



THEOLOGY CORNER

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Theological Reflections by Paul Chutikorn - Director of Faith Formation

“Why Should Catholics Pray the Rosary?”

The Feast of Our Lady of the Rosary is quickly approaching! The Church celebrates this feast on October 7 of every year. This date is significant because it was the day that the Holy League (a fleet comprising Spain and most of Italy, arranged by Pope Pius V) defeated the Ottomans in the Battle of Lepanto in 1571. This was no small feat since the Ottoman Empire was extremely powerful at this time and the Church was at a weak point having felt the impact of the Protestant Reformation. The unlikely victory of the Holy League over the fleet of the Ottoman Empire was attributed to the intercession of the Blessed Mother, which they had implored for victory through the use of the Holy Rosary. As a result, Pope Pius V erected the Feast of Our Lady of Victory, which is now more commonly referred to as the Feast of Our Lady of the Rosary.

These kinds of stories are very helpful in getting us excited to pray the Rosary, but what is the real significance of the Rosary? The first significance is that **it caters to our nature**. We are human beings, not angels. This means that we are not pure spirits by nature, but are composed of body and soul. This is what specifically distinguishes us from the angels. The rosary is embodied, it is tangible. We hold it in our hands. By holding onto it and praying, it helps to discipline the mind for meditation. We use sacred words in the form of repetitious prayers of scripture. And in doing so, it quiets the mind so that we may slow down and meditate upon the great mysteries of the life of Christ! I have often heard of the Rosary being called: “The Bible on beads.” This seems to be an adequate name since pretty much everything we say in the Rosary are direct quotes from the Bible! Sometimes Catholics are criticized for praying the Rosary due to its repetitive nature, seemingly praying repetitiously in vain. But this is far from the truth since not only are we repeating the words of scripture, but we are actively meditating on significant events in the life of Christ. So, it is far from vain! Even the Jews would recite passages from scripture over and over again to not only enhance memorization of the scriptures, but also to instantly recall them in every action of their life. The *Desert Fathers* would knot their ropes to keep track of prayer (i.e., the Jesus Prayer) reciting: “Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me a sinner.” In the material order, we know that regular exercise is important if we are to have a healthy *body*. In a similar way, in the spiritual order, we have to exercise so that we may have a healthy *soul*. To get physically fit, we may go on walks, or perhaps walk/run on a treadmill for fifteen plus minutes every morning. Likewise, to get spiritually fit, we can pray a rosary for fifteen minutes training the soul to remain strong and faithful knowing what Jesus has done for our redemption and ongoing sanctification — and to develop the habit of asking the intercession of his mother who is near to him in heaven.

The second significance is that **it is historical**. The Rosary was received from St. Dominic by the Blessed Mother, as she gave him the mysteries to meditate upon in order that he may combat the heresy of Albigensianism. She reportedly told him to “preach my psalter.” For background, the Psalter is the collection of 150 Psalms from the Bible, which was (and still is!) a practice that priests and religious, as well as the laity would recite throughout their day (e.g., Divine Office/Liturgy of the Hours). But over time, due to the fact that many of the laity either did not have immediate access to the Psalms (and if they did, many were not literate), they would pray the Our Father or the Hail Mary 150 times throughout the day. It is for this reason that the Rosary was sometimes referred to as the “poor man’s breviary” since religious would find the 150 Psalms in their breviary (as they still do today!). It was not until about the fifteenth century that these 150 Hail Mary’s were divided into sections of ten “decades” for each of the fifteen mysteries of what is now called the Rosary. The name “Rosary” succeeded titles like “Psalter of Mary” or “Angelic Psalter”. It is derived from the Latin *rosarium*, which means a garden of roses since the string of beads looked like a bouquet of flowers — being understood in the Middle Ages as a bouquet or garland of prayer. Interestingly, the old English word “bede” is a word that also means “prayer.”

The third significance is that **it is a sacramental**. The Catechism states that “Sacramentals are sacred signs which bear a resemblance to the sacraments. They signify effects, particularly of a spiritual nature, which are obtained through the intercession of the Church. By them, men are disposed to receive the chief effect of the sacraments, and various occasions in life are rendered holy” (CCC 1667). In other words, the Rosary *increases* devotion. It does not, of itself, give grace — it disposes us to become more *receptive* to God’s grace.

Last but not least, **the Rosary is relevant.** In fact, it is more relevant now than ever. John Paul II introduced the Luminous Mysteries (i.e., Mysteries of Light) which focuses on the other times in Jesus' life in between his baptism and his passion — mysteries like the wedding feast of Cana and the Institution of the Eucharist. Dedication to the Sacrament of Matrimony and belief in the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist is fading in the world today. Just as Mary gave Dominic mysteries to reflect on to combat heresy in his day, so too do we have mysteries to reflect on to combat heresy in our own day; reflection that should lead to not only our own sanctification but also to bringing others to Christ.

We live in a time when people in society have forgotten the importance of prayer. We live in a time when even Catholics forget the real meaning behind the words of the Creed. Yet, the more we pray the Rosary, the more that we renew our faith through the meditations on the mysteries of Christ which are summarized in the Creed. We also renew our understanding of the importance of prayer and in the regular recitation of the Lord's Prayer. Finally, we also pray three Hail Mary's to ask for an increase in the theological virtues according to Mary's example. We ask God to allow us to grow in faith through focusing on Christ's marvelous deeds, to persevere in hope, and to live our faith completely in charity. May the intercession of our Blessed Mother ("pray for us now and at the hour of our death") lead us to our heavenly destiny where we may give glory to the Holy Trinity for all eternity as we say, "Glory be to the Father and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen."