

*20
Mysteries
of the
Rosary*

20
Mysteries
of the
Rosary
A Scriptural
Journey

ROSARY PRAYERS INCLUDED

M. Basil Pennington, O.C.S.O.



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For Neal in friendship.

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Welcome

I have to smile every time I think of it. My first book on Centering Prayer, *Daily We Touch Him*, had just been published. I sent a copy of it to my aunt. I was eager to get her reaction to it. Aunt Marion was quite a woman, the highest paid woman in AT&T at that time. After she had time to read the book, I anxiously inquired as to her appreciation of it. Aunt Marion said it was a good book, clear and simple; it would help many. And then she added: But I will stick with the rosary!

Certainly, devotion to Mary and to the rosary was a part of my life from the beginning, in our family, in our home. My earliest memories of the experience of God come with images of sitting in church next to my grandmother praying her beads. To the day they were placed in her hands as she lay in her coffin, they were never far from her hands, those hands so worn by loving labor for us all. And the same could

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be said of my mother.

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In years past I have written two books on the rosary: *Praying by Hand: Rediscovering the Rosary As a Way of Prayer* and *The Fifteen Mysteries: In Image and Word*. This present volume gathers up sections from both these previous books, and adds something new: we now have twenty mysteries.

Pope John Paul II has given us not only five new mysteries, the Mysteries of Light, but in his Apostolic Letter “*Rosarium Virginis Mariae*” (“The Rosary of the Virgin Mary”), he has given us a rich spiritual theology of this wonderful practice of prayer, a way of prayer which is truly Christocentric. Following his predecessors, he sees the rosary as a “compendium” of the Gospel, containing “all the light of the Gospel message in its entirety” (“Rosary,” 1). We sit “at the school of Mary” (“Rosary,” 1) and learn “to contemplate the beauty on the face of Christ and to experience the depths of his love. It is not just a question of learning what he taught but of *learning him*” (“Rosary,” 1, 14). How beautifully and richly the pope develops his reflections on Mary’s contemplation of her son and relates it with our experience in the liturgy. The whole of this inspiring letter deserves not only to be

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It can be found on the Vatican Web page: www.vatican.va.

In the course of this volume, I include some of the pope's concise reflections on the mysteries, but there is much more to be found in his pastoral letter. For me, one of the striking elements of it is the pope's sensitivity to the current ecumenical and interreligious climate. Noting "contemporary culture, even amid so many indications to the contrary, has witnessed the flowering of a new call for spirituality," he goes on to say this is "due also to the influence of other religions" ("Rosary," 5). He argues: "If properly revitalized, the Rosary is an aid and certainly not a hindrance to ecumenism!" ("Rosary," 4). It is "a devotion directed to the Christological center of the Christian faith, in such a way that 'when the Mother is honored, the Son...is duly known, loved and glorified'" ("Rosary," 4).

John Paul II is not outside of history in his thinking. Pointing to "the terrifying attacks of September 11, 2001" ("Rosary," 6) he looks to the rosary as a desperately needed prayer for peace. Still more profoundly in touch with the needs of our times, the pope explores the "anthropological significance of the Rosary" ("Rosary," 25). "Anyone who contemplates Christ

through the various stages of his life cannot fail to perceive in him *the truth about man [and woman]*” (“Rosary,” 25). He goes on to develop this: “Contemplating Christ’s birth, they learn of the sanctity of life; seeing the household of Nazareth, they learn the original truth of the family according to God’s plan; listening to the Master in the mysteries of his public ministry, they find the light which leads them to enter the Kingdom of God; and following him on the way to Calvary, they learn the meaning of salvific suffering. Finally, contemplating Christ and his Blessed Mother in glory, they see the goal towards which each of us is called, if we allow ourselves to be healed and transformed by Holy Spirit” (“Rosary,” 25). In fact, this pope makes this bold statement: “To understand the Rosary, one has to enter into the psychological dynamic proper to love” (“Rosary,” 26). While it is true that “Christian spirituality is familiar with the most sublime forms of mystical silence in which images, words and gestures are all, so to speak, superseded by an intense and ineffable union with God, it normally engages the whole person in all his [or her] complex psychological, physical and relational reality” (“Rosary,” 27).

disciple's commitment to become conformed ever more fully to his [or her] Master" ("Rosary," 15), the pope notes: "In the spiritual journey of the Rosary, based on the constant contemplation—in Mary's company—of the face of Christ, this demanding ideal of being conformed to him is pursued through an association which could be described in terms of friendship.... The cycles of meditation proposed by the Holy Rosary are by no means exhaustive, but they do bring to mind what is essential and they awaken in the soul a thirst for a knowledge of Christ continually nourished by the pure source of the Gospel" ("Rosary," 15). The pope wants the rosary to be "a true doorway to the depths of the Heart of Christ, ocean of joy and of light, of suffering and of glory" ("Rosary," 19). Quoting Saint Paul's heartfelt prayer for all the baptized in his letter to the Ephesians, "I pray that...Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love. I pray that you may have the power...to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God" (3:16, 17–19), the pope adds quite simply: "The Rosary is at the service of this ideal" ("Rosary," 24).

use of this “method of contemplation,” the pope asserts: “The Rosary is no substitute for *lectio divina*; on the contrary, it presupposes and promotes it” (“Rosary,” 29). And he suggests: “In order to supply a Biblical foundation and greater depth to our meditation, it is helpful to follow the announcement of the mystery with *the proclamation of a related biblical passage*, long or short, depending on the circumstances” (“Rosary,” 30). In service of this we place before each meditation some appropriate Scripture, usually that cited by the pope in his Apostolic Letter. The further guidance of the pope in regards to these words is also worth listening to: “No other words can ever match the efficacy of the inspired word. As we listen, we are certain that this is the word of God, spoken for today and spoken ‘for me.’ It is not a matter of recalling information but of *allowing God to speak*” (“Rosary,” 30).

The meditations I offer here are quite short. Certainly, I could write a whole book on each of these mysteries. But what is offered here is meant to simply open space for your own thoughts and memories, affections and imaginations, to bring you into the experience of the mystery and its meaning in your life today, at

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As a Trappist abbot I would especially like to endorse these words of the pope:

Listening and meditation are nourished by silence. After the announcement of the mystery and the proclamation of the word, it is fitting to pause and focus one's attention for a suitable period of time on the mystery concerned, before moving into vocal prayer. A discovery of the importance of silence is one of the secrets of practicing contemplation and meditation. One drawback of a society dominated by technology and the mass media is the fact that silence becomes increasingly difficult to achieve. Just as moments of silence are recommended in the Liturgy, so too in the recitation of the Rosary it is fitting to pause briefly after listening to the word of God, while the mind focuses on the content of a particular mystery ("Rosary," 31).

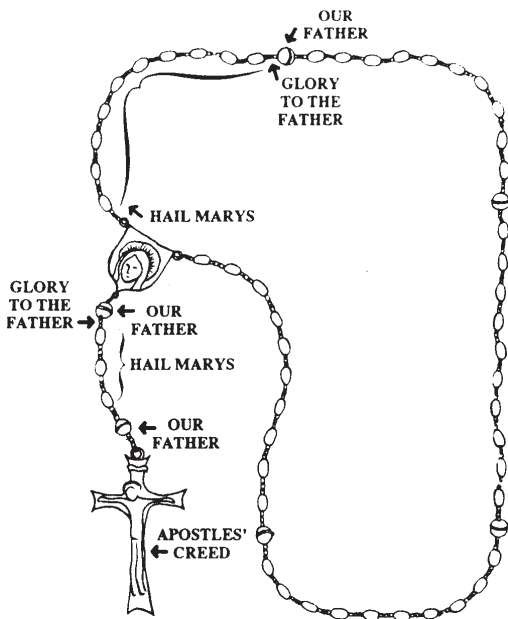
As I said above, the whole of the pope's beautiful, profound, and practical letter, which invites us to an enriched life lifted up by contemplative prayer, deserves to be read and

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reread. Let me simply conclude with his words: “A prayer so easy and yet so rich truly deserves to be rediscovered by the Christian community.... I look to all of you, brothers and sisters of every state of life, to you, Christian families, to you, the sick and elderly, and to you, young people: *confidently take up the Rosary once again*. Rediscover the Rosary in the light of Scripture, in harmony with the Liturgy, and in the context of your daily lives” (“Rosary,” 43).

+ M. BASIL
FEAST OF OUR LADY OF LOURDES
FEBRUARY 11, 2003

How to Pray the Rosary



We begin by making the Sign of the Cross. Then we say the Apostles' Creed, one Our Father, three Hail Marys, and one Glory to the Father (Prayer of Praise) on the small chain.

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Next recall the first mystery and contemplate that mystery (with or without the assistance of the reflections provided herein).

Say one Our Father, ten Hail Marys, and one Glory Be to the Father. This completes one decade. All the other decades are said in the same manner with a different mystery meditated upon during each decade.

At the end of the rosary, the prayer Hail, Holy Queen may be recited.

The new pattern suggested by Pope John Paul II indicates also the distribution of the mysteries during the week, as follows:

The Joyful Mysteries	Monday & Saturday
The Mysteries of Light	Thursday
The Sorrowful Mysteries	Tuesday & Friday
The Glorious Mysteries	Wednesday & Sunday

The Prayers of the Rosary

The Sign of the Cross

*In the name of the Father, and of the Son,
and of Holy Spirit. Amen.*

The Apostles' Creed

I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth. I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord. He was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary. He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried. He descended to the dead. On the third day he rose again. He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come to judge the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

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Our Father **(The Lord's Prayer)**

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name; thy kingdom come; thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us; lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. Amen.

Hail Mary **(The Angelic Salutation)**

Hail, Mary, full of grace! The Lord is with you; blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb, Jesus. Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death. Amen.

Glory Be to the Father **(The Doxology)**

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to Holy Spirit. As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.

Hail, Holy Queen **(Salve Regina)**

Hail, holy Queen, Mother of Mercy; hail our life, our sweetness, and our hope. To you do we cry, poor banished children of Eve. To you do we send up our sighs, mourning and weeping in this valley of tears.

Turn, then, most gracious advocate, your eyes of mercy toward us. And after this our exile show unto us the blessed fruit of your womb, Jesus. O clement, O loving, O sweet Virgin Mary.

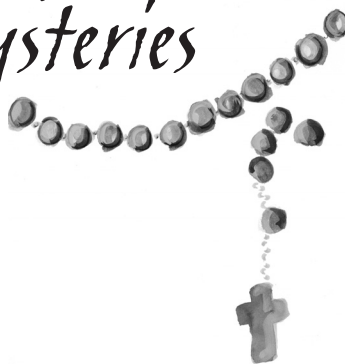
Pray for us, O holy Mother of God, that we may be made worthy of the promises of Christ.

Let us pray.

Pour forth, we beseech you, O Lord, your grace into our hearts, that we to whom the incarnation of Christ your Son was made known by the message of an angel, may by his passion and cross be brought to the glory of his resurrection, through the same Christ, our Lord. Amen.

*20
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The Five Joyful Mysteries



The first five decades, the “joyful mysteries,” are marked by the joy radiating from the event of the Incarnation. This is clear from the very first mystery.... To meditate upon the “joyful” mysteries, then, is to enter into the ultimate causes and the deepest meaning of Christian joy. It is to focus on the realism of the mystery of the Incarnation and on the obscure foreshadowing of the mystery of the saving Passion. Mary leads us to discover the secret of Christian joy, reminding us that Christianity is, first and foremost, evangelism, “good news,” which has as its heart and its whole content the person of Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh, the one Savior of the world.

“APOSTOLIC LETTER OF POPE JOHN PAUL II
ON THE MOST HOLY ROSARY:
ROSARIUM VIRGINIS MARIAE,” 20

The First Joyful Mystery

The Annunciation

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you." But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end."

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Mary said to the angel, "How can this be,"
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since I am a virgin?" The angel said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God. And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren. For nothing will be impossible with God." Then Mary said, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word." Then the angel departed from her.

LUKE 1:26–38



The Basilica at the Annunciation (in Nazareth) is a good place to begin. A church built on many levels, it contains homes from the time of Jesus, an early Christian place of worship, a Constantinian basilica, the enormous basilica of the Crusaders, and today's strikingly modern edifice, which rises above all its surroundings. The event that traditionally took place here has drawn forth the talents

great talent have expressed their meditations on this mystery in stone, mosaic, and paint, uncovering the many levels of the mystery itself. As I sit here writing, groups of pilgrims pass by speaking the languages of many nations. This mystery belongs to all people of all times, each assimilating and living it in his or her own way according to each one's particular grace.

I sit opposite the little grotto that traditionally covers the site of the home of Joachim and Anne. Beneath the altar, pilgrims bend to kiss the marble stone: *Hic Verbum caro factum est*. “Here the Word was made flesh.”

I am a bit weary from the long, hot journey. Things did not all go as I would have liked, so I have some remaining feelings of anger, self-pity, and hurt. How out of place these all seem in the face of this awesome mystery: God coming to us in our very own humanity. But this is what it is all about. He became one of us, like us in all but sin yet taking on even our sin so that he could heal all of this. If I am to give him my humanity, it has to be this poor, needy, weak, and sinful humanity. There is no other “me” to offer him now. It is crazy to think that we have

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to get all spruced up to offer ourselves to God.

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in fact, the only way we *can* get spruced up is by offering our mess to him.

One of the wonders of what took place here—and in sacramental mystery continues to take place here—is that one of us had a humanity to give him that was *not* messed up. But that was so only because, in a way that it took us a long time to understand, he “spruced up” Mary’s humanity at the very instant it became hers.

I wonder, though, if Mary was not more conscious of unworthiness than we unworthy sinners are. Did not this little woman—barely more than a girl—who had faithfully pondered the Scriptures through the years and entered into the liturgies and rituals of her people come to a deep sense of the awesomeness of Yahweh? Surely God had prepared Mary in a special way for this moment. Without some divine illumination she could never have grasped the angelic message sufficiently to give human assent. Yet any illumination concerning the Trinity—the fact that Yahweh is three in one, a Father who has a Son who by the action of their Holy Spirit will become in a completely human, physical way *her* son—must have made Yahweh even more awesome. “Mary, do not be afraid.” Yet

how fearsome is this mystery.

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