

# THE HOLY ROSARY

*... that their hearts may be encouraged as they are knit together in love, to have all the riches of assured understanding and the knowledge of God's mystery, of Christ, in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. ~ Colossians 2:2-3*



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**T**HE ROSARY is one of the most beloved and cherished private devotions in the Church. For over seven centuries, millions of Christians have found the rosary to be a powerful way of meditating on the most important Christian mysteries: those of Christ's life, death, and Resurrection. Through the gentle repetition of the prayers of the rosary, many have come to a deeper appreciation and love for the gospel. The rosary has a way of recalling to mind the central mysteries of the faith and then penetrating deeply into the meaning, truths, and implications contained in those mysteries. Down through the history of the Church, the rosary has become the second most highly recommended prayer form, subordinate only to the liturgical prayer of the Church, which centers on the holy Mass.

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Historically, the rosary can be traced back to the violent and tumultuous times of the Albigensian heresy in Southern France. St. Dominic de Guzmán (1170-1221), who was a missionary, was saddened by the great doctrinal confusion and error he encountered among the faithful wherever he traveled.

St. Dominic prayed to Mary, the first disciple of Christ, and asked her for her powerful intercession in his missionary work. As reported in the stories told in honor of the Feast of the Holy rosary (October 7), the Blessed

Virgin gave St. Dominic the rosary as a tool to combat the upheaval of faith which was characteristic of his time. St. Dominic became the greatest promoter of the rosary, telling all he encountered of the great benefits that come when praying it.

Between the 13<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries, the rosary became an important part of the prayer life of the faithful. The 150 “Hail Mary” prayers recited by the faithful modeled the 150 Psalms prayed by the monks in the Liturgy of the Hours. The prayers of the rosary enabled the faithful to have their own consistent daily prayer mirroring that of the monastery. Eventually, fifteen “Our Father” prayers were added to the rosary to break up the 150 “Hail Mary” prayers. The number of mysteries for meditation were gradually lowered from 150 (one mystery for each “Hail Mary” prayer) to fifteen (one mystery for each decade). In 1569, Pope Saint Pius V approved the basic form of the fifteen-decade rosary divided into three sets of five mysteries for meditation. In 2002, Pope John Paul II added a fourth set of mysteries.

In its present form, therefore, the rosary consists in the recitation of twenty decades (sets of ten) “Hail Mary” prayers. Each decade begins with the Lord’s Prayer (also called “Our Father” prayer), and following the ten “Hail Mary” prayers concludes with the “Glorify Be” prayer. Each set of five decades focuses on one aspect of Jesus’ life and work. The Incarnation is the focus of the first set, called the five Joyful mysteries; the public life of Jesus of the second set, called the five Luminous mysteries; the Passion and Death of Jesus of the third set, called the five Sorrowful mysteries; and the glorification of Jesus and his Mother of the fourth set, called the five Glorious mysteries. The mysteries of the rosary wonderfully present to the believer the heart of the Christian life, those aspects of the Gospel that are most important and most beneficial for our contemplation. The rosary is indeed what Pope Paul VI

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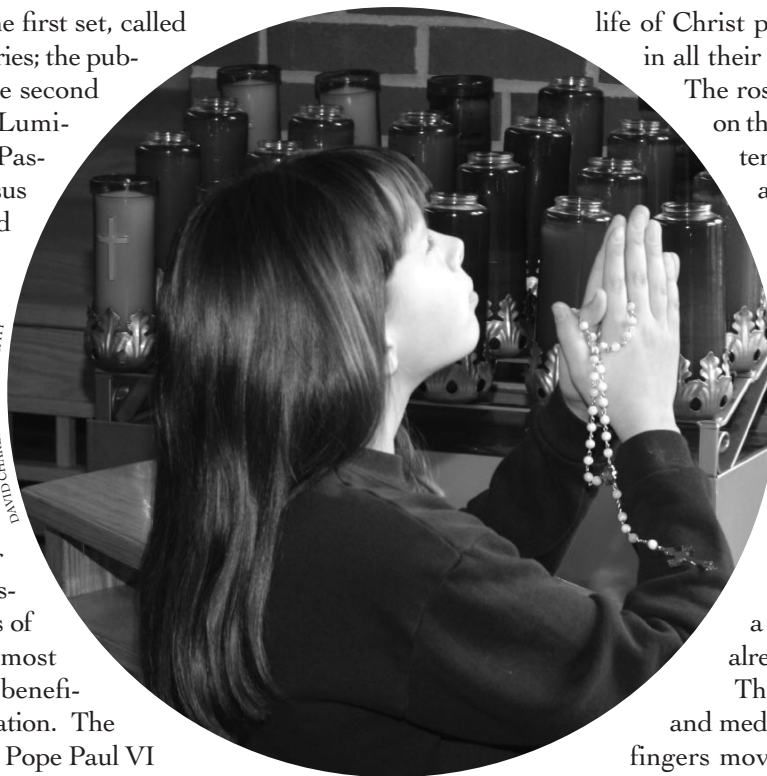
called, “the epitome of the whole gospel,” the summary of the Christian faith.

The rosary is a prayer that finds its foundations in Sacred Scripture. The prayers recited during the rosary are essentially taken directly from Scripture. The “Our Father” prayer was directly revealed by Jesus Christ in answer to the disciples’ request to be taught how to pray (see Mt 6:9-13; Lk 11:1-4). The “Hail Mary” prayer is also Scriptural. The first part of it is a combination of the two Scriptural greetings made to Mary. The first was made by the angel Gabriel, “Hail, O favored one, the Lord is with you” (Lk 1:28) (see “The Five Doctrines on Mary” for the reason why “full of grace” has been the traditional Catholic translation over such modern renditions as “O favored one”); the second was made by Elizabeth, “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb” (Lk 1:42). The second part of the prayer (“Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death”) is a prayer of petition based on the early Church practice of intercessory prayer to the Virgin Mary.

The rosary is a prayer that is centered completely on Jesus Christ. The main episodes of the life of Christ pass before our minds in all their richness and majesty.

The rosary focuses primarily on the greatest Gospel mysteries in the life of Christ and only secondarily on significant events in the life of the mother of Jesus. In fact, eighteen of the twenty mysteries are dedicated to the life of Jesus, while the last two serve to foreshadow the glory that is in store for all faithful followers of Christ, a glory which Mary has already received.

The rosary is both a vocal and meditative prayer. As our fingers move through the beads,



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and as our lips rhythmically vocalize the prayers, our minds are freed to contemplate

the wondrous mysteries of Christ, probing the depths which can never be exhausted of meaning. If we pray the rosary without meditating with our hearts on the mysteries, we are in danger of falling into a mechanical repetition of formulas, which would go against the very wishes of the Lord, who carefully cautioned his disciples, *“and in praying do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do; for they think that they will be heard for their many words”* (Mt 6:7). The rosary is meant to be prayed both with the lips and with the heart; this special prayer will bear much fruit if both aspects are kept in balance.

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It also possesses great power to sanctify those who prayerfully recite it. It can be an important tool in the hand of the believer, a tool that brings us into a more profound meditation and understanding of the life of Christ. In fact, a prayerful pondering of the life of Jesus is really an imitation of the spiritual practice of his dear Mother, who was his first follower. As the great mysteries of the redemption began to unfold before her eyes, *“Mary kept all these things, pondering them in her heart”* (Lk 2:19). We, too, can ponder the mysteries of salvation in our hearts with the help of the rosary.

(CCC 971, 2678, 2708)

### **The Mysteries of the Rosary**

Traditionally, the Joyful mysteries were prayed on Mondays and Thursdays, the Sorrowful on Tuesdays and Fridays, and the Glorious on Wednesdays, Saturdays, and Sundays. Pope John Paul II suggests that the Joyful mysteries be prayed on Mondays and Saturdays, Luminous mysteries on Thursdays, the Sorrowful mysteries on Tuesdays and Fridays, and the Glorious mysteries on Wednesdays and Sundays.

#### **The Joyful Mysteries**

The First Joyful Mystery:	The Annunciation of the Archangel Gabriel to Mary
The Second Joyful Mystery:	The Visitation of Mary to Elizabeth
The Third Joyful Mystery:	The Birth of Christ
The Fourth Joyful Mystery:	The Presentation of Jesus in the Temple
The Fifth Joyful Mystery:	The Finding of Jesus in the Temple

#### **The Luminous Mysteries**

The First Luminous Mystery:	The Baptism of Jesus in the Jordan
The Second Luminous Mystery:	The Self-Manifestation at the Wedding of Cana
The Third Luminous Mystery:	The Proclamation of the Kingdom of God and Call to Conversion
The Fourth Luminous Mystery:	The Transfiguration
The Fifth Luminous Mystery:	The Institution of the Eucharist

#### **The Sorrowful Mysteries**

The First Sorrowful Mystery:	The Agony in the Garden
The Second Sorrowful Mystery:	The Scourging at the Pillar
The Third Sorrowful Mystery:	The Crowning with Thorns
The Fourth Sorrowful Mystery:	The Carrying of the Cross
The Fifth Sorrowful Mystery:	The Crucifixion

#### **The Glorious Mysteries**

The First Glorious Mystery:	The Resurrection
The Second Glorious Mystery:	The Ascension
The Third Glorious Mystery:	The Coming of the Holy Spirit
The Fourth Glorious Mystery:	The Assumption of Mary into Heaven
The Fifth Glorious Mystery:	The Coronation of Mary as Queen of Heaven and Earth