

Solemnity of Mary the Mother of God
January 1, 2009
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The Rosary

Numbers 6:22-27
Psalm 67
Galatians 4:4-7
Luke 2:16-21

About a week ago, I was having dinner with some parishioners and one of them mentioned that the best homily she ever heard was on the rosary. She explained that the priest preached about the rosary in a way that made the ancient devotion much more meaningful. The woman's story reminded me that it is very important for priests and deacons to preach about practical and experiential aspects of our faith and not simply on spirituality and theology. Because of her inspiration, I am going to share with you some of my thoughts on the rosary, which is the most common prayer in the Church that refers to our solemnity today—"Holy Mary, Mother of God..."

The rosary is one of the most misunderstood prayers by non-Catholics and even many Catholics. Some people think that the rosary is just a multiplication of words, which is exactly what Jesus warns against in Sacred Scripture when He says, "In praying, do not babble like the pagans, who think that they will be heard because of their many words" (Matthew 6:7). In actuality, the repetitious nature of the rosary is not the most important part of the prayer.

The rosary is actually three different forms of prayer directed toward God through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary. These three forms of prayer are—the sacrifice of our time, the meaning behind the prayers that are repeated, and the meditation on the life of Christ. The rosary takes about 15 minutes to pray. In our busy world, 15 minutes is a lot of time. When we choose to pray the rosary, we are offering to God the sacrificial gift of our time. In addition to the gift of our time, we are offering to God the beautiful prayers of the "Our Father," which Jesus taught His disciples in the Gospel of Matthew, chapter six, and the "Hail Mary," found in the Gospel of Luke, chapter two. As we say these two prayers, we are invited to meditate on some specific moments in the life of Christ, which can strengthen each of us as we are called to model our lives on His life.

By knowing that the rosary is really three types of prayer, we can reverence the fact that we don't always offer to God the fullest expression of the rosary when we pray it. For example, when we pray the rosary while driving, hopefully, we are not deep in meditation on the mysteries of Christ (or at least not with our eyes closed!). However, we *are* offering God the prayer of our time and the beautiful vocalization of Scriptural prayers (i.e. the "Lord's Prayer" and the "Hail Mary").

The rosary begins with the recitation of the Creed. I used to think that this was a strange formality that only made praying the rosary take longer. However, I've come to understand that, since the rosary is a meditation on the life of Christ, the Creed helps us to "frame" our meditation into a very specific context. We don't meditate on the life of Christ isolated, as it were, from an understanding of who He is, but rather, we pray in the context of what God has done for us and Christ's role within the Trinity and the Church.

After the Creed, we pray one “Our Father.” While there is no particular thing that we are invited to meditate on during this prayer, it does give us an opportunity to recall Christ’s words from Matthew chapter six when He explains the importance of prayer in the context of our relationship with “Abba,” Father.

Next, we pray three “Hail Mary’s,” as requests for an increase in faith, hope, and love. This is an extremely important part of the rosary because it reminds us that the rosary must NEVER become a mere repetition of words. If we are not seeing tangible spiritual fruit (i.e. an increase of faith, hope, and love) from our regularly praying the rosary, then something is deficient in our prayer or our desire (or both).

After these three prayers, we begin our meditation on the life of Christ. The Church offers us 20 “mysteries” or moments in salvation history to reflect on during the rosary, but we can use other ones as well. With each “mystery,” we use the “Hail Mary” prayer and the beads as an ancient stopwatch to time our meditation. If we find that it is difficult to meditate on the mysteries of the rosary, then I suggest we apply the *meaning* of the mystery to events in our own lives and meditate on those. For example, if we are praying the second joyful mystery, the visitation of Mary to her cousin Elizabeth, we might spend our meditation time thinking about Mary’s unbelievable generosity in journeying to Elizabeth’s house in order to help her in her pregnancy and then think about one person in our lives that we need to be more generous to and ask God to give us the grace to serve that person.

After we have meditated on the mysteries of the rosary, we end by praying the “Hail Holy Queen” prayer, which is a very direct prayer asking Mary for her intercession, especially since she is the first disciple of Christ and the perfect model Christian discipleship.

In celebration of the Solemnity of Mary, the Mother of God, I invite all of us, individually or with our families, to pray the rosary today. Through the grace of God and the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary, may our prayer bring forth even greater faith, hope, and love in our hearts and in our world!