

The Rhythm of Life

In 2001 Pope John Paul II released an important letter to mark the beginning of the new millennium: *Novo Millennio Ineunte*. In that document he called the people of God to 'contemplate the face of Christ'.

The Pope followed up that message in October 2002 with another apostolic letter: *Rosarium Virginis Mariae*. This is a reflection on the significance of the rosary which he offers as a kind of Marian complement to the first letter. When we pray the rosary, we 'sit' with Mary and contemplate the face of Christ.

The rosary has a time-honoured place in the Church's tradition of prayer. However that does not mean it cannot be improved. In his reflection on the rosary the Pope puts forward a number of recommendations for revitalising this beautiful prayer for our age.

Contemplating Christ with Mary

The rosary is a simple but profound prayer. Through its meditative rhythm it leads us to reflect on the events of Jesus' life and thus draws our own lives into the mystery of the gospel and the 'rhythm' of God's life.

Although Marian in character, at heart the rosary is a Christ-centered prayer. It is a succinct expression of the gospel message. With the rosary, we sit with Mary and contemplate the face of Christ.

Why should we contemplate with Mary? Says John Paul II, 'In a unique way the face of the Son belongs to Mary' (#10). Her whole person – body, mind, soul – was attuned to Jesus. Throughout her life, in so many different circumstances, she would look upon her Son. At times she would look upon him with eyes filled with wonder (Lk 2:7); at times with a questioning look (Lk 2:48); always with a penetrating gaze (Jn 2:5). At times it would be a look of sorrow (Jn 19: 26-27). At Easter her eyes would be filled with the radiance of the resurrection. Finally, at Pentecost, with a gaze afire, she would witness the outpouring of the Spirit (Acts 1:14).

Mary lived with her eyes fixed on Christ, treasuring his words and the events of his life and pondering them in her heart (Lk 2:19). Her memories of Jesus were like a living 'rosary' prayed

throughout her earthly life. Even now, in the glory of heaven, she gazes upon Christ. By reciting the rosary, the Christian community enters into the memories and contemplative gaze of Mary.

Old traditions, brand new

In our parish there is a practice of passing a statue of Mary from home to home. Each week parishioners pray the rosary at the home that has the statue.

One day I was asked if I would host the statue and the rosary. 'Uh, okay,' I said. I can't say I was thrilled. I associated the rosary with the 'old fashioned' church of my childhood. Still, I was prepared to cooperate.

What I wasn't prepared for was the reaction of my children. To my amazement they were thrilled at the idea! They were so excited when the statue finally arrived. 'Look, Mum, it's here!' I was touched by the joy they found in this age-old tradition and by the way they treated the whole affair with such reverence, even bringing out some special family symbols that were dear to my heart to include in our prayer time.

All this was an eye-opener to me. My children, free of the 'baggage' I carried, had no trouble embracing the rosary, and with a fresh spirit. In their eyes this was not an 'old' thing, it was completely new. (Julie)

A journey with **Mary**

The rosary: a contemplative journey

Develop a quiet rhythm

The rosary invites us to undertake an inner journey of faith. It should be recited with a quiet rhythm and at a lingering pace. To rattle through the rosary in a mechanical way would be to destroy the soul of this exquisitely contemplative prayer.

Learn from Mary

In the rosary Mary 'teaches' us Christ. No one knows Jesus better than Mary. Through her own 'pilgrimage of faith' in the Holy Spirit she introduces us to the mystery of her Son.

Remember Christ with Mary

As we focus on the past events of Jesus' life their meaning touches us in the present; our existence is profoundly shaped by the gospel.

Grow closer to Christ with Mary

Just as two friends who spend a lot of time together develop similar habits, the rosary takes us on a Spirit-led

journey whereby we come to know and be like Christ more and more, bit by bit, revealing to us the true meaning of our baptism.

Mary is more like Christ than any of God's creatures. By drawing close to her in the prayer of the rosary we draw closer to her Son.

Pray to Christ with Mary

Through the goodness of the Father, the mediation of Christ and power of the Holy Spirit we approach God with all our needs and desires. Mary helps us to pray. She supports us and lifts us up as our hearts cry out to God. 'The prayer of the Church is sustained by the prayer of Mary' (n.16).

Proclaim Christ with Mary

When prayed well, and especially in communal celebrations in parishes, the rosary presents a catechetical opportunity. As people reflect on the mystery of the gospel their hearts and minds unite with Christ. The rosary is a valuable pastoral resource for every good evangelizer.

The Mysteries of Light

To hear God's voice in our lives we need to listen. The rosary is one of the traditional contemplative paths for helping us to listen to the gospel.

The rosary is a 'compendium of the gospel' (n.19). To bring out fully the Christological depth of this prayer the Pope presents an alteration to the centuries-old practice of praying the rosary. Traditionally the rosary has consisted of the joyful, sorrowful and glorious mysteries. Now the Pope adds the 'mysteries of light'.

The 'mysteries of light' lead us to reflect on the public ministry of Jesus, specifically the events of:

- 1. Jesus' baptism in the Jordan**
- 2. His self-manifestation at the Cana wedding**
- 3. His preaching of the kingdom of God**
- 4. His transfiguration**
- 5. The Last Supper**

The rosary: a treasure to be rediscovered

The Pope appeals to all people of the Church to '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.' His appeal goes out to families, bishops, parishes, theologians, youth...

To those who object that the rosary is hardly suited to the taste of youth, the Pope replies that perhaps the objection is directed to an impoverished method. He points to the huge success of World Youth Days where faith is so vitally expressed through the gifts and enthusiasm of youth culture. 'I am sure that young people will once more surprise adults by the way they make this prayer their own...' (n.43).

To the heart of the **Gospel**

The rosary helps us to see our human lives in the light of Christ

Joy: Contemplating Christ's birth, we learn of the sanctity of life. Reflecting on the household of Nazareth, we learn to value the truth of family life.

Light: Dwelling on the public life of Jesus we learn to find the light that leads us into God's kingdom.

Sorrow: Following him on the way to Calvary, we learn what it means to embrace suffering with faith.

Glory: Gazing upon Christ and his Mother in glory we glimpse our true destiny, if we allow ourselves to be healed and transformed by the Spirit.

From mysteries to Mystery: Mary's way

The meditative cycles of the rosary by no means exhaust all the sacred and inspired events of Jesus' life. But they do offer us a way of entering into the Mystery that surpasses all understanding. The rosary leads us into a profound and inward knowledge of Christ via the attentiveness of his Mother. We might call it 'Mary's way'. 'The mysteries of Christ are also in some sense the mysteries of his Mother' (n.24).

John Paul II recalls how often the rosary has sustained him in his ministry as Pope: 'Thinking back over the difficulties which have also been part of my exercise of the Petrine ministry, I feel the need to say...as a warm invitation to everyone to experience it personally: the rosary does indeed mark the "rhythm" of human life, bringing it into harmony with the "rhythm" of God's own life' (n.25).

Answering objections to the rosary:

'It distracts from the liturgy.'

The Pope replies that the rosary sustains the liturgy. It serves as an introduction to the liturgy and is a faithful echo of the liturgy, thus enabling people to participate fully.

'It's unecumenical.'

The rosary honors the Mother of God in such a way as to lead us to Jesus Christ. When the Mother is honored, the Son is known, loved, glorified. If properly revitalized the rosary will aid, not hinder, ecumenism.

'It's superstitious and old-fashioned.'

No, it's realistic and practical! In every age Christian life should be distinguished above all by the art of prayer. The rosary offers a 'genuine school of prayer'. Responsive to the West's growing interest in meditation, it teaches people to contemplate the gospel mystery.

'It's repetitive and boring.'

The rosary is a method based on repetition, yes. But this need not make it dry and dull. Think of lovers who never tire of repeating sweet words of affection to each other. As an outpouring of love for Christ, the rosary is always a fresh utterance.

'It's irrelevant.'

The rosary has often been promoted as a prayer for peace. Its meditative style fosters an inner calm while leading us to contemplate Jesus, the Prince of Peace. How fitting that we should revive this prayer today when we are witnessing so much bloodshed and violence in the world. The gift of peace is also desperately needed in so many families today. The prayer of the rosary is an effective aid to healing and uniting families.

The Pope has declared a Year of the Rosary: Oct 2002 to Oct 2003

- Read the full document:

Apostolic Letter on the Rosary of the Virgin Mary is published by St Paul Publications and available from Catholic bookshops.

Or read it online at www.vatican.va

- In your home or parish introduce the rosary, or refresh the way you pray it.
- Teach the rosary to your children. As they face life's challenges and heartaches there is sure to be a day when they will need to draw on this prayer as a source of comfort and strength.

Tips for **praying** the rosary

The rosary is a method of prayer lovingly preserved by the Church through the centuries. Still, the method can be improved, says the Pope. He recommends the following:

1. *Announce each mystery.* This focuses our attention, as does a suitable icon. Use of visual and imaginative elements can enhance our prayer. This is in keeping with the inner logic of the Incarnation: in the bodily reality of Jesus the divinity of the Son is communicated to us.

2. Follow the announcement of each mystery with a suitable bible passage. In this way the Word of God speaks to us through the rosary's methodology.

3. *Pause* after the bible passage. Focus on the mystery in silence. Being comfortable with silence is a secret to good meditation. Silence is especially important in a society dominated by the relentless 'noise' of the mass media.

4. As you begin the 'Our Father' raise your mind towards God the Father. Jesus yearns for us to share in his intimacy with the Father. In the Spirit we

become his sisters and brothers.

5. As you recite the ten Hail Marys, understand that you are echoing the words spoken to Mary by the Angel Gabriel and Elizabeth; words expressing the wonder of heaven and earth: God incarnate in Mary's womb.

The 'centre of gravity' in the Hail Mary is the name of Jesus. When hurried, this focal point can be overlooked. Take time to ponder the name of Jesus.

6. All Christian contemplation leads us to give praise to the Trinity. Christ is the way to the Father in the Spirit. Savor the 'Gloria be' at the end of each decade. In public recitation it might be sung.

7. The Pope recommends that the concluding prayer after the 'Gloria be' be a prayer for the fruits specific to that particular mystery.

8. Let the symbolism of the rosary beads add depth to your contemplation. Note that the beads converge upon the crucifix, just as our lives flow from and towards Christ. The beads can also be seen as a 'chain' linking us to God. They could also remind us of our

relationships, of the bond of love that unites us all in Christ.

9. The prayers for introducing and closing the rosary should dispose the mind to contemplation and encourage the ecclesial dimension of the rosary. When we recite the rosary we are not just in our own little private world of prayer; we are united with the whole praying Church.

10. The rosary can be recited in full every day, however for those who are able to recite only a part of the rosary, the following weekly pattern – including the new mysteries of light – is suggested:

- Monday:** Joyful mysteries.
- Tuesday:** Sorrowful mysteries.
- Wednesday:** Glorious mysteries.
- Thursday:** Luminous mysteries.
- Friday:** Sorrowful mysteries.
- Saturday:** Joyful mysteries.
- Sunday:** Glorious mysteries.

Waiting...with Mary

As we waited at the hospital for Dad to come through a difficult operation, there was so little to do, and nothing to say. We just had to wait...and wait.

During this time it was a wonderful comfort to be able to pray the rosary together as a family. The simple formula released us from the discomfort of not knowing what to say, and the repetition was calming.

It was the perfect prayer in our hour of need. (DJ)

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