

REFLECTIONS

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The Rosary: A Prayer for All Needs

The global increase of radical secularism has had devastating effects on religious beliefs, the traditional family, the sanctity of life, and the abuse of human nature. In response, Catholics in many Western nations are turning to the Rosary as a means of seeking through His Blessed Mother Our Lord's intercession.

On October 7, 2017, some one million Catholics assembled along Poland's border to pray to the Virgin Mary for peace among nations, families and youth, and the conversion of the world. A week later, on October 13, Catholics throughout Italy fasted and prayed "to save Italy and Europe from Islamic nihilism and from the denial of the Christian faith." The following month, on November 26, more than 30,000 people convened across Ireland to pray for a renewal of the Catholic faith and against the threat of abortion. Then, on April 29, 2018, tens of thousands of Catholics gathered at the coasts of Scotland, England and Wales to pray for the restoration of faith, life, and peace in the British Isles. The United States has followed with several similar rallies.

The Rosary is a simple, yet powerful set of prayers that has been invoked by popes and saints, groups and individuals to affect world events, restore peace among nations, meet personal needs, and provide serenity of soul. Pope Pius XI said that, "If you desire peace in your hearts, in your homes, and in your country, assemble each evening to recite the Rosary."

Most Catholics are familiar with this devotion. Virtually all have or have had a rosary at some point in their lives. But how often do they say it? How many have ever asked, why is it special?

The primary invocations of the Rosary date back to the first days of our Faith, expressed in the words of the Archangel Gabriel, the Blessed Mother, and Our Lord himself. Its recitation consists principally of three prayers, the Our Father, the Hail Mary, and the Glory Be.

The Our Father was given to us by Jesus when the Apostles asked Him how they should pray. As St. Louis de Montfort wrote, this prayer "contains all the duties we owe to God, the acts of all the virtues and the petitions for all our spiritual and corporal needs." Every time we say the Our Father, we are saying Our Lord's own prayer.

The Hail Mary begins with the words of the Archangel Gabriel when asking Mary to be the Mother of Our Lord: "Hail [Mary], full of grace, the Lord is with thee." It continues, "Blessed are thou among women and blessed is the fruit of thy womb," the greeting of Elizabeth when Mary came to visit her shortly thereafter. As the prayer evolved, the couplet of praise was joined to a statement of recognition and petition. The Council of Ephesus in 431, in resolving an existing heresy, declared that Mary gave birth to the Lord in His Divinity, and added "Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death" to the angelic greeting.

In the early stages of monastic development, monks often prayed the entire 150 psalms and after each gave glory to the Trinity. Their statement of praise evolved and was added to the Rosary. The Creed was included in the early 17th century, as a proclamation of belief in the principal Christian truths.

In 1917, when Our Lady appeared at Fatima, she asked that after each mystery people include the petition, "O Jesus, forgive us our sins, save us from the fires of hell, lead all souls to Heaven, especially those who have most need of your mercy." And so, we have the present form of the

Rosary with its individual prayers. The beads evolved as a means of keeping count of the prayer iterations.

The Rosary incorporates two types of prayer, invocative and contemplative. The invocative is the repetition of the decades – sets of the Hail Mary, preceded by the Our Father and ended with a Glory Be. In this, the intercession of the Blessed Mother with her Son is sought for our requests.

The contemplative portion focuses on the life and glory of Our Lord and His Mother. The original 15 decades follow Our Lord's birth, childhood, passion, death, resurrection and ascension. They were expanded by St. John Paul II to 20 decades to include Our Lord's public life. These reflections are Christ-centered, but Marian in character for Mary lived these incidents.

While the saintly John Paul II described the Rosary as, "A marvelous prayer! Marvelous in its simplicity and its depth," it also has brought about profound effects in the world. In 1571, a powerful fleet of the Mohammedan Ottoman Empire sailed into the Gulf of Patras, near Lepanto, threatening Christian Europe. A smaller fleet was formed in defense. Pope Pius V ordered public processions and the recitation of the Rosary throughout Christendom. The resulting battle was a decisive Christian victory.

In 1683, Christian Europe again was under assault; this time by land. The invading Turkish army was opposed by a smaller force placed under the protection of Our Lady of Czestochowa. Pope Innocent XI called for a Christendom-wide recitation of the Rosary for its success. The Turks were totally routed.

In 1945, an atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima killing some 70,000 people. Eight blocks from the epicenter was the residence of eight Jesuit missionaries. None were affected by the blast. They attributed the miracle to their devotion to the Blessed Mother and faithfulness in praying the Rosary.

At the end of World War II, Austria was divided among the victorious allies, with the Soviet quarter subjected to Communist oppression. Fr. Petrus Pevlicek founded the Holy Rosary Atonement Crusade in 1947 to pray to Our Lady of Fatima for the nation's freedom. On the 13th of each month, the faithful marched through the streets, praying and increasing in number to 500,000. Then, on May 13, 1955, the anniversary of the first apparition of Our Lady at Fatima, the Russians unexpectedly withdrew.

These are just a few of many examples of how devotion to the Rosary has affected world events. But the Rosary is also a prayer for individual intentions. As St. Padre Pio advised us, "Love the Madonna and pray the Rosary." Pray it at a rally, with a group, in your council, in church, at home, with your family, whenever you have a moment. If it is said devoutly and regularly, our lives will change. How can our heavenly Mother and her Son not answer our petitions? "Indeed," said Jamie Cardinal Sin, "when we give our best to the Lord, and leave the rest to His Providence, the Lord always responds."

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