

Let Us Pray the Rosary

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Australian Catholic Truth Society No.1583 (1970)

It is sometimes said nowadays that the Rosary is out of date and no longer of any value. This, however, cannot be taken for granted; the statement must be examined before it is accepted. It is just possible that the fault is not in the Rosary but in ourselves. The Rosary is a form of prayer which has been the possession of the Church for many centuries. It has been used with devotion by many saints. It has been the spiritual nourishment of countless humble souls. Popes, up to the time of Pope John and the present Pontiff, have spoken of it in the highest terms. It would be strange indeed if Catholics today found that this bread had gone stale. Would it not be possible that the bread was as sound and wholesome as before, but that our taste had somehow been spoiled? Before we discard the Rosary, then, we should examine it, in order to be sure that we understand what it is and how it should be used.

Difficulties

It need not be denied that the use of the Rosary can present difficulties, which perhaps were not felt, or not to the same degree, in earlier times. But are these difficulties so great that we must now discard a form of prayer which undoubtedly has brought great profit to the Church? The writer of these pages has known and used the Rosary for nearly 80 years, and his experience, for what it is worth, is that the older he gets the more helpful he finds the Rosary. The following pages are offered as a help both to those who are inclined to abandon the Rosary and to those who remain faithful to it, but feel they are not profiting by it.

The greatest need today, both for individuals and for the Church as a whole, is genuine prayer. It is the solution for all our problems. The Rosary, well said, can be the means of ensuring that there is real prayer in our lives. On that account it can be most valuable. It could well be that the spiritual revival we are hoping for in the life of the Church could come through revival of the Rosary.

Real Prayer

But why do we say that the Rosary can be real prayer? Let us examine the elements of which it is composed. It is made up of vocal prayer and reflections. The vocal prayers are -as we shall see more fully later the three best prayers in existence. The reflections are concerned with the primary truth that concerns us, God's supreme love for us and our redemption through the incarnation and sacrifice of his Son. Every good gift we have ever received, every one that will be ours in time and in eternity, comes from the merits of our Redeemer. We do not think of that enough; hence we are not sufficiently convinced of that truth. All our troubles stem from the fact that we do not sufficiently realise who and what we are, where we came from and where we are going. We do not give God and our Saviour their rightful place in our lives and in our thoughts. We are too wrapped up in the things around us. We are searching for what pleases us rather than what pleases God. This is where the Rosary helps. It fixes our minds day by day on the truths that are most important for us; it gives us a realisation of our real value.

In the Rosary we ponder on the profound mysteries of the Incarnation, the redemption, the cross ("to the Jews an obstacle they cannot get over, to the pagans madness") the universality of salvation, the centrality of Christ, "Christ crucified, the power of God and the wisdom of God" (1 Cor. 1:23). This is one of the great themes of St. Paul's writings, "the mystery kept secret for long ages, but now made known to all"; "a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which he decreed from eternity for our glorification"; "God's secret, in which all the jewels of wisdom and knowledge are hidden". (Rom. 16:26, Eph. 3:10, Col. 2:2-3).

In these days of change it is important to realise that there are certain things that never change. At a time when many things are regarded, and perhaps rightly so, as out of date, we must remember that there are some things which can never be out of date, for example, the New Testament and the teaching and spirit of Christ. "God has already placed Jesus Christ as the one and only foundation, and no other foundation can be laid" (1 Cor. 3:11). "Salvation is to be found through him alone; there is no one else through whom we can be saved" (Acts 4:12). "There is only one God, and there is only one mediator between God and men, himself a man, Christ Jesus" (1 Tim. 2:5). The value of the Rosary consists in this, that it keeps this important truth before us; without the Rosary many people might hardly give it a thought.

Let us, therefore, examine the Rosary. There are three things we may consider: I. The vocal prayers which enter into it, II. The subjects of reflection during it, and III. How the two are combined.

I. The vocal prayers of the Rosary.

1. THE OUR FATHER.

No one will deny that the Our Father is the best of prayers. It was what our Lord himself taught the apostles when they asked him to teach them how to pray. We can be sure, then, that when we use the Our Father we are expressing ourselves to the Father in a way that is really pleasing to him and of profit to ourselves.

But mere recital of words is not prayer; there can be a great difference between "saying prayers" and praying. We must understand and make the words our own. It is not "clamor" but "amor" (not sound but love), St. Augustine says, that reaches the ear of God. There is special danger in the case of a prayer which we use frequently that it will become a matter of mere mechanical repetition. If we are careful, the Rosary can train us to say the Our Father well.

The first thing to do is to take the different sentences of the prayer and spend time in pondering on them. Each of them can be a subject of prayer in itself. "Our Father in heaven." The words remind us of a wonderful truth, that we really have a perfect Father, and that heaven is our true home. There is no one so truly a Father. "You have one Father, who is in heaven", our Lord tells us elsewhere. "My Father and your Father", is one expression he used. God is our Father because he is our creator, but in a higher sense because he has also begotten us in a way that makes us sharers of the sonship of his only-begotten Son, who then becomes "eldest of many brothers" (Rom. 8:29). The "Our" reminds us constantly that we are all members of one family of God.

"May your name be held holy". For the Hebrews the name meant more than it means for us; it stood for the person or the reality named. So God's name is God himself. We honour God and treat him as holy by submitting ourselves in everything to him, and so we are led to pray:

"Your kingdom come", that is, may God's sovereignty be established over all. That, in turn, is made clearer by the petition:

"May your will be done on earth as it is in heaven." God is reigning over us when we do his will. There are two slightly different ways of understanding this petition. Most people, perhaps, understand it in this way: "May your will be done on earth as it is done in heaven." But what exactly it means to do God's will in heaven is not quite clear. Another way of taking it is: "According as God's will is in heaven so may our actions be. Every time we say the Our Father it should mean a strengthening of our determination to honour the holiness of our Father, to let him rule over us completely, and do his will more perfectly.

Then we think of our own needs of soul and body. "Our daily bread" can stand for all these. We need forgiveness, and we ask confidently because we guarantee that we, too, forgive those who have offended us. The Our Father is a constant reminder of our duty in this regard. "As the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive" (Col. 3: 13). "Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, as God forgave you in Christ" (Eph. 3:32).

"Lead us not into temptation". The Jews attributed everything that happened to the action of God, even though he only permitted it. So, for example, in Isaiah 63:17: "O Lord, why do you make us wander from your ways, and harden our hearts, so that we do not fear you?" So we may understand this petition as asking God not to let us be tried beyond our strength. "You can trust God, who will not let you be tempted (or tried) beyond your strength, but with the temptation (or trial) will also provide the way of escape, so that you may be able to endure it" (1 Cor. 10:13).

"But deliver us from evil", or from the evil one. The word in the Greek original can be neuter or masculine, the latter being more probable. The forces of evil are our only real enemy, from which God alone can protect us.

2. THE HAIL MARY.

Here again we have a prayer of pre-eminent value. The first part is entirely from the inspired words of Scripture, made up of the greeting of the angel and of Elizabeth.

"Hail" is a possible translation, but in the context it is more probable that the meaning really is, "Rejoice, specially favoured one". It is indeed joyful news for all the world, as the angel said later to the shepherds.

"The Lord is with you"; and he was going to be with her in a new and marvellous way. Elizabeth, inspired, we are told, by the Holy Spirit, saluted Mary with the words, "You are blessed among women", which really means, "You are most blessed of all women", for the Jews had neither comparative or superlative of the adjective in their language. "And blessed is the child you are bearing." Blessed are we, too, in being able to join with Elizabeth in repeating these inspired words.

We add the holy name. Jesus and Mary are the centre of our prayer.

We take over ourselves now and ask her who is mother of God, and - because of our identification with her Son - our mother too, to intercede for us "now and at the hour of our death". One day it will be, perhaps before long, "now at the hour of my death". We might sometimes pray: "O Mary, I beg of you by the anguish you endured at the death of your adorable Son on the cross, be with me when I come to die and protect me."

We repeat this prayer ten times in each decade, and it is sometimes objected that the repetition of the same words is wearisome and useless. But it is not to be looked on as a repetition of words, but a repetition of thoughts, which is necessary and profitable.

3. GLORY BE TO THE FATHER.

This prayer, also of scriptural tone, is the summing up of what we want to do, in time and in eternity, namely give glory to God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The English translation is very inaccurate. There is no "is" or "shall be" in the original, nor could they be supplied grammatically from the past tense which is there. The real meaning is: "May glory be given to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, as in the beginning so now and for ever". "As in the beginning" is a parenthesis added to combat the Arian heresy which maintained that Christ was a creature.

As the Glory be to the Father is a kind of summing up of the object of our prayer when we say the Rosary, it should be said with special care and reverence. To this end it will be of advantage to make a slight pause before it, that we may realise better what we want to do. It will take time and effort before such: a habit is established.

II. Reflections during the mysteries.

The reflections here offered are meant for those who find it hard to reflect for themselves. Our own reflections may be better than those suggested by others. Varied reflections are here offered, but of course they are not meant to be used all together. A selection must be made. Furthermore, what is suggested here must be pondered on apart from its use in the Rosary. There is not time in the course of a decade to develop even one idea. Therefore the thoughts presented must be digested, so to speak, before they can provide spiritual nourishment. So this booklet is not just to be read and set aside; it is rather a text-book to be studied. It should be referred to frequently till the thoughts contained in it, together with others which the Holy Spirit may suggest, become thoroughly familiar and part of ourselves. Only then will they be profitable during the recitation of the Rosary. Many passages from Scripture have been quoted, for God's word is meant to be the food of our souls.

A. THE JOYFUL MYSTERIES.

1. The Annunciation.

The story is told in St. Luke, 1:26-38. We say the Our Father with great reverence in the presence of this great mystery. This is a scene we need never tire of thinking about. It is the beginning of the history of our supernatural life. Here we have, in the Incarnation, the mystery of God's power and love. We can never realise fully all it means to us. At different times we might dwell on one phrase or another: "Rejoice, so highly favoured one!" "How can this come about, since I am a virgin?" "The child will be holy and will be called the Son of God". "Nothing is impossible for God". "I am the handmaid (or slave-girl) of the Lord; let what you have said be accomplished in me." The account of what happened must, of course, have come originally from Our Lady. We might make it more vivid for ourselves by putting it into the first person in her words: "One day an angel came to me and said . . ." We should pause a moment before saying the Glory be to the Father. Surely we should glorify God for this great mystery.

2. The Visitation.

This follows in St. Luke, 1:39-56. We say the Our Father with gratitude, considering how God now begins the work of manifesting his Son to the world. From the high mystery of the Incarnation we come to ordinary human life. Mary did not remain wrapped up in the marvellous things God had done for her. She went out of herself and thought of what she could do for her kinswoman, Elizabeth. Mary would have walked the best part of a hundred miles to visit Elizabeth, who would have been old enough to be Mary's grandmother.

Mary's greeting brought blessings on her kinswoman's unborn child and a pouring out of the Holy Spirit on Elizabeth herself. "You are most blessed of all women", said the older to the younger woman, "and blessed is the child you are bearing. How have I deserved that the mother of my Lord should come to me?" We may remember that Elizabeth's son showed the same humility in the presence of Mary's Son: "I am not worthy to loose the straps of his sandals."

"You are blessed for believing that what the Lord has spoken to you will come true." In the Rosary we strengthen our faith and trust in God. Then we have the Magnificat, Mary's prayer of praise, humility, and thanksgiving. It is like a window through which we can look into her soul. We could go on to the Benedictus, Zachary's song of praise and thanksgiving for the fulfilment of God's promises. It would have found an echo in Mary's heart. We join in the praise and thanksgiving by our Glory be to the Father.

3. The birth of our Lord.

We find the account of this in St. Luke, 2:1-20. We say the Our Father with special attention, remembering the value of the gift God has given us in his Son. We know the story well. "She laid him in a manger, because there was no room in the inn." We can consider Joseph's great anxiety when he could not find shelter, and Mary's complete submission; she was still the handmaid of the Lord. "When the appointed time came, God sent his Son, born of a human mother, born a subject of the Law, in order to set free those who were subjects of the Law and enable them to become children of God." (Gal. 4:4-5). "Though he was by nature God, he did not cling greedily to his equality with God, but emptied himself, to take the form of a servant and be born in the likeness of man." (Phil. 2:6-7). Jesus in the manger is already teaching silently what he was later to put into words: "Become my pupils, for I am gentle and lowly of heart." The shepherds at first were terrified when they got the message of redemption. Yet it was a joyful message for them, as it is for us. "Glory to God in highest heaven and peace on earth to men who enjoy his favour." We must enter into the spirit of the angels' song. We are told of the attitudes of two groups and one individual. Ordinary people who heard the news "were astonished." The shepherds "went away glorifying and praising God." Mary "treasured up everything that had happened and pondered on it in her heart." In the Rosary we are trying to imitate her. In the Glory be to the Father we join in the spirit of the shepherds.

4. The Presentation of our Lord in the Temple.

Here again we turn to St. Luke, 2:22-38. We, too, present ourselves to the Lord when we say the Our Father. "They took the Child to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord." The presentation of the child was not part of the prescribed ceremony. All that was of obligation was that the first-born should be redeemed, or bought back, because by the ancient law he belonged to the Lord. But it was fitting that as Jesus came on earth to do his Father's will, he should be thus ceremonially offered to his Father at the very beginning of his earthly course. It is worth noting that our Lord's first visit to Jerusalem was in order that he might be "redeemed"; his last that he might redeem us.

Mary had already offered herself completely to God; now she offers her greatest treasure, which she had received from God. Mary and Joseph no doubt looked forward to a quiet ceremony, but to their surprise Simeon appeared and took the Child in his arms and spoke wonderful words about him. He had been assured by the Holy Spirit that he would not die without seeing the promised Messiah. Now the promise was fulfilled, and Simeon was ready to leave this life. "He will cause many to fall and many to rise." To which class do I wish to belong? "So that the secret thoughts of many may be

laid bare." That is what the Rosary will do for me. What Mary's offering was to cost her is now foreshadowed: "A sword of sorrow will pierce your heart."

Then came Anna, who was rewarded for a life of self-denial and prayer by the sight of the long-awaited Messiah. "She spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the deliverance of Jerusalem." The knowledge of Christ which we gain through the Rosary we should spread abroad in the world. Let us enter into the spirit of Simeon and Anna, the spirit of gratitude for our Redeemer, when we say the Glory be to the Father.

5. The Finding in the Temple.

St. Luke tells us what happened, 2: 41-51. People often talk of the "loss" of the child Jesus. But he was not a child; he was already very mature, as shown by the impression he made on the doctors in the Temple. The fact is that he deliberately separated himself from Mary and Joseph without letting them know what he was doing. Here again is a joyful mystery which is full of sorrow. Mary could not be sure that she would ever see her Son again. Her pain is revealed by the spontaneous words that poured out when she found her Son.

"Did you not know that I must be engaged in my Father's business?" This is the stamp of our Lord's life and spirit always. The alternative translation, which is often given, "my Father's house," does not suit the context. The Temple, surely would have been the first place Mary and Joseph would have looked. Moreover, we are told that they did not understand what he said to them. In the words about "my Father's business" there is mystery; but there is no mystery about the question, "Did you not know that I was bound to be in the Temple?"

Our Lord was teaching a lesson. "He who loves father and mother more than me is not worthy of me." (Matt. 10: 37). He never asks us to practice what he does not practice himself. He was strict with the man who was invited to follow him but asked to be allowed to go first and say good-bye to his family. (Luke, 9:61). "The person who does what my Father in heaven wants him to do is brother and sister and mother to me" (Matt. 12: 50).

This mystery puts before us what must be our occupation in life, searching for Jesus; and it is what we do particularly in the Rosary. "Search and you will find," he said himself (Luke, 11:9). "When you search for me you will find me, provided you search for me with your whole heart" (Jer. 29: 13).

A second time we are told that "his mother treasured all these things in her heart." Surely she will help us to do the same. Our Glory be to the Father should be an act of gratitude for what God has made known to us.

B. THE SORROWFUL MYSTERIES

1. The Agony in the Garden

We pass over the rest of our Lord's life, for it has been shown to us in its spirit and purpose in the early events we have been considering. Now we come to what was most important, his sufferings and death for our redemption. An account of the passion is given in all four evangelists.

We should say the Our Father with special attention, because part of it is used by our Lord in the garden when he prayed, "Thy will be done," and part is referred to when he urges his apostles to pray, so that they may not enter into temptation. The suffering of heart was the most severe of our

Lord's sufferings. Martyrs have endured their pains without appearing to feel them, because of the joy that filled their hearts. It was not so with our Lord.

"Sadness came over him and great distress. Then he said: 'My heart is so full of sorrow I feel I may die'" (Matt. 26: 37-38). He knew perfectly all the terrible physical suffering he had to endure; it was all concentrated into a moment in his consciousness. He felt the awful burden of the sins of the world. He felt the ingratitude that so many would show towards him. When the angel came to strengthen him, could Jesus have found strength in the thought of my gratitude and generosity? There are many points we might dwell on: "May your will, not mine, be done!" "Being in anguish, he prayed more intensely." "Wait here and keep awake with me". (In the Rosary we are trying to do what he asked.) "I had hoped for sympathy, but in vain; I found no one to console me" (Psalm 69:20). Mary would have shared in this anguish of her Son. She would have understood better than the apostles the meaning of the words in which he had often foretold his passion and death; she would have been aware of the opposition and hatred that were building up against him in Jerusalem. She, too, must have entered into the dark night of his soul. The Glory be to the Father should be our effort to glorify God for giving us such a Redeemer.

2. The Scouring at the Pillar.

We say the Our Father to him in whose sight his Son endured the scourging for us. "Pilate ordered Jesus to be first scourged and then handed over to be crucified" (Matt. 27:26). Our Lord specially foretold this part of his passion several times. It was probably the most terrible part of his physical sufferings. The scourging killed him. The soldiers were afraid that they would not be able to get him to Calvary in time to crucify him and got someone to carry his cross for him. When Joseph of Arimathea went to Pilate to ask for the body of Jesus, Pilate was astonished that he had died so quickly and sent for the centurion that he might verify the fact (Mark 15: 44-45). The scourging was most unjust: "I find no reason to condemn this man" (Luke 23 :4) ; "I have gone into the matter myself in your presence and found no case against the man in respect of all the charges you bring against him; nor has Herod either. So I shall have him flogged and let him go" (Luke, 23:14-15).

It was shameful. A Roman citizen could not be subjected to this indignity, but the Son of God was. St. Paul, who was a Roman citizen, twice made trouble about this, once when he had been flogged (Acts 16:37), and once when he was threatened with it (Acts 22:25). It was a savage and cruel punishment, which our Lord endured for sin. We should never forget that. The Rosary helps us to keep it before us. Mary would in all likelihood have heard of the sentence. Would she have been near enough to hear it carried out? We should say the Glory be to the Father in a spirit of reparation.

3. The Crowning with Thorns.

Jesus suffered to reconcile us with his Father; let us say the Our Father with gratitude. "Then Pilate's soldiers took Jesus into the inner court of the palace, and the whole company gathered around him. They stripped off his clothes and put a scarlet robe on him. Then they made a crown out of thorny branches and put it on his head, and put a stick in his right hand; then they knelt before him and mocked him. 'Long live the King of the Jews!' they said. They spat on him, and took the stick and hit him over the head."

We acknowledge Jesus as truly our king. What do we think of this scene of mockery, and what efforts shall we make to honour him in reparation for this dishonour? This is the second occasion during the passion when we are told that Jesus was spat upon. Then he was brought to Pilate, and even Pilate seems to have been horrified at what had happened. He felt sure that the people would

now be satisfied. "Pilate went out again and said to them: "Look, I am bringing him out to you, that you may know that I find no crime in him." So Jesus came out, wearing the crown of thorns and the scarlet robe. Pilate said, "Here is the man!" When the chief priests and the guards saw him they shouted, "Crucify him! Crucify him!" (John 19: 4-6).

Could Mary have been present at this scene? If so, she could hardly have recognised her Son now. Would she have hoped against hope that the people would now relent. If so, she was quickly undeceived by that terrible cry, "Crucify him! " There we have the voice of all the sinners of the world. Can I recognise my voice among them? I offer my tribute of praise and adoration in the Glory be to the Father.

4. The Carrying of the Cross.

It is because Christ carried his cross that I am able to address God in the prayer our Saviour gave us. "The soldiers took the robe off him and put his own clothes back on him and led him away to crucify him. As they were marching out, they came upon a man of Cyrene, Simon by name, who was coming in from the country, and they made him shoulder the cross and carry it behind Jesus" (Matt. 27:32, with Mark 15:21 and Luke 23:26-31). We are here contemplating what is our work in life, carrying our cross after Jesus. "Whoever does not take up his cross ("every day" S. Luke adds) and follow in my steps is not worthy of me" (Matt. 10:38). "If anyone wants to be a follower of mine let him renounce himself and take up his cross and follow me" (Matt. 16: 24).

How would Simon have looked on the task of helping a condemned criminal? At first he would certainly have hated it; but as we know that he was the father of two well-known Christians (so St. Mark tells us) we can well believe that the service he rendered Jesus, however unwillingly at first, brought him the grace of faith. "In the cross is salvation." Among the crowd that accompanied the procession there were some women who lifted up their voices in lamentation. (Never in the Gospels do we find a single case of a woman who was hostile to our Lord.) Jesus forgot his own sufferings and said to them: "Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me, but for yourselves and for your children . . . If such things happen when the wood is green, what will it be like when the wood is dry?" (Luke 23: 27-31).

It is likely that his mother met him on the way to Calvary, as is commemorated in the Stations of the Cross. She could not be certain of being able to get near him on the cross (it was only the darkness that dispersed the crowds), and she would have wished to meet him once before he died. She, too, carried his cross, in a truer sense than Simon did. How much we have to glorify God for when we recite the Glory be to the Father at the end of this decade.

5. The Crucifixion.

We say the Our Father with confidence. "Since God did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for the benefit of us all, we may be certain, after such a gift, that he will not refuse anything he can give" (Rom. 8:32).

Our Lord has reached the end of the journey he undertook for us, and the deathbed the world has prepared for him is a cross. Iron spikes were driven through his hands and feet and he was raised up between heaven and earth. While he was being nailed to the cross a cry came from him. It may have astonished many hearers, though it will not astonish us. "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." Has he not a right to ask us to be generous in forgiving? A dying sinner asked just for a remembrance when his fellow sufferer assumed his kingship, and the supremely generous

answer came. Hand in hand, we might say, with the Redeemer into eternal life went, not his spotless mother or one of the prophets of old, but a sinner who turned to him almost with his last breath.

But his mother was not forgotten. Now she was standing with St. John beneath his cross, and, as if he had overlooked something he had meant to give us, he said: "Mother, there is your son," and to John (the only representative of the apostles present), "There is your mother." "I am thirsty." All these sayings on the cross have a deeper meaning than might appear, so we may well believe that Jesus was alluding, not merely to his physical thirst (torturing as that must have been now that so much blood had been drained from his body), but still more to his thirst for souls and the love of men. Does the cry mean anything to me?

"My God, my God, why have you deserted me?" This saying sometimes raises difficulties, but we must keep in mind that it was not a saying of our Lord himself, but the first line of a psalm which foretold his passion. The whole psalm must have run through his mind, and it is a psalm that ends in triumph. It would be well to read it sometimes. It is Psalm 21 (22).

"All is accomplished." Our Lord could look back to the beginning of human history, to the entrance of sin into the world, the promise of a redeemer, the long years of preparation; now all the promises were fulfilled and Christ had accomplished his earthly course. As he said at the Last Supper, "Father, I have finished the work which you gave me to do" (John 17:4). We shall be happy when death comes if we can say the same.

"Father, in your hands I place my spirit." This is the second quotation from the psalms which Jesus made on the cross. In the original, the spirit, or life, was committed to God to be saved, but Jesus has consecrated the saying in the sense in which we now use it. The oftener we stand beneath the cross with Mary and the others who were there the better. We can never learn all the lessons to be learned. It is one of the great benefits of the Rosary that it brings us often to the cross. Some texts which we can ponder on, so that they will be at least in the background of our minds when we are at this mystery of the Rosary: "You are not your own property; you have been bought and paid for" (1 Cor. 6: 19).

"He died for all, so that living men should live no longer for themselves, but for him who died and was raised to- life for them" (2 Cor. 5: 15). "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who am living, but Christ who is living in me" (Gal. 2:20). "When I am lifted up from the earth I will draw all men to myself" (John 12:32). I cannot answer for all men, but has his boast been verified in my case?

C. THE GLORIOUS MYSTERIES

1. The Resurrection.

We should say the Our Father with special earnestness now that Christ has risen, and we with him, to a new life. All four evangelists deal with this event: Matthew 28: 1-15, Mark 16: 1-8, Luke 24: 1-12, John 20: 1-18. Too often we look on the resurrection as just a sequel to Christ's redemptive work, whereas it is an essential part of it. We were redeemed by the death and resurrection of Christ, dying to the old life and rising to the new. St. Paul habitually joins the two together. In a great war we cannot be certain of victory. But in our struggle with Christ we can be sure that we are on the winning side. The resurrection is the proof of Christ's victory and the assurance of ours. "Do not be afraid; I was dead, but look, I am alive for evermore" (Apoc. 1: 17). "He was given over to die because of our sins, and was raised to life to put us right with God" (Rom. 4:25). "Thanks be to God

who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 15:57). "If we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his" (Rom. 6: 5). "He who raised the Lord Jesus to life will raise us also with Jesus and bring us into his presence" (2 Cor. 4:14). "You have been buried with Christ when you were baptized, and by baptism, too, you have been raised up with him" (Col. 2:12). "You have been brought back to life with Christ. Set your hearts, then, on the things that are in heaven, where Christ is, sitting at God's right hand. Keep your minds fixed on things there, not on the things here on earth" (Col. 3: 1). Mary suffered most with her Son; she shared in the highest degree in his triumph. Our Glory be to the Father should be a real song of triumph.

2. The Ascension.

When we address our Father in heaven at the beginning of the decade, our thoughts will naturally go with Christ as he ascends to his Father's right hand. The ascension is a symbolic act which is meant to impress upon us the glory that came to Christ's humanity through his resurrection. The ascension was separated in time from the resurrection, but the glory of Christ was already complete when he rose from the dead. It is helpful for us to consider it separately. It was an extraordinary parting between our Lord and his followers. Partings are usually occasions of sorrow, and this was a final parting as far as the visible presence of Christ was concerned. But we read that the disciples "returned to Jerusalem with great joy" (Luke 24:52). Our Lord had said at the Last Supper: "If you loved me, you would be glad that I am going to the Father" (John 14:28).

We, too, should rejoice that Christ now receives all the honour that is due to him. "God raised Christ from the dead, and made him sit at his right hand in the heavenly regions, and put all things under his feet" (Eph. 1:20). But it is for our sake, too, he has gone to heaven. "I am going to prepare a place for you" (John 14:2). There "He is living for ever to intercede for all who come to God through him" (Hebr. 7: 25). "Christ has entered into heaven itself to appear in the presence of God on our behalf" (Hebr. 9:24). Mary, his mother, would have rejoiced more than all the others at his triumph. We join with her and his friends in our Glory be to the Father.

3. The Descent of the Holy Spirit.

The Our Father is addressed to him who is giving us the Holy Spirit constantly. Here, again, this mystery is not something just added which has no real connection with what went before; this is the climax of the work of redemption. Christ died and rose again that we might have a share in his divine life. The descent of the Holy Spirit on the apostles was the outward manifestation of the accomplishment of this work. "And that we might live no longer for ourselves but for him, he sent the Holy Spirit from you, Father, as his first gift to those who believe, to complete his work on earth and bring us the fullness of grace." (Eucharistic Prayer IV). The account of this event covers a good deal of the opening section of the Acts of the Apostles. The main points are contained in the following passages: 1: 4-5, 13-14; 2: 1-4, 17, 38. "I will ask the Father and he will give you another Advocate (or Helper or Counsellor, as the word Paraclete may be translated), the Spirit of Truth, to stay with you for ever" (John 14: 16). We are not merely looking back to an event which happened in the past. The Holy Spirit is a gift constantly being poured out by the Father and Son upon the Church and upon each member of it.

It might have seemed strange to us that our Lord said: "It is to your advantage that I should leave you, for if I do not go away the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go I will send him to you" (John 16:7). The work of redemption had to be accomplished before its fruits could be fully

received. Earlier in his Gospel St. John had drawn attention to this: "Jesus was speaking of the Spirit which those who believed in him were to receive; for the Spirit had not yet been given, because Jesus had not yet been glorified" (John 7:39).

It was when they were praying "with Mary the mother of Jesus" that the Holy Spirit was poured out on the disciples so abundantly. We are doing the same in the Rosary and can look for the same result.

"We have received the Spirit who comes from God, to teach us to understand the gifts that he has given us" (1 Cor. 2: 12). Again, that is what we are primarily trying to do in the Rosary, understand the gifts of redemption and sanctification God has given us. This mystery should teach us to rely on the Holy Spirit. "We do not know how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with yearnings that cannot be put into words" (Rom. 8: 26). "When the Spirit of Truth comes, he will lead you into all truth" (John 16: 13). Have we not reason for saying the Glory be to the Father fervently?

4. The Assumption.

We are now finished with events on earth, and in the last two mysteries of the Rosary we look ahead to see what will be the results of our redemption in eternity. We should say the Our Father in a spirit of gratitude for all that God has done for Mary, and through her for us. The assumption of our Lady into heaven was not such a wonderful event as we might be inclined to think. We are all to be brought, body and soul, to heaven one day. In Mary's case, because of her sinlessness and the special place she occupied in the plan of redemption, it took place at once. "I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am you also will be" (John 14: 3).

There is no need to puzzle over how this is going to happen. It will be God's doing, and beyond our comprehension. "We are citizens of heaven, and we eagerly await our Saviour to come from heaven, the Lord Jesus Christ. He will change our weak mortal bodies and make them like his own glorious body" (Phil. 3: 21). "It is sown a physical body, it is raised a spiritual body" (1 Cor. 15: 44).

This mystery, therefore, should be one of joy for us. The Vatican Council speaks of Mary "shining forth as a sign of hope and consolation for the people of God on their pilgrimage" (Constitution on the Church, 68).

But we should also rejoice in the glory of our mother. "A great portent appeared in heaven, a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon beneath her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars" (Apoc. 12: 1). Scholars tell us that this image refers primarily to the people of God; but the Vatican Council tells us that Mary is an image of the Church, and a preeminent and exceptional member of the Church. The words of the Apocalypse may, therefore, be legitimately applied to her.

Our Glory be to the Father is our praise of God for what he has done for Mary and for us.

5. The Crowning of our Blessed Lady in Heaven.

Here again we are dealing with symbols. We are all promised a crown of life; it is the certain end of a life of fidelity in this world. "Be faithful till death and I will give you the crown of life" (Apoc. 2: 10). The Our Father can look forward to that life in which God will be known as our Father in the fullest sense.

"This day you will be with me in paradise." Mary had heard these words addressed by her Son to a repentant sinner. Now they were to be true of herself, who had never known sin. Nothing so holy

among creatures had ever appeared in heaven apart from the sacred humanity of her Son. She had led a very ordinary life on earth, a life of faith, of suffering, and of obedience. Now she was to be queen of heaven, for her Son was king. Now there was to be perfect union with Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

We have a mother who is in a position to help us to follow her Son and finally join him in his glory. "Father, I desire that they also whom you have given me may be with me where I am, to behold my glory" (John 17: 24).

"He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning or crying or pain any more, for the former things have passed away" (Apoc. 21: 4).

Our Glory be to the Father is our praise of God for what he has done for Mary, the Queen-Mother and for us in having such a wonderful model and exemplar in Mary, Queen of the Church.

III. How the recitation of the words and reflection of the mysteries can be combined.

A common difficulty that is put forward regarding the Rosary is how to combine the recitation of the vocal prayers with reflections on the mysteries. It might seem that if attention is given to the words reflection on the mysteries is impossible, and on the other hand serious reflection on the mysteries will prevent any real attention to the words.

It has already been suggested that the reflections we make in the Rosary are not to be regarded as formal meditations. For one thing, the time occupied by a decade is too short, and besides the content of the mystery is too great. To get full profit from the Rosary we must make serious preparation beforehand. It is suggested that the points put forward in this booklet under each of the mysteries be taken at different times as subjects for meditation. The various texts quoted and the ideas put forward would supply matter for many periods of meditation on each mystery. In that way we should become familiar with the great mystery of God's plan for our salvation and the various aspects of it presented in the Rosary.

In the same way the words of the vocal prayers can be meditated on and prayed about, so that all that is contained in them will become present to us in some way as we use the prayers, without any real effort on our part.

We suppose some such preparation, then, when we come to the actual saying of the Rosary. In the solution of the problem of combining words and reflections no fixed rules are to be laid down, and the fullest liberty is to be given to all to act according to their capacities and follow their personal tastes.

It has already been supposed that in the recitation of the Our Father and the Glory be to the Father attention should be given primarily to the words, the subject of the mystery providing motive and direction. Our present enquiry, therefore, is concerned mainly with the Hail Mary.

There are various ways of combining the recitation of the ten Hail Marys with reflection on the mysteries. At one time more attention may be given primarily to the words of the Hail Mary, the scene of the mystery forming a kind of background. Thus in the joyful mysteries we might regard ourselves as addressing our Lady along with the angel, or with Elizabeth, or on our own behalf as she lays her infant in the manger. Or we could address the words to her as she stands by the cross, or in the glory of her assumption. These can serve as examples. The lights we have gained by

previous meditation on the mysteries shine in the background, and can give deeper meaning and value to the words we are repeating.

Sometimes special emphasis can be laid on one particular phrase of the Hail Mary. For example we could concentrate on addressing our Lady as "Blessed among women", at the birth of her Son, at her assumption, under the cross, and so on.

Or it would be sufficient to say the Hail Mary's with attention and devotion, desiring with the help of our Lady to learn the lessons taught in the different mysteries. Take the Joyful Mysteries, for example. We might ask our blessed Mother in the first mystery to obtain for us a deeper understanding and appreciation of the Incarnation. In the second we might ask that we may imitate Mary's faith, charity and humility. In the third, we might pray for a share in her love of her Son. In the fourth we might ask to accept joy and sorrow in our lives as equally governed by the providence of God. In the fifth we might pray that we may be equally diligent in searching for Jesus and successful in finding him. And so with the other two sets of mysteries. This is, perhaps, the simplest and easiest way of saying the Rosary.

At other times it may be the profound truths embodied in the mysteries that are the chief object of our attention. The words of the Hail Mary, which we know are in harmony with all the mysteries, then serve as a kind of background music.

But often there will be a swing from one method to the other, even in the course of one mystery, and thus we can combine the advantages of both methods, and find an increasing appreciation of the harmony between them. The difficulty then, will probably be found to be more theoretical than practical. Such as it is, it is to be solved by practice.

To sum up.

If we say the Rosary well, there will be prayer in our lives, and prayer is essential if we are to live as we should. Day by day we shall grow in understanding of the wonderful plans that God has made for us in Christ and the wonderful things he has done for us. The Rosary will make us better prepared to offer the sacrifice of the Mass, because it will make us familiar with the work of redemption.

Jesus and his mother will become better known to us, and will have a greater influence on our lives. Through continual contemplation of the life, death, and glory of our Saviour we shall be impelled to imitate more and more what is put before us in the Rosary, and in that way we shall be led more securely to the final consummation which is there promised.

Nihil Obstat: BERNARD O'CONNOR, Diocesan Censor. Imprimatur: + J. R. KNOX, Archbishop of Melbourne. 11th August, 1970
