



ROSARY

Explanation & History

The Rosary has been a major influence in Roman Catholic thought for over 500 years while paving the way for a greater understanding of the mystery of Christ celebrated within family prayer.

The Rosary is the tradition-distilled essence of Christian devotion in which vocal and mental prayer unite the whole person in effective and purposeful meditation on the central mysteries of Christian belief. The Rosary thus joins the human race to God through Mary whom God chose from all time for the specific purposes of mother and intercessor.

The historical development of the Rosary begins with the desert fathers and their need to find a system to ease their laborious and repetitive prayer life. It is generally agreed by scholars that a system for counting repetitive prayers began with the Hindus some nine centuries before Christ. Prayer counters such as rocks, sticks or notches in wood were employed to ensure that the proper number of prayers were recited. Over time, counters and psalms were united into a "three groups of fifty" format (Na tri coicat) so that "fifties" could be used for personal and/or penitential prayer.

The fifteenth century provided the development period for the many facets of today's Rosary. During this period the Dominican influence with the Rosary grew and was fostered through both fact and legend. Although the Dominicans were not the sole originators of the Rosary, their influence in the growth, devotion and spread of this prayer cannot be denied. It would not be inaccurate to call them the principal promoters and defenders of the Rosary through history.

The fifteenth century saw the Rosary begin its development into the familiar prayer form we know today. The Our Father came intact from the Gospel of Matthew. The Hail Mary developed from the scriptural greetings of Gabriel and Elizabeth to Mary in Luke's Gospel, plus a popular exhortation in use by the laity of that period. The Glory Be was used as a common doxology from the earliest of Christian times when praying the psalms. The Salve Regina, a later addition to the Rosary, states all relevant medieval themes about the Blessed Virgin Mary. Its affiliation with the Rosary came about through popular practice although its precise origin within the devotion is not known. The Apostles' Creed along with the rosary pendant were also later developments, being added to the Rosary only in the early seventeenth century.

The voices of those who have promoted the Rosary have continued to speak. Probably the most significant comment which has come forward is the emphasis on the family as the principal body around which the Rosary can be most effectively utilized. Pope Pius XII spoke of the use of the

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Rosary in the family setting. The Pope's words were in keeping with the trend initiated in 1942 by Father Patrick Peyton, CSC, who became internationally known as "The Rosary Priest." Through his Family Theater productions and international rosary crusades, the Rosary and family prayer became common practices in the typical Roman Catholic household. Father Peyton's expression, "The Family That Prays Together Stays Together™," became a rallying cry for many of the faithful.

Popes John XXIII and Paul VI introduced new teachings on the Rosary while continuing the teachings of their predecessors. For Pope John, the Rosary was the universal prayer for all the redeemed. Additionally, he taught that the mysteries of the Rosary must have a three-fold purpose: mystical contemplation, intimate reflection and pious intention. Both popes continued to foster the family rosary through writings and support of Father Peyton's Rosary crusade. The views of the pontiffs show that rosary recitation and teaching continues to be important in our contemporary prayer devotion.

By Father Richard Gribble, CSC

Pope John Paul II has issued Rosarium Virginis Mariae to expand upon his love and promotion of the Rosary and to renew this centuries old prayer. In this document he tells us,

Simple yet profound, it still remains, at the dawn of this third millennium, a prayer of great significance, destined to bring forth a harvest of holiness.

Rosarium Virginis Mariae

Para. 1

The additional mysteries, the Mysteries of Light, provide greater insights and greater learnings into Christ's life as we reflect on these significant events of his public life.

The Rosary is a powerful tool to help us achieve peace ... within our families ... within our world. The Holy Father tells us,

As a prayer for peace, the Rosary is also, and always has been, a prayer of and for the family. At one time this prayer was particularly dear to Christian families, and it certainly brought them closer together. It is important not to lose this precious inheritance. We need to return to the practice of family prayer and prayer for families ...

The family that prays together stays together™. The Holy Rosary, by age-old tradition, has shown itself particularly effective as a prayer which brings the family together. Individual family members, in turning their eyes towards Jesus, also regain the ability to look one another in the eye, to communicate, to show solidarity, to forgive one another and to see their covenant of love renewed in the Spirit of God.

Rosarium Virginis Mariae

Para 41

Copied from Holy Cross Family Ministries Website