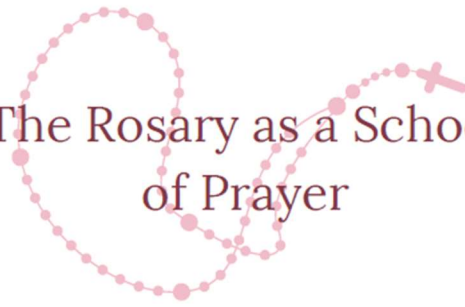


Prayer

May 30, 2024



The Rosary as a School of Prayer



Introduction

This year's novena theme is taken from Pope Francis's declaration of 2024 as the year of prayer in preparation for the Jubilee of Mercy in 2025. Tonight, the novena begins with a brief catechesis on prayer and how the Rosary is a school of prayer or as Saint John Paul calls it the "school of Mary" (*Rosarium Virginis Mariae* 1, 14, 43).

Catechesis on Prayer

Prayer can be described as a conversation with God or loving awareness of God's presence. It is necessary for salvation because it fosters the relationship between God and us, namely grace. God initiates the conversation by giving us existence, the initial grace of conversion, and the infused virtues and Gifts of the Holy Spirit in the sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation. Grace is not just a thing like spiritual electricity or gasoline, but a relationship with God, a participation in His life and love.

The main sources of grace are the sacraments which comprise the main component of liturgy and liturgical prayer. However, liturgical prayer comprises only half of the ladder; we also need personal prayer to foster our fruitful reception of the graces bestowed on us through the sacraments.

The two kinds of prayer are vocal and mental prayer. Vocal prayer can be divided into public or liturgical prayer and private or devotional prayer, which are formula prayers such as the Hail Mary, Glory Be, and the Our Father. Mental prayer can also be divided into formal mental prayer, such as meditation, and informal mental prayer which would be short prayers known as aspirations or calling to mind God's presence in the present moment. The Rosary, as we shall see, blends both kinds of prayer in the way that it is structured. It falls under the category of devotional vocal or formula prayer, but also mental prayer. Really, any formula prayer must include some degree of mental prayer, or it would become the vain repetition that Our Savior condemned (Mt 6:7-8).

The four ends or reasons why we pray include: adoration, worshiping and praising God for His goodness and mercy; contrition, sorrow and repentance for our sins; thanksgiving, gratitude for God's kindness and mercy towards us; and supplication

or petition, asking God for favors and graces. Again, the Rosary's elements include all these ends. With the Our Father we have the prayer of petition and contrition, with the Hail Mary, gratitude and the beginnings of contemplation, with the Glory Be we learn praise and adoration.

The four qualities of prayer that make our prayer more effective are devotion, attention, confidence, and perseverance. The Rosary can foster all these qualities, especially persevering in prayer. The Rosary also lends itself to communal recitation which adds even more efficacy as Jesus said, "wherever two or more are gathered in my name, I am there in their midst" (Mt. 18:19-20).

Learning how to speak with God

The way we learned to talk was by listening and imitating what we heard. At first, we didn't totally understand what was being said but the meaning became clearer as we entered the dialogue with our parents and family. For many of us, this was also the way we learned to pray. At least for me, my mother taught my sister and I the Our Father as our first bedtime prayer before she tucked us in. We learned our basic prayers when we were little from our parents.

Vatican II called the family the domestic Church. Paul VI said,

"... If this element of common prayer were missing, the family would lack its very character as a domestic Church. Thus there must logically follow a concrete effort to reinstate communal prayer in family life if there is to be a restoration of the theological concept of the family as the domestic Church.

But there is no doubt that, after the celebration of the Liturgy of the Hours, the high point which family prayer can reach, the Rosary should be considered as one of the best and most efficacious prayers in common that the Christian family is invited to recite. We like to think, and sincerely hope, that when the family gathering becomes a time of prayer, the Rosary is a frequent and favored manner of praying. We are well aware that ... life today do not make family gatherings easy, and that even when such a gathering is possible many circumstances make it difficult to turn it into an occasion of prayer. ... But it is characteristic of the Christian in his manner of life not to give in to circumstances but to overcome them, not to succumb but to make an effort. Families which want to live in full measure the vocation and spirituality proper to the Christian family must therefore devote all their energies to overcoming the pressures that hinder family gatherings and prayer in common. (*Marialis Cultus* 53-54)"

How beautiful it is when parents introduce their children to prayer by praying the Rosary together as a family. In this way, children naturally learn their basic prayers and the beginnings of meditation and contemplation. But for all of us, young or old,

simple believer or advanced theologian, by praying with Mary we learn to enter into deeper and more profound dialogue with Christ.

Venerable Lucia dos Santos one of the seers at Fatima says that Mary's request to say the daily Rosary is possible for anyone, anywhere to fulfill.

“All people of good will can and must say the Rosary every day,” Lucia counsels. “Why? In order to put ourselves in contact with God, to thank Him for His benefits and ask for the graces we need. It is the prayer which places us in familiar contact with God, like the son who goes to his father to thank him for the gifts he has received, to talk to him about special concerns, to receive his guidance, his help, his support and his blessing.” (as quoted by Joseph Pronechen)

Do you want your children to stay Catholic? Do you want world peace? Do you want to grow in you own relationship with Jesus and Mary? Then pay heed to Mary's repeated request to pray the daily Rosary.

The vocal prayers of the Rosary

One objection to the Rosary is the repetition of the Hail Mary. But the language of love consists of repetition. Just think what would happen if a man thought that it was sufficient to say, “I love you.” to his wife only once at his wedding and never again! Jesus, Himself asked Peter three times if he loved Him.

The repetition of the Hail Mary helps us to stay focused on the mystery of the Rosary we are meditating on. Even as Mary pondered in her heart the mysteries of Her Son, hearing the echo of the angel's greeting. The real center of each Hail Mary is “Jesus.” It puts us in touch with Jesus even as it is also asking for Mary's intercession with Her Son.

The Our Father centers the prayer squarely where it belongs as petition to the Father, through Christ in the Holy Spirit. The “Glory be” traditionally ends the psalms in the Liturgy of the Hours and here serves the same purpose; the ultimate glory and praise of God. The optional final prayer, such as the Fatima prayer “O my Jesus, forgive us our sins...” or “eternal rest grant unto them O Lord...” can also help focus on what and to whom we are praying.

Catholics are about “smells and bells”, that is about incarnational prayer. We are after all human beings made of soul AND body. Beads for tactile counting help us keep our minds on the mystery without having to think about what number of Hail Marys we have said. The physical chain of beads symbolizes our tie to Mother Mary, and a deeper level or connection to Christ and God, the Father.

Contemplation of the mysteries: the mental prayer of the Rosary

But the vocal prayer isn't the whole story. As Pope St. Paul VI said,

“... a further essential element in the Rosary, in addition to the value of the elements of praise and petition, [is]... the element of contemplation. Without this the Rosary is a body without a soul, and its recitation is in danger of becoming a mechanical repetition of formulas ... By its nature the recitation of the Rosary calls for a quiet rhythm and a lingering pace, helping the individual to meditate on the mysteries of the Lord's life as seen through the eyes of her who was closest to the Lord. In this way the unfathomable riches of these mysteries are unfolded.” (*Marialis Cultis* 47)

In *Rosarium Virginis Mariae*, Pope John Paul suggests several ways in fostering this aspect of meditation and contemplation of the mysteries of Jesus's life. I will outline his suggestions and I encourage you to read them in full in the original apostolic letter – [**Rosarium Virginis Mariae**](#)

Pope John Paul II calls the Rosary the Compendium of the Gospel, because through the mysteries of the Rosary we assimilate the mind and actions of Christ as portrayed in the Gospel. He even added the Luminous Mysteries to complete the entire arc of the Gospel the main events of the life and teaching of Jesus.

Some methods for aiding our meditations on the mysteries of the Rosary include announcing each mystery with a brief description or scripture verse. One might include a booklet or holy card depicting the mysteries. I know of several mothers who have a flip chart of pictures that the children take turns flipping as the family prays the particular mystery. There is also the practice of saying a short hinge prayers after “Jesus” such as Jesus, who became incarnate in your womb ..., or Jesus, who agonized in the garden..., or Jesus, who was baptized in the Jordan..., or Jesus, risen from the dead....

Saying the Rosary daily besides forming a habit of prayer also leads to a balanced spirituality. The full cycle of mysteries takes you through the entire life of Christ with ALL its joys and sorrows. Which helps us avoid extremes of too much desire for consolation or too much melancholy in our prayer life -- “5 for sorrow, 10 for joy”.

Fruits and Efficacy

My focus in this talk has been about the Rosary as teaching us to pray. But the Rosary is so much more than just about our education and formation. Mary has asked repeatedly for praying the Rosary because God has put His treasury of grace

in her hands. She desires to distribute the infinitely abundant grace and mercy of God in the world, but we have to ask for it! I don't have time to go through all the victories, conversions and graces obtained by the recitation of the Rosary, but they are many... that will have to be another talk, actually several other talks.

Works Cited

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