



# PRAYING THE ROSARY

A Way into the Heart of the Gospel

“The rosary is a prayer that always accompanies me. It is also the prayer of the ordinary people and the saints.

It is a prayer from my heart.”

—*Pope Francis*

“With the rosary, we allow ourselves to be guided by Mary, model of faith, in meditating on the mysteries of Christ, and day after day we are helped to assimilate the Gospel, so that it shapes all our lives.”

—*Pope Benedict XVI*

“The rosary is a magnificent and universal prayer for the needs of the Church, the nations and the entire world. It is a school for learning true Christian perfection.”

—*Pope St. John XXIII*

“The rosary is the most beautiful and the most rich in graces of all prayers; it is the prayer that touches most the heart of the Mother of God. And if you wish peace to reign in your homes, recite the family rosary.”

—*Pope St. Pius X*

# Praying the Rosary

## A WAY INTO THE HEART OF THE GOSPEL

The Marian rosary is a Scripture-based prayer which Pope John Paul II called a “compendium of the Gospel” that “is the prayer of the Christian who advances in the pilgrimage of faith, in the following of Jesus, preceded by Mary. It is a means given for contemplating Jesus and, meditating on his life, for loving and following him always more faithfully.” It draws from the Gospel both its main prayer formulas and the presentation of the mysteries for contemplation.

The complete rosary prayer consists of the recitation of fifteen (now 20) decades or sets of ten *Hail Marys* preceded by the *Our Father* and followed by



the *Glory Be*, accompanied by prayerful reflection on one of the mysteries of Jesus' life, death, resurrection and glorification. The orderly and gradual unfolding of the rosary reflects the way in which the Word of God entered our world and brought about our salvation.

The rosary begins with the *Sign of the Cross*, reminding us that all our prayer puts us in the presence of

the Holy Trinity. Then we say the *Apostles' Creed*, the ancient baptismal creed of the Church of Rome, which faithfully summarizes the great mysteries of the Catholic faith. The *Lord's Prayer* or *Our Father*, which Jesus taught to his disciples as the way to pray (Matthew 6:9-13; Luke 11:2-4) introduces each mystery. The first part of the *Hail Mary* combines the angel's words announcing Christ's birth (Luke 1:28) and Elizabeth's greeting to Mary (Luke 1:43). (In 1569, St. Pius V officially added the second part of our *Hail Mary*.) The *Glory Be* is a short Trinitarian formula of praise (a doxology) again reminding us that all our prayer is directed to God.

There are now four sets of Mysteries: the three traditional sets of the Joyful, Sorrowful, and Glorious and the new Luminous Mysteries added by Pope John Paul II in 2002. Thus the complete set of rosary mysteries reveals the overall pattern of Jesus' life that is also the pattern for our lives as his disciples: our entry into life at birth (Joyful Mysteries), our gospel ministry and witness (Luminous Mysteries) to our death (Sorrowful Mysteries) and then to new life with God forever (Glorious Mysteries).

## *The History of the Rosary Prayer*

The rosary prayer dates back to the Middle Ages, developing through a combination of various forms of

popular devotion. Irish monks developed a type of rosary prayer and brought it to the continent with their missionary endeavors as a popular substitute for the daily Liturgy of the Hours in which the monks recited the complete 150 biblical Psalms every week. Thus their rosary was a kind of “psalter for the laity,” substituting 150 *Our Fathers* for the 150 psalms. A string of beads (*Paternoster* beads) was used to count these *Our Fathers*.

Towards the end of the twelfth century, Marian devotion adopted a similar pattern by the repetition of the “Ave Maria” or *Hail Mary* prayer (the first part of what we say today,



which soon became a prayer that all were expected to know and understand) coupled with reflections on the joys and sorrows of Mary.

Eventually between 1410 and 1439, German Carthusian monks popularized the practice of meditation on the biblical mysteries by joining a *Hail Mary* with a brief psalm quote or a phrase referring to Jesus or Mary. The name *rosary* (Latin: *rosarium*, a rose garden) then began to be used because gardens were used to designate fifty places for meditation. In 1470, through

the efforts of the Dominican Alan de la Roche and the Confraternity of the Psalter of Jesus and Mary, the Dominican rosary became a popular Marian devotion in the universal church with the three sets Joyful, Sorrowful and Glorious Mysteries still used today. (Even today there are numerous other rosaries, such as the Franciscan rosary with seven decades in honor of the Seven Joys of Mary, the rosary of the Seven Sorrows, and others in honor of the Sacred Heart, the Holy Name, the



Holy Spirit, the Angels, St. Joseph, St. Patrick and other saints.)

To keep track and count these prayers, special strings of beads were introduced consisting of a crucifix, six large beads (for the *Our Fathers*)

and fifty-three smaller ones divided into groups of ten (for the *Hail Marys*) with each group separated by a large bead.

### *The Mysteries of the Rosary*

While using the rosary, we focus on 20 events or Mysteries in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus and reflect on how we share with Mary in the saving work of Christ today. The traditional decades of the rosary

focus on the heart of the Gospel proclamation: the Joyful Mysteries center on the Good News of Jesus' incarnation which begins our salvation in Christ; the Luminous Mysteries focus on Jesus' earthly ministry and his revelation of the Father and his self-revelation to the world; the Sorrowful Mysteries remember and reveal the first aspect of the paschal mystery, the redemptive sufferings and death of Christ; the Glorious Mysteries reveal the fulfillment of the paschal mystery in Jesus' resurrection, ascension, the sending of the Holy Spirit and the assumption and glorification Mary.

Like the prayer beads that are used in many religious traditions, the rosary keeps our hands moving while our minds and hearts are meditating on the mysteries of Jesus life, death and resurrection. The gentle repetition of the words of the rosary is meant to lead one into restful and contemplative prayer in relation to each mystery and to help us to enter into the silence of our hearts, where Christ's spirit dwells. Reading a related passage from the Bible also helps to deepen our understanding of each mystery. In this way the unfathomable riches of these mysteries are unfolded. The scripture citations given below are not exhaustive. Many other biblical texts might also be suitable for your prayerful reflection on each mystery.

# *Joyful Mysteries*

**The 5 Joyful Mysteries recall  
Jesus' birth and childhood.**



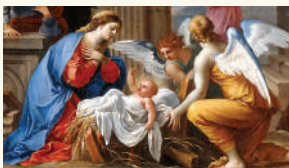
## **1. THE ANNUNCIATION**

Mary is told she will  
be Jesus' mother.  
(Luke 1:26-38)



## **2. THE VISITATION**

Mary visits her cousin,  
Elizabeth (Luke 1:39-56)



## **3. THE NATIVITY**

Jesus is born in Bethlehem.  
(Luke 2:1-20)



## **4. THE PRESENTATION**

Mary goes to the Temple  
to offer a gift to God.  
(Luke 2:22-38)



## **5. THE FINDING OF JESUS IN THE TEMPLE**

Jesus anticipates his  
mission at age 12.  
(Luke 2:41-52)



# *Luminous Mysteries*

**The 5 Luminous Mysteries recall  
Jesus' mission and ministry.**



## **6. THE BAPTISM OF JESUS**

Jesus is empowered for his mission & ministry.  
(Matthew 3:13-17)



## **7. THE WEDDING AT CANA**

Jesus changes water to wine. (John 2:1-12)



## **8. THE PROCLAMATION OF THE KINGDOM**

Jesus reveals God's presence with us.  
(Mark 1:15)



## **9. THE TRANSFIGURATION**

Jesus appears like he will be after the resurrection.  
(Luke 9:28-36)



## **10. THE FIRST EUCHARIST**

Jesus shares the Last Supper with the disciples.  
(Matthew 26:26-29)

# *Sorrowful Mysteries*

**The 5 Sorrowful Mysteries recall  
Jesus' suffering and death.**



## **11. THE AGONY IN THE GARDEN**

Jesus prays for strength in  
his suffering.

(Matthew 26:36-56)



## **12. THE SCOURGING AT THE PILLAR**

Jesus is whipped.

(Matthew 27:20-26)



## **13. THE CROWNING WITH THORNS**

Jesus has a thorny crown  
put on his head.

(Matthew 27:27-30)



## **14. THE CARRYING OF THE CROSS**

Jesus carries his cross to  
the execution place.

(Matthew 27:31-33)



## **15. THE CRUCIFIXION**

Jesus dies nailed to a cross.

(Matthew 27:34-60)

# *Glorious Mysteries*

**The 5 Glorious Mysteries recall the fulfillment of God's saving plan.**



## **16. THE RESURRECTION**

God gives Jesus a new kind of life. (John 20:1-18)



## **17. THE ASCENSION**

Jesus goes up to heaven to be with God. (Acts 1:9-11)



## **18. THE DESCENT OF THE HOLY SPIRIT**

The apostles are empowered at Pentecost. (John 20:19-23)



## **19. THE ASSUMPTION OF MARY**

Mary is taken up to heaven when she dies. (John 11:25-26)



**20. THE CROWNING OF MARY AS  
QUEEN OF HEAVEN AND EARTH**  
(2 Corinthians 5:1-2)

# *The Prayers of the Rosary*

*(Note: The rosary can be said privately or with a group. If prayed in a group, the leader prays the italicized words in the following prayers.)*

## **THE SIGN OF THE CROSS**

(said to begin the prayer and recall God's presence)

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

## **APOSTLES' CREED**

(said at first, holding the crucifix)

I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, his only son, our Lord. He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary. He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried. He descended into hell. On the third day he rose again. He ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

### THE LORD'S PRAYER/OUR FATHER

(said holding the single bead before each decade)

*Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name; thy kingdom come; thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.*

Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. Amen

### HAIL MARY

(said holding each of the 10 beads in the decade)

*Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with you; blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb, Jesus.*

Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death. Amen.

### GLORY BE TO THE FATHER

(said at the end of each decade,  
before the next *Our Father*)

*Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit.*

As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.

### THE FATIMA PRAYER

(said after the *Glory Be* at the end of each decade)

O my Jesus, forgive us our sins, save us from the fires of hell; lead all souls to heaven, especially those who have most need of your mercy. Amen.

## HAIL, HOLY QUEEN

(said after the final decade)

Hail, holy Queen, mother of mercy, our life, our sweetness and our hope. To you do we cry, poor banished children of Eve; to you we send up our sighs, mourning and weeping in this valley of tears. Turn, then, most gracious advocate, your eyes of mercy toward us; and after this, our exile, show unto us the blessed fruit of your womb, Jesus. O clement, O loving, O sweet Virgin Mary. Amen.

## FINAL DIALOGUE & PRAYER

(said after the Hail, Holy Queen)

**Leader:** *Pray for us, O holy Mother of God.*

**Response:** That we may be made worthy of the promises of Christ.

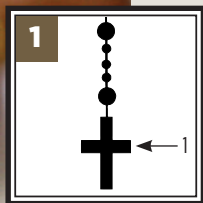
**Leader:** *Let us pray:*

**All:** O God, whose only begotten Son, by his life, death, and resurrection, has purchased for us the rewards of eternal life, grant, we beseech thee, that while meditating on these mysteries of the most holy rosary of the blessed Virgin Mary, we may imitate what they contain and obtain what they promise, through the same Christ our Lord. Amen.

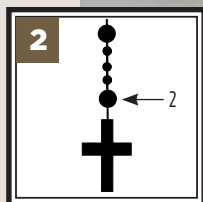
“The rosary, though clearly Marian in character, is at heart a Christocentric prayer. In the sobriety of its elements, it has all the depth of the Gospel message in its entirety, of which it can be said to be a compendium. It is an echo of the prayer of Mary, her perennial *Magnificat* for the work of the redemptive Incarnation which began in her virginal womb. With the rosary, the Christian people sits at the school of Mary and is led to contemplate the beauty on the face of Christ and to experience the depths of his love. Through the rosary the faithful receive abundant grace, as though from the very hands of the Mother of the Redeemer.”

—*Pope St. John Paul II*

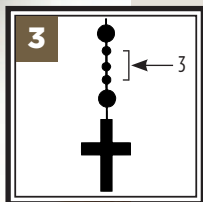
# How to Pray the Rosary



1. Make the *Sign of the Cross*. say the *Apostles' Creed*.



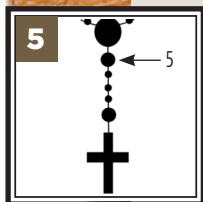
2. On the first bead, say an *Our Father*.



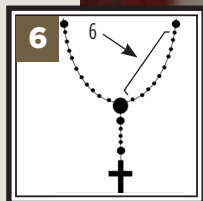
3. On each of the next three beads, say one *Hail Mary*.



4. Say the *Glory Be*.



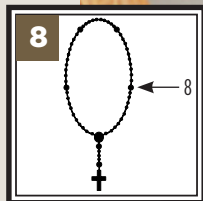
5. For each of the five decades (set of 10 beads), announce the *Mystery* then say the *Our Father*.



6. For each of the 10 beads of the decade, say a *Hail Mary*.



7. Say the *Glory Be*.



8. Continue through all five decades. End with *Hail, Holy Queen*, followed by the *Final Dialogue & Prayer* and the *Sign of the Cross*.