
OCTOBER 2002-OCTOBER 2003: YEAR OF THE ROSARY



On October 16 of this year, which marked the beginning of the twenty-fifth year of his pontificate, Pope John Paul II proclaimed “Year of the Rosary” the twelve months from October, 2002 to October, 2003. I would like, here, to give you a brief summary of the apostolic letter on the beautiful prayer, The Rosary of the Virgin Mary. The Pope is convinced that the rosary takes us to the very heart of the Christian life and offers us a strikingly profitable spiritual opportunity and teaching tool for a contemplative lifestyle, for the formation of the People of God, and for the new evangelisation.

LEARNING FROM MARY

At the end of the Holy Year, Pope John Paul II wrote an unusual message of introduction to the new millennium. Starting with Jesus Christ, the pope’s aim was to remind us of our call to holiness, that each of our communities must be or become once again a “school of holiness,” a “school of prayer” where one listens to and meditates the Word of God, where we celebrate the sacraments and live in all its depth a life of communion with one another. An unusual message at the level of the Church’s tradition, but also an urgent plea to truly live in an extraordinary way our vocation of disciples of Christ. It is in this context of a call to holiness of life that John Paul II moves us to pray the rosary. It was a favourite prayer of countless saints, and was always fostered in the Church. In its simplicity and depth, the rosary remains, at the beginning of the new millennium, a deeply meaningful prayer, the bearer of fruits of holiness. Even after two thousand years, this prayer has lost none of the freshness of its beginnings: one feels impelled by the Holy Spirit to tell the world over and over again that Christ is Lord and Saviour, that he is the way, the truth, and the life; that Jesus, Son of God and son of Mary is the end-point of human history, the point towards which the hopes and desires of civilisation converge.

A SUMMARY OF THE GOSPEL

The Rosary has a Marian character, but it is a prayer whose centre is totally focussed on Christ. In the soberness of its elements, it concentrates on him the fullness of the Gospel message, of which it is practically a summary. Mary’s prayer resounds there, a permanent Magnificat for the work of the redeeming incarnation which had its beginnings in her virginal womb. Through the rosary the Christian people truly sit at Mary’s feet to learn in contemplation about the beauty of the face of Christ, and to experience the depth of his love. Through the rosary, the believer receives many graces from the hands of the Mother of the Redeemer, as it were.

“MY FAVOURITE PRAYER”

In this new letter on the Virgin Mary, it is not surprising to hear the pope mention a private comment of his, made October 29, 1978, barely two weeks following his election to the throne of Peter: “The rosary is my favourite prayer. It is a wonderful prayer, wonderful in its simplicity and depth of meaning. Against the background of the Hail Marys, the principal episodes of the life of Jesus Christ unfold. We might say that, gathered as joyous, sorrowful, and glorious mysteries, they put us in living communion with Jesus through the heart of his Mother. We can at the same time gather together in these decades of the rosary all the events

of our individual or family life, the events of our national life, of the life of the Church and of the world, that is, the events we hold most dear, our personal events and those of our neighbour. This is how the simple prayer of the Rosary flows to the rhythm of human life.”

LUMINOUS MYSTERIES

The pope takes time to explain each element of the rosary: profession of faith (I believe in God), prayer of Jesus (Our Father), greeting of Elizabeth and the Church (Hail Mary), and praise to the Blessed Trinity (Glory be). Going over and explaining each of the fifteen mysteries of the rosary, the pope then suggests the addition of five new mysteries which he calls “the luminous mysteries,” in which are contemplated the events of Jesus’ public life. It is the mystery of Christ that is a mystery, and this dimension is especially evident during his public life when he proclaims the Gospel of his Kingdom: at his baptism in the Jordan, at the wedding feast at Cana, in his Gospel call to conversion, his transfiguration, and finally in his institution of the Eucharist. These five “new” mysteries will help us better focus on Jesus, Light of the World. In these mysteries – except for Cana – Mary remains in the background, but the role she plays at Cana follows in a way the entire ministry of Jesus. “Do whatever he tells you,” is Mary’s recommendation to us, an invitation which introduces us to Jesus’ words and works.

TO MEDITATE IN ONE’S HEART

It is the evangelist Saint Luke who tells us the most about the Virgin Mary. He is the one who tells us about the mysteries of the annunciation, the visitation, Jesus’ birth, his presentation in the Temple, and his finding in the Temple. It is also Luke who, in the Acts of the Apostles, reports how the Virgin Mary was at prayer with the Apostles, in the upper room, awaiting the Holy Spirit. And Luke also says that Mary “kept all these things and pondered them in her heart.” I deeply hope that everyone in the diocese will live to the fullest this Year of the Rosary. I know many people who have formed the good habit of praying three Hail Marys before going to bed at night or getting up in the morning: this good habit must be kept. For those in the habit of praying the rosary or even fifteen decades daily at home or in church, I encourage them to continue this excellent devotion which is a source of blessing for every family, parish, community, and diocese. I gratefully thank them all for this beneficial prayer, and I ask the pastors and pastoral agents, the parents and religious educators to explain carefully this Year of the Rosary. A reading of Pope John Paul II’s apostolic letter on the Holy Rosary, or reading chapter eight of Vatican II’s constitution *Lumen Gentium* on the Church reminds us of the Virgin Mary’s very special vocation and mission. And joined to you all, I address her and say: “Hail, Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with you: blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb, Jesus.”

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« From A Bishop’s Journal » (467) (18 December 2002)