

ROSARY TALKS WITH MARY

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The Church, in her official prayer, the Collect of the Mass of the Most Holy Rosary, teaches us that it is by meditating on the Joyful, Sorrowful, and Glorious Mysteries of the Rosary that we may hope to imitate the virtues of our Blessed Lord and His Blessed Mother. The Rosary presents to us a summary of Our Lord's Life on earth, of His Passion and Death, and of the triumphs which followed His Resurrection. In its three divisions, Joyful, Sorrowful, and Glorious, we have a Synopsis of the liturgical year which is a devout study of our Saviour's Life.

Men today have forgotten how to pray because there is no thought behind their words. Vocal prayers do not sink in unless the heart is touched and the spirit aroused. Today, as in the time of Our Lord's sojourn on this earth, the words of Isaias are true: "This people honoureth Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me. And in vain do they worship Me, teaching doctrine and commandments of men."

CARDINAL GILROY ON MEDITATION

Addressing youth during the Centenary Celebrations in Perth, Western Australia, in May, 1946, Cardinal Gilroy, Archbishop of Sydney, advocated the Rosary as a splendid training ground for meditation.

"There is no better training in concentration than the making of a daily meditation. The ability to concentrate is a most valuable asset in anyone's mental equipment."

"There is one invaluable form of meditation within easy reach of us all. It is the contemplation of the Mysteries of the Rosary. This exercise of piety I cordially and earnestly recommend to each and every one of you. It is not something novel or untried. Rather it is venerable and of proved efficacy. The exercise in times of peace of noble souls, and of those who wish to be noble, it has been in war a favourite exercise of heroes.

"You are familiar with the praises of the Rosary uttered with incomparable gracefulness by Australia's priest-poet, John O'Brien. He portrays the recitation of the Rosary in the lovely setting of the unspoilt, natural family circle. In war-time there have been descriptions in poem and in prose of valiant youths and men engaged in perilous undertakings on land, at sea, and in the air, and again in foul prison camps, recommending themselves, their companions, and their cause to God through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary by the recitation of the Rosary. In your daily Rosary—and we should be well advised to say the Rosary every day—be sure to ponder over the Mysteries in the Life of your Divine Master and His Blessed Mother. You will, as a consequence of doing that, be encouraged to strive, in spite of all difficulties, to imitate what their Mysteries contain and obtain what they promise."

THE HAPPY UNION OF MENTAL AND VOCAL PRAYER

The slow recitation of the prayers joined with the meditations on the Mysteries of our Redemption, make the Rosary one of the sure ways to holiness of life. Saying the one hundred and fifty "Aves" and "Paters" without meditating on the Mysteries is a tiresome task. But once throw upon the vocal prayers the light of the Mysteries and monotony and dullness vanish.

Again, since the depth of each Mystery is infinite, so no two of our Rosaries need be alike, but may carry us further and further into the meaning of these sacred scenes, adding fruit upon fruit of pious affections and resolve, building up our lives in the spirit and practice of Christianity, and upholding to us more and more of the beauties of our Holy Faith.

Five Mysteries each day, or even one Mystery devoutly and reverently meditated on and woven into the eloquence of the beads, will bear fruit in our lives.

The Rosary alone, said as Mary taught St. Dominic to say it, is a pledge of salvation. We have in our hands an overwhelming and invincible power, when in union with Catholics the world over, and kneeling before Jesus, the Fruit of Mary's womb, we unite our minds in contemplating these Mysteries and our voices in praying our "Paters" and "Aves." Truly is the Rosary, like its glorious Queen, "terrible as an army set in battle array!"

The following outlines of meditations should be read frequently to prompt our imaginations to paint the scenes and

to rouse our hearts to generous response. The notes provide different ideas for a varied recitation **of** the Rosary. It does not matter if we interchange them in one Rosary. No, all that is hoped for in these outlines is that they will help us to say our beads meditatively.

Aids to meditation on the Rosary are grouped under five headings, namely:

1. Chat with Mary.
2. Select a virtue in the Mystery.
3. Concentrate on the "Our Father," and the "Hail Mary."
4. Addressing Mary in the "Hail Mary."
5. A progress through each decade.

I. CHAT WITH MARY.

Father Patrick Peyton, the 6ft.4in. Irish ex-miner who has set out to bring the Family Rosary into the homes of American Catholics with the help of Hollywood, looks like a mischievous, overgrown altar boy. Yet a few years ago, while he was studying for the priesthood, he became tubercular.

He was in an advanced condition; coughing blood. Since it was impossible to collapse the lung, it was decided to remove part of his ribs.

An old priest visited him in hospital. "Why don't you ask Our Lady to cure you?" he suggested.

"I have," said Father Peyton, "and I think this operation is her way of doing it."

"Nonsense," said the old priest. "She can do better than breaking your back to cure you. She's a woman, and she likes to be talked to. Talk to her, man; talk to her!"

Father Peyton talked to her that night, with the result that there was no operation, and now in gratitude to Mary he is devoting his life to the Family Rosary.

Here is a pleasant way to meditate upon the Mysteries of the Rosary. It will mean a much slower saying of the beads, with many a pause to chat with her about the mystery in an artless, childlike way, and then, go on. It is far better to recite one or two decades a day and three on Saturdays, in this way, than to say five decades mechanically or too fast.

To stop every now and then to chat with Mary about the mystery contemplated is to share her innermost thoughts. It will help to increase our love for Mary if we meet her often for a chat within the Rosary. Through that intimate chat we share her feelings and know her thoughts and imagine ourselves kneeling at her side as we ask her to pray for us now and at the hour of our death.

TAKE MARY TO OUR OWN.

"When Jesus therefore had seen His mother and the disciple standing, whom He loved, He saith to His mother: "Woman, behold thy son. After that, He saith to the disciple: Behold thy mother. And from that hour the disciple took her to his own." (St. John xix, 26-27.)

Like St. John we take Mary to our own through thinking with her in our hearts as she lived through the joyful, the glorious, and the sorrowful stages of her life.

This thinking in the heart is open to all, even to little children. It does not depend upon intelligence or a trained mind.

St. Luke records the sequel to the finding of the Boy Jesus in the temple: "And seeing Him, they wondered. And His mother said to Him: 'Son, why hast Thou done so to us? Behold Thy father and I have sought Thee sorrowing.' And He said to them: 'How is it that you sought Me? Did you not know that I must be about My Father's business?' And they understood not the word that He spoke unto them."

"And He went down with them and came to Nazareth: and was subject to them. And His mother kept all these words in her heart." (St; Luke 11; 48-51.)

Chatting with Mary while saying her Rosary will open up her heart to us and we shall share, in a little way; her thoughts. She who lived the mysteries with her Divine Son will teach us, gradually and slowly, to do as she did and keep all these words in our hearts;

II. SELECT A VIRTUE IN THE MYSTERY

Each mystery contemplated in the Rosary presents many virtues to us for our imitation. Selecting a virtue for each mystery will vary the motives for saying the Rosary and save it from monotony and sameness. To single out one of Mary's virtues and contrast our weakness with her strength will convince us that we must build that virtue from within. In that uphill pull against our frail human nature, meditation upon Mary's virtues will bolster up our sagging spirit.

The natural virtues of Mary will beckon us onwards, for example, her prudence at the Annunciation, her fraternal charity during the Visitation, her mother's love at the Nativity, her confidence at the Presentation, and the lesson of obedience at the Finding of the Child Jesus. Whenever we find a human motive, a natural aid to support us in our striving after holiness, let us seize upon it, and build upon it. Mary's example will give us courage to increase our meagre stocks of the natural virtues of patience and prudence of fraternal charity and generosity, and of obedience and self-discipline.

The Rosary recited with mind and heart concentrated upon one of Mary's virtues could not be wearisome and dull, as it too often is. No, it would be all too short. Meditation on Mary's virtues will work its salutary effects upon our lives. Through the consideration of Mary's part in the Life of Our Blessed Lord, the Great Exemplar according to which we are bidden to fashion our own, we are naturally led to a more perfect imitation of Him. Just as the sculptor takes a mass of roughly-hewn stone and with untiring labour chisels it and fashions it, until by dint of skilful workmanship the shapeless block is clothed with beautiful forms and reflects the artist's thought, so by frequent and devout study of our Saviour's life—a study eminently afforded by the Rosary—ought we to strive to reproduce in our own life something of the virtue that shone out so resplendently in His.

III. CONCENTRATE ON THE "OUR FATHER" AND "HAIL MARY."

Before the coming of Our Lord, young and old recited the one hundred and fifty psalms of David as a prayer. Many of the psalms were committed to memory and said frequently throughout the day. The more the people meditated upon the psalms the better they prayed and the richer were the spiritual rains.

The one hundred and fifty psalms divided into fifties, continued a favourite form of devotion among the Christians of the early Church. Gradually the humble folk, the people whose days were occupied in physical labour, found little time to study the psalms and began to substitute for them the repetition of fifty, a hundred or a hundred and fifty salutations to Our Lady, leaving the psalms to clerics, religious, and learned groups. The 150 salutations to Mary correspond to the 150 psalms of David which sang the praises of God and besought Him for mercy and grace.

As with the psalms the more we meditate upon the words we say the more effect they will have upon our spiritual health. The repetition of the Angelical salutation is always pleasing to Our Lady. The Lord's Prayer is the prayer taught us by Our Lord Himself, and cannot be said often enough. So the very words we use in the Rosary have a virtue of their own and will merit much for *us*. The following notes on the "Hail Mary" and the "Our Father" supply food for meditation.

THE ORIGIN OF THE HAIL MARY

St. Luke tells us the origin of the "Hail Mary" in words that glow with the devotion of a loving son. Raphael, in his picture of St. Luke painting the Virgin and Child, portrays in the face of the artist a deep love of the Virgin.

St. Luke writes: "And in the sixth month, the Angel Gabriel was sent from God into a city of Galilee, called Nazareth,

"To a virgin espoused to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the virgin's name was Mary.

"And the Angel being come in, said unto her: Hail full of grace, the Lord is with thee: Blessed are thou among women.

"Who having heard, was troubled at his saying, and thought with herself what manner of salutation this should be.

"And the Angel said to her: Fear not, Mary, for thou hast found grace with God.

"Behold thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and shall bring forth a son; and thou shall call His name Jesus.

"He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God shall give unto Him the throne

of David his father; and he shall reign in the house of Jacob for ever,

“And of His kingdom there shall be no end.”

“And Mary said to the Angel: How shall this be done, because I know not man?”

“And the Angel answering, said to her: The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Most High shall overshadow thee. And therefore also the Holy which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God.

“And behold thy cousin Elizabeth, she also hath conceived a son in her old age; and this is the sixth month with her that is called barren; because no word shall be impossible with God.

“And Mary said: Behold the handmaid of the Lord, be it done to me according to thy word. And the Angel departed from her.

“And Mary, rising up in these days, went into the hill country with haste into a city of Juda.

“And she entered into the house of Zachary, and saluted Elizabeth.

“And it came to pass; that when Elizabeth heard the salutation of Mary, the infant leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Ghost: And she cried out with a loud voice, and said: Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb.” (St. Luke I, 26.42.)

“Hail, full of grace.”

We salute Mary with: “Hail, full of grace.” Not without good reason did the angel omit her name, “Mary,” saying instead, “Full of grace.” He wished thereby to intimate that the title, “Full of grace” is more proper for her than her name, and due far more to her than the title “wise” was due to Solomon, “obedient” to Isaac, and “strong” to Samson.

“The Lord is with thee.”

God is indeed everywhere, but He is in one way with men and in another with irrational and inanimate beings; one way with the good, and another with the bad. He is with irrational beings without their knowledge, and with rational beings who know and acknowledge Him; but, above all, He is with the good who know and love Him. He is with the Blessed Virgin in a special manner; He is one with her not only in the will but also in the flesh. “The Lord is with thee,” this is a prerogative that raises her above the angels.

“Blessed art thou among women.”

She “conceived,” but “without sin”; she brought forth “without pain” and “without knowing man”; to her great glory she is the “Mother of Him Whose Father is God”; she, the creature, became the “Mother of the Creator”; she became a Mother, without ceasing to be a “Virgin.” Had not the angel reason to say: “Blessed art thou among women?” Can we therefore honour the Blessed Virgin more than by praising her with the angelic salutation:

“Blessed art thou among women?”

“The Hail Mary,” writes St. Grignon de Montfort, “is a heavenly dew which waters the soul, and renders it fruitful in all virtues; a soul not watered by this prayer, brings forth no fruit, nothing but briars and thorns.

The Hail Mary is the sanctification of the soul, the joy of the Angels, the song of the predestined, the canticle of the New Testament, the pleasure of Mary, the glory of the most Holy Trinity. The Hail Mary is a loving kiss we give to Mary; it is a brilliant rose we present to her; a special pearl we offer to her; a cup of ambrosia and divine nectar.”

THE ORIGIN OF THE PATER NOSTER

St. Matthew records that Christ taught the “Pater Noster” to His disciples at the sermon on the mount, near the Sea of Galilee (St. Matthew vi, 9-18). St. Luke puts the origin much later, during the December before His death, and probably at the Feast of the Dedication of the Temple at Jerusalem. Our Lord had spent the whole night in prayer on the Mount of Olives. The Apostles wished to pray as He did, and they approached Him, saying: “Lord, teach us to pray.” (St. Luke xi, 1-4.) On the Mount of Olives the Pater Noster Church has been erected to commemorate this scene.

One may readily believe that Our Lord had said this prayer at His Mother’s knee in Nazareth, so promptly did the words pour from His lips when asked by the disciples to teach them to pray. From that day on the Mount of Olives He and His disciples said the “Pater Noster” frequently. They surely said it together in the Upper Room at the Last Supper. It was said by St. Peter in prison and by St. Paul on his journeys.

With what fervour Our Blessed Lady must have prayed it with St. John in their home at Ephesus! The music of its

words filled the winding tunnels of the catacombs at Rome. It was on the lips of the martyrs in the arenas. From apostolic times to our own its petitions to Heaven have arisen from our altars “from the rising of the sun even to the going down.” The greatest minds of the Church, such as St. Thomas Aquinas and St. Augustine, have found the Pater Noster an unending subject for meditation, while little children can say it lovingly.

The Family Prayer

The Pater Noster, the family prayer of the Church, has an arc like the rainbow, which springs up from the earth, touches the clouds, and then sweeps down to earth. We lift our hearts to God in its mounting petitions: “Hallowed be Thy Name: Thy Kingdom come”, until we reach the apex of the arc in: “Thy Will be done on earth as it is in Heaven.” Downwards sweeps the curve with its recital of our needs from “Give us this day our daily bread” to “Deliver us from evil.”

Christ’s own prayer has the double action of praise and petition. To give is higher than to receive, and so the first part of the “Pater Noster” is more important than the second. It is the model prayer. All our needs and all our desires are summed up in it, and seen in the light of eternity. The best place and time to say it is during the Mass, when it comes after the Canon. With his hands outstretched and his eyes on the consecrated Host the priest calls upon Christ to represent us in Heaven in the sevenfold petitions of His own prayer.

“Let us pray: urged on by saving precept and following Thy divine institution, we dare to say: Our Father Who art in Heaven. . . .” Outside the Holy Mass the “Pater Noster” is best said within the Rosary of Mary. Let us ask Him Who bade us say it to inspire us with its meaning

Coined in Heaven.

The Rosary teaches us to say the great universal prayer to God the Father entwined with the angelic salutation to Mary. We speak to Our Father and salute Mary as she goes step by step with her Divine Son, in turn, joyful at His coming, sorrowful in His sufferings and death, and glorious in His Resurrection and Ascension. Within the three divisions of the Rosary we say these, our greatest prayers, in a background of joy, sorrow, and triumph.

The words of the “Hail Mary” and of the Lord’s Prayer were coined in Heaven. Part at least of these prayers, we may feel sure, are said by the angels and saints in Heaven, and the repetition of them during the Rosary is excellent practice for our future home.

IV. ADDRESSING MARY IN THE “HAIL MARY”

Address Mary with the words: “Hail Mary,” thinking how they apply to her in the special circumstances of each Mystery. Mary is always “full of grace,” always “blessed,” because the Lord is always with her. Yet, the Lord is with her in a different way in the stable of Bethlehem, on the Hill of Calvary, and at the throne of the Father in Heaven. She is “with the Lord,” with the Fruit of her womb, Jesus, but her being with Jesus in the home of Nazareth is a very different thing from her being with Jesus dying on the Cross.

From Mary’s union with Jesus comes all her greatness. This way of saying the Rosary is to tell our Mother that we greet her as full of God’s grace, blessed, because she is with Jesus as no other human being can ever be; in His joy, in His sorrow, and in His triumph. Let us see briefly the different shades of meaning we can put into the words of the “Hail Mary” in each of the five Joyful Mysteries.

The Annunciation

In the first mystery, the Annunciation, we remember at once that we are addressing to Mary the very words that the Archangel addressed to her at the Annunciation. He said to her: “Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with thee, blessed art thou among women.” (Luke 1, 28.) We say the same to her, thinking that she is indeed “full of grace” at this moment. Conceived immaculate, she has corresponded so well with the graces God has given her that now God’s messenger thus addresses her. We tell her she is “blessed among women,” because at this moment, when the Word is made flesh within her womb, “the Lord is with her” in a way He has never been with any other; blessed amongst women because the Son thus conceived in her womb is the Son of God. .

The Visitation

At the Visitation, too, we are using the actual words spoken to Mary by St. Elizabeth: “Blessed art thou among women and blessed is the fruit of thy womb.” (Luke 1, 42.) When we say “the Lord is with thee” during this mystery we remember how truly He was with her then, bringing grace and sanctification to St. John the Baptist even before his entry into the world. As we repeat “Blessed art thou” we are actually fulfilling, even now, the prophecy that Mary made at the Visitation: “Behold all generations shall call me blessed.” (Luke 1, 48.)

The Nativity

During the recitation of the third Mystery, the Nativity, we can have before our minds that first Christmas night and the wonderful application of the words must strike us at once. “The Lord is with thee”; yes, indeed, with thee now as with no other creature, with thee in the most intimate union of mother and new-born Babe. “Blessed art thou among women”; more blessed in thy poverty than the richest mother in the land, more blessed than any other woman ever was or ever will be, because this thy Child, the fruit of thy womb, is blessed, none other than God Himself.

The Presentation

The fourth Joyful Mystery, the Presentation, shows us Mary in the Temple offering the fruit of her womb to the Eternal Father. That offering in her case meant far more than it did for any other Jewish mother. Their offerings were symbolical, hers was real. True, she gave in the Temple only the gift of the poor, whilst many of the others gave the gift prescribed for the rich. Yet, who shall say that theirs was an offering equal to hers? She gave to Almighty God His Son and hers.

The Finding in the Temple

The final mystery of this decade, the Finding of the Child Jesus in the Temple, gives us two aspects of the truth of the words we say in our prayer.

Mary is blessed when she finds her Child, because once more, “the Lord is with her.” After the desolation of those days of fruitless search, what a joy, what a relief it must have been when she was with Him once more! God had done such wonderful things for her: the miraculous conception, the Virgin motherhood, the possession of God as her own Son; how she must have wondered when so soon afterwards He disappeared from her. How comforted she must have been when she had Him with her again and when “He went down with them and came to Nazareth and was subject to them.” (Luke 2, 51.)

These last words open out a vista of thought for the Fifth Mystery. Whilst we say the “Hail Mary” let us tell the Divine Mother that we know how “full of grace” she must have been during those happy years in Nazareth, when the “Lord was with her” night and day. He learned at her knee, He obeyed her voice, He was her dutiful Son, and yet all the time she knew that He was her God. “Blessed art thou among women” because the fruit of thy womb—thy Son—is blessed above all others, Jesus, thy God.”

Whilst we say the second part of the “Hail Mary” in these joyful mysteries we will ask Holy Mary, Mother of God to pray for us, that we may be full of God’s grace and that the Lord may be with us. Pray for us, Mother of God, now, that in all the joys and sorrows of life “the Lord may be with us”; pray for us at the hour of our death, that we may be blessed for all eternity, with the “Blessed fruit of thy womb, Jesus.”

V. A PROGRESS THROUGH EACH DECADE

Another way to vary the accompaniment of the sweet melody of “Hail Marys” and “Our Fathers” is to plan a progress through each decade combining the ideas already elaborated. Begin each decade by concentrating on the words used in the Our Father. When we come to the petition: “Give us this day our daily bread,” let us ask Him to open the eyes of our souls to the mystery contemplated in this decade. Long ago in the inn at Emmaus He opened the eyes of the two disciples when He took bread and blessed and broke and gave to them and thus they knew Him. “Give us this day our daily bread” will be a request to Him to open to us the mystery that is proposed for this decade.

The first “Hail Mary” will be a salutation to Our Lady, saying the words with which Gabriel addressed her at the

Annunciation, and trying to capture the devotion and warmth which St. Luke puts into those words.

During the recital of the next six “Hail Marys” we shall draw upon all that we have learned at school, or read and heard since, to help us to paint a word picture of the mystery.

The last three “Hail Marys” will uncover our hearts to Mary’s whisperings. We shall try to get inside our Mother Mary’s heart during this mystery, and catch some of its fire and heat to warm our own towards her. Some day we shall feel our hearts burning within us and on that blessed occasion we shall understand what that humble French priest, St. Grignon de Montfort, wrote some two hundred years ago—namely, that “being a servant of Mary is good, but to be her slave is better. The servant is worthy of his hire but the slave is not. As Mary’s slave we wish to be absorbed completely in Mary’s personality, to work in and through and by her for Mary’s cause, the salvation of souls. That ideal of complete slavery is the keynote of the Legion of Mary Apostolate. In the words of dedication the Legionaries proclaim: I am thine, my Queen, my Mother, and all that I have is thine.”

Mary’s part in this mystery will shine upon us like a star beckoning us to follow her according to our own small measure. The virtue that attracts us to Mary in this mystery is something we must strive to build within ourselves. There is the example for us to follow, there is Mary awaiting to help us, provided we set ourselves to the task. God cannot build His Kingdom in man’s soul without man’s help and earnestness. And Mary whispers to us to begin upon that virtue we need so badly, for she is ever ready with her encouragement and her help.

No matter how gloomy the picture of a soul presents itself to any man, if he begins with confidence in Mary’s prayers and his own efforts he can change vice into virtue, and sin into sanctity. The virtue of self-discipline, of self-denial so distasteful to the human spirit and so onerous on human nature, yet, so necessary in life and a sine-qua-non condition for sonship of God, will be won by us gradually and painfully but certainly, through listening to Mary’s whisperings to us while saying the last three “Hail Marys” of each decade.

“The Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost” which concludes the decade will be addressed to the Holy Spirit through the Blessed Trinity for light to see and courage to assume the task of building from within ourselves the virtues that shine from Mary in this mystery.

Nihil Obstat:
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