

## *On the Rosary*

By William Thomas Sherman

Thank God for the rosary! I have been made to be abominably alone for along time now, and what a comfort it has been in giving me something to hold onto, and be a part of, for a time when the local church has frankly been brutal in its silence and indifference toward my situation. No, I myself am not always exactly in the mood for it. More often than I would otherwise, and to be honest, I sometimes rush through it. Still, at least if I adhere to it on a regular and ongoing basis, I find its value immeasurable (in many ways) and life saving. And if ever things get so bad that I feel discouraged at the seeming inefficacy of prayer, it does not take me long to realize that the blame for this lies not with prayer or the rosary, but rather my carelessly allowing false, irrational, and childish ideas about God and religion to creep into my thoughts and assumptions.

Among a few of the rosary's benefits, the following can be mentioned:

\* To regularly say the rosary makes you feel being part of community of faith, a community which includes many lowly and humble people, and who are far dearer and devoted souls than you or I.

\* It can bring a certain orderliness to one's spiritual life, like regular Bible reading, and similarly in an easy and convenient manner.

\* Some people reach a dire point in their lives where they have no one, or anything left – *but* the rosary. By saying it then we are showing solidarity with them, even though we ourselves feel as though we somehow don't need it.

\* It gives and makes for us a special time to remind ourselves about what is truly of most importance to us; and what we should be most concerned about.

\* The rosary is a way to seek, celebrate and give thanks for peace; it can bring order and peace to your thoughts and spirit, particularly thinking here of times when we are very anxious or upset. And who is so great that he or she doesn't sooner and later need peace – and perhaps when they least expect it?

\* One can say it if they are happy, or feeling sad, or feeling guilty, or if they simply desire to assert their love and desire for truth and purity: a useful thing if people you deal with happen to be casual and indifferent toward evil.

\* If we are sincere and mean it, the rosary gives one the means of at least expressing a token gesture that they would do something about such and such a problem if they really could. That is it is a way for a person to say that if all they *can do* is pray about the particular problem or concern, they will *at least do* that (much.)

\* In addition to providing a means of expressing and reflecting on what matters most, the rosary gives one the opportunity to seek hope for problems one doesn't understand (say, for example they are of a seemingly new and unusual kind) or can't contend with. In instances where one simply can't handle what's going on, it is one help, and a valid means of saying they will not be a party to excessive evil or maliciousness that might be going on in or near their vicinity and living circumstance.

\* The rosary brings to our lives, albeit in a modernized form, the practice of ritual singing and, in doing so, helps take us back to some of our most ancient and primitive roots. If for instance we lived at a much earlier time, we might have found ourselves singing songs or saying prayers as part of the formal and informal rituals in our individual and collective lives. Now with such practices largely gone outside of churches, formal prayer like the rosary serves as at least a nominal replacement and reminder of them; thus permitting us to continue and carry on some of life's very oldest spiritual traditions and heritages.

\* If the world sees the rosary as foolish, perhaps *in the world* it is foolish. Yet a person *of faith*, of course, knows that there is much more to life than just this world, and why should the world be offended; or made less by his or her saying the rosary?

Prayer, as I see it, is speaking to God within you. If for some reason, and many people understandably feel this way, you cannot quite speak to God *without*, you can speak to your own soul, wherein God dwells, and dedicate it to God's service and purpose. At the same time, you seek to bring your mind and spirit closer to God's wisdom and purpose, even if, again, for whatever reason, you cannot literally or directly affect the world outside you with a given prayer.

The full rosary, not counting the preliminary prayers (i.e. the "Apostles Creed," 1 "Our Father" and 3 "Hail Marys"), consists of 15 "Our Fathers," and 150 "Hail Marys." These are divided into three main *mysteries*: the *Joyful* mystery, the *Sorrowful* mystery, and the *Glorious* mystery; each of which consists of 5 "Our Fathers" and 50 "Hail Marys." This is what I say daily, so that in three days I will have said the entire thing. Each prayer is a rose or flower, hence the name.

I think of the rosary as a song or series of songs, and usually try to keep a certain rhythm and cadence while saying it. I rarely use beads anymore and instead count the prayers on my clasped fingers to keep track of the prayers.

In saying the rosary, you are doing a number of things at once, reciting a prayer, while thinking about who or what you are praying for, while beseeching God to work his will in your life, while perhaps also reflecting on Jesus, or Mary, the apostles or saints (including "saints" or very admirable and other very inspiring people.) When I think of or meditate on the mysteries, I endeavor to dwell on the higher or poetic truth they contain. Rather than form great paintings in my imagination of the events they depict, I try to grasp and understand the greater moral teaching they impart. And even if some of the mysteries, for some reason, seem fanciful or perhaps somewhat mythical in character to us, say because

the “miraculous” event in question seems so removed from believable experience, better it is to pray and have faith in sincere and heartfelt dreams, than to despair because we imagine we know everything. For in the vast majority of instances, *what we love* matters far, far more than what we know or are capable of knowing intellectually. Or to put the matter differently, if I have reservations, for example, about what “the Assumption of the Virgin Mary” means or is supposed to signify, I can console my doubt or else lack of understanding by venerating the hope and joy it advocates or suggests.

Sometimes I pray for wisdom, for guidance, for humility, and to not to be stupid about things. I pray for the happiness and peace of loved ones, both those still here and those departed; for family members; for my enemies; for those who are alone and need. I pray for people; for animals. I pray for Israel; for the church; for the Holy Father and other religious leaders trying to do the right thing; for Jerusalem's peace; for our nation and local communities; and civic leaders. I pray for forgiveness, for those I have unjustly hurt, and for those who are or have been my benefactors. I pray for those who say the rosary. I pray for those fighting the Organization Against Freedom and the League of Horror. I pray for angels and devils who repent. And, as John Paul II often told us, I pray for peace. In sum, prayer for or on behalf of someone else is usually, if not always, more effective prayer than praying for ourselves; unless it be to ask God to give us good sense and character to meet and contend with present circumstances.

The rosary because it is found on an already established wording allows you to pray somewhat blindly, meditating in your mind and heart, even though the spoken words themselves flow somewhat mechanically. Sometimes one is so frustrated or in such pain that they are baffled as to what (at that present time in question) they should most pray for. Especially if we are under unnatural duress, life can be very confusing and we are at loss to know what we should think and what we should feel. So, in a sense, you ask that God say the prayer for you. "Tell me Lord in my heart and spirit what to pray -- for I want to pray for that. Tell me what to believe; what greatest goodness most to seek." Given what I have written elsewhere I hope it is already understood that I will under no circumstances allow spirit people, whether in the form of Jesus, angels, Mary, or anyone you can think of -- to just step in to tell we what to do or think, etc., and consider them unwelcome intruders. I personally adopt as a practical rule, spirit people should always treated as imposters, because no truly good or honest person needs to act or communicate in secret. If God need to speak you by means of a spirit person, he can easily arrange such to take place in public And why after all would a Godly spirit person -- albeit glowing with ‘heavenliness’ -- need to come to you, invading your deepest privacy, like a thief or molester on the prowl? Use common sense. The only spirit that is really needed in a person’s life, or anywhere for that matter, is the Holy Spirit, or the Spirit of Love and Truth, known through *logos*.

If you feel unworthy of saying the rosary well that can be just the very good reason to say it. Pray *to be* worthy of it, or more specifically of higher love, and humbleness. If need be say the prayers mechanically, if praying goes against your immediate mood or emotional disposition, and see yourself as engaged in an act of self-discipline.

There are some commonly accepted teachings of the rosary, say with respect to the cataloging and qualification for certain indulgences that do not seem to me in the right spirit, and smack of superstition, or else someone's rather arbitrary and presumptuous ideas. Yet these, in my opinion, one can personally leave or take as they like without offending anyone.

Among the very rich and beautiful works on the subject, though perhaps on some points a bit unnecessarily rigid and dogmatic, are those of St. Louis Marie de Montfort (1673-1716). His writings are brought together in a very nice modern (English) edition entitled *God alone: the Collected writings of St. Louis Marie de Montfort*. (Montfort Publications, Bay Shore, NY, 11706)

In the face of long standing, and what seems to me erroneous, convention, when I say the "Our Father," rather than "lead us not into temptation," I say "keep us from the final test" which is, after all the more correct translation, and free of the perhaps suspicious implication contained in the former.

After saying the "Hail Holy Queen..." and "Oh God, whose only begotten Son..." and "May the souls of the dearly departed..." prayers, I finish up a given rosary session with a special one of my own which goes:

May the children, the animals,  
The simple, the weak  
And the innocent  
Be spared cruelty and undue suffering;  
And for that which they have undergone,  
Or do or will undergo.  
Lord, may they always  
Be strengthened and comforted  
And through you  
Know true and everlasting peace.  
*Amen.*

(Of course if you like, you may make up and add a little, specially made prayer of your own in this same manner.)

Then I say:

- \* Prayer to St. Michael the Archangel
- \* Prayer to the Sacred Heart of Jesus ("Hail Sacred Heart of Jesus, living and strengthening source of eternal life...")
- \* St. Augustine's Prayer to the Holy Spirit ("Holy Spirit, powerful consoler, sacred bond of the Father and Son...")

Last and finally I end with:

- \* Lord make me good keep me from foolishness
- \* Not mine lord but your will be done
- \* Lord have mercy on me a poor sinner
- \* Thanks be to God!

*Amen.*