
has purchased for us the rewards of eternal life, grant, we beseech You,

that meditating upon these Mysteries

of the Holy Rosary of the Blessed Virgin Mary, we may imitate what they contain,
and obtain what they promise, through the same Christ, our Lord. *Amen.*

The Memorare of St. Bernard

Remember, O most gracious Virgin Mary,
that never was it known that any one who fled to thy protection, implored thy help,
and sought thy intercession, was left unaided.

Inspired with this confidence, I fly unto thee, O Virgin of virgins, my Mother;
to thee I come; before thee I stand sinful and sorrowful.

O Mother of the Word Incarnate, despise not my petitions,
but, in thy mercy, hear and answer me. *Amen.*