

On The Rosary

Magnae Dei Matris

Encyclical of Pope Leo XIII promulgated on September 8, 1892.

To Our Venerable Brethren, the Patriarchs, Primates, Archbishops, and other Ordinaries in Peace and Communion with the Apostolic See.

As often as the occasion arises to stimulate and intensify the love and veneration of the Christian people for Mary, the great Mother of God, We are filled with wondrous satisfaction and joy, as by a subject which is not only of prime importance in itself and profitable in countless ways, but which also perfectly accords with the inmost sentiments of Our heart. For the holy reverence for Mary which We experienced from Our tenderest years, has grown greater and has taken firmer hold of Our soul with Our advancing age.

2. As time went on, it became more and more evident how deserving of love and honor was she whom God Himself was the first to love, and loved so much more than any other that, after elevating her high above all the rest of His creation and adorning her with His richest gifts, He made her His Mother. The many and splendid proofs of her bounty and beneficence toward us, which We remember with deep gratitude and which move Us to tears, still further encourage and strongly inflame Our filial reverence for her. Throughout the many dreadful events of every kind which the times have brought to pass, always with her have We sought refuge, always to her have We lifted up pleading and confident eyes. And in all the hopes and fears, the joys and sorrows, that We confided to her, the thought was constantly before Us to ask her to assist Us at all times as Our gracious Mother and to obtain this greatest of favors: that We might be able, in return, to show her the heart of a most devoted son.

3. When, then, it came to pass in the secret design of God's providence that We were chosen to fill this Chair of St. Peter and to take the place of the Person of Christ Himself in the Church, worried by the enormous burden of the office and

finding no ground for reliance upon Our own strength, We hastened with fervent zeal to implore the divine aid through the maternal intercession of the ever blessed Virgin. Never has Our hope, We are happy to acknowledge, at any time of Our life but more especially since We began to exercise the Supreme Apostolate, failed in the course of events to bear fruit or bring Us comfort. Thus encouraged, Our hope today mounts more confidently than ever to beseech many more and even greater blessings through her favor and mediation, which will profit alike the salvation of Christ's flock and the happy increase of His Church's glory.

4. It is, therefore, a fitting and opportune time, Venerable Brethren, for Us to induce all Our children -- exhorting them through you -- to plan on celebrating the coming month of October, consecrated to our Lady as the august Queen of the Rosary, with the fervent and wholehearted devotion which the necessities weighing upon Us demand.

5. It is only too plain how many and of what nature are the corrupting agencies by which the wickedness of the world deceitfully strives to weaken and completely uproot from souls their Christian faith and the respect for God's law on which faith is fed and depends for its effectiveness. Already the fields cultivated by our Lord are everywhere turning into a wilderness abounding in ignorance of the Faith, in error and vice, as though blown upon by some hideous pest. And to add to the anguish of this thought, so far from putting a check on such insolent and destructive depravity, or imposing the punishment deserved, they who can and should correct matters seem in many cases, by their indifference or open connivance, to increase the spirit of evil.

6. We have good reason to deplore the public institutions in which the teaching of the sciences and arts is purposely so organized that the name of God is passed over in silence or visited with vituperation; to deplore the license -- growing more shameless by the day -- of the press in publishing whatever it pleases, and the license of speech in addressing any kind of insult to Christ our God and His Church. And We deplore no less the consequent laxity and apathy in the practice of the Catholic religion which if not quite open apostasy from the Faith, is certainly going to prove an easy road to it, since it is a manner of life having nothing in common with faith. Nobody who ponders this disorder and the surrender of the most fundamental principles will be astonished if afflicted nations everywhere are groaning under the heavy hand of God's vengeance and stand anxious and trembling in fear of worse calamities.

7. Now, to appease the might of an outraged God and to bring that health of soul so needed by those who are sorely afflicted, there is nothing better than devout and persevering prayer, provided it be joined with a love for and practice of Christian life. And both of these, the spirit of prayer and the practice of Christian life, are best attained through the devotion of the Rosary of Mary.

8. The well-known origin of the Rosary, illustrated in celebrated monuments of

which we have made frequent mention, bears witness to its remarkable efficacy. For, in the days when the Albigensian sect, posing as the champion of pure faith and morals, but in reality introducing the worst kind of anarchy and corruption, brought many a nation to its utter ruin, the Church fought against it and the other infamous factions associated with it, not with troops and arms, but chiefly with the power of the most holy Rosary, the devotion which the Mother of God taught to our Father Dominic in order that he might propagate it. By this means the Church triumphed magnificently over every obstacle and provided for the salvation of her children not only in that trial but in others like it afterward, always with the same glorious success. For this reason, now, when human affairs have taken the course which We deplore, bringing affection to the Church and ruin to the State, all of us have the duty to unite our voice in prayer, with like devotion, to the holy Mother of God, beseeching her that we too may rejoice, as we ardently desire, in experiencing the same power of her Rosary.

9. When we have recourse to Mary in prayer, we are having recourse to the Mother of mercy, who is so well disposed toward us that, whatever the necessity that presses upon us especially in attaining eternal life, she is instantly at our side of her own accord, even though she has not been invoked. She dispenses grace with a generous hand from that treasure with which from the beginning she was divinely endowed in fullest abundance that she might be worthy to be the Mother of God. By the fullness of grace which confers on her the most illustrious of her many titles, the Blessed Virgin is infinitely superior to all the hierarchies of men and angels, the one creature who is closest of all to Christ. "It is a great thing in any saint to have grace sufficient for the salvation of many souls; but to have enough to suffice for the salvation of everybody in the world. is the greatest of all; and this is found in Christ and in the Blessed Virgin."[1]

10. It is impossible to say how pleasing and gratifying to her it is when we greet her with the Angelic Salutation, "full of grace"; and in repeating it, fashion these words of praise into ritual crowns for her. For every time we say them, we recall the memory of her exalted dignity and of the Redemption of the human race which God began through her. We likewise bring to mind the divine and everlasting bond which links her with the joys and sorrows, the humiliations and triumphs of Christ in directing and helping mankind to eternal life.

11. It pleased Christ to take upon Himself the Son of Man, and to become thereby our Brother, in order that His mercy to us might be shown most openly; for "it behooved him in all things to be made like unto his brethren that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest before God."[2] Likewise because Mary was chosen to be the Mother of Christ, our Lord and our Brother, the unique prerogative was given her above all other mothers to show her mercy to us and to pour it out upon us. Besides, as we are indebted to Christ for sharing in some way with us the right, which is peculiarly His own, of calling God our Father and possessing Him as such, we are in like manner indebted to Him for His loving generosity in sharing with us the right to call Mary our Mother and to cherish her as such.

12. While nature itself made the name of mother the sweetest of all names and has made motherhood the very model of tender and solicitous love, no tongue is eloquent enough to put in words what every devout soul feels, namely how intense is the flame of affectionate and active charity which glows in Mary, in her who is truly our mother not in a human way but through Christ. Nobody knows and comprehends so well as she everything that concerns us: what helps we need in life; what dangers, public or private, threaten our welfare; what difficulties and evils surround us; above all, how fierce is the fight we wage with ruthless enemies of our salvation. In these and in all other troubles of life her power is most far-reaching. Her desire to use it is most ardent to bring consolation, strength, and help of every kind to children who are dear to her.

13. Accordingly, let us approach Mary confidently, wholeheartedly beseeching her by the bonds of her motherhood which unite her so closely to Jesus and at the same time to us. Let us with deepest devotion invoke her constant aid in the prayer which she herself has indicated and which is most acceptable to her. Then with good reason shall we rest with an easy and joyous mind under the protection of the best of mothers.

14. To this commendation of the Rosary which follows from the very nature of the prayer, We may add that the Rosary offers an easy way to present the chief mysteries of the Christian religion and to impress them upon the mind; and this commendation is one of the most beautiful of all. For it is mainly by faith that a man sets out on the straight and sure path to God and learns to revere in mind and heart His supreme majesty, His sovereignty over the whole of creation, His unsounded power, wisdom, and providence. For he who comes to God must believe that God exists and is a rewarder to those who seek Him. Moreover, because God's eternal Son assumed our humanity and shone before us as the Way, the Truth, and the Life, our faith must include the lofty mysteries of the august Trinity of divine Persons and of the Father's only-begotten Son made Man: "This is eternal life: that they may know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent."[3]

15. God gave us a most precious blessing when He gave us faith. By this gift we are not only raised above the level of human things, to contemplate and share in the divine nature, but are also furnished with the means of meriting the rewards of heaven; and therefore the hope is encouraged and strengthened that we shall one day look upon God, not in the shadowy images of His creatures, but in the fullest light, and shall enjoy Him forever as the Supreme Goodness. But the Christian is kept so busy by the various affairs of life and wanders so easily into matters of little importance, that unless he be helped with frequent reminders, the truths which are of first importance and necessity are little by little forgotten; and then faith begins to grow weak and may even perish.

16. To ward off these exceedingly great dangers of ignorance from her children, the Church, which never relaxes her vigilant and diligent care, has been in the

habit of looking for the staunchest support of faith in the Rosary of Mary. And indeed in the Rosary, along with the most beautiful and efficacious prayer arranged in an orderly pattern, the chief mysteries of our religion follow one another, as they are brought before our mind for contemplation: first of all the mysteries in which the Word was made flesh and Mary, the inviolate Virgin and Mother, performed her maternal duties for Him with a holy joy; there come then the sorrows, the agony and death of the suffering Christ, the price at which the salvation of our race was accomplished; then follow the mysteries full of His glory; His triumph over death, the Ascension into heaven, the sending of the Holy Spirit, the resplendent brightness of Mary received among the stars, and finally the everlasting glory of all the saints in heaven united with the glory of the Mother and her Son.

17. This uninterrupted sequence of wonderful events the Rosary frequently and perseveringly recalls to the minds of the faithful and presents almost as though they were unfolding before our eyes: and this, flooding the souls of those who devoutly recite it with a sweetness of piety that never grows weary, impresses and stirs them as though they were listening to the very voice of the Blessed Mother explaining the mysteries and conversing with them at length about their salvation.

18. It will not, then, seem too much to say that in places, families, and nations in which the Rosary of Mary retains its ancient honor, the loss of faith through ignorance and vicious error need not be feared.

19. There is still another and not lesser advantage which the Church earnestly seeks for her children from the Rosary, and that is the faithful regulation of their lives and their conduct in keeping with the rules and precepts of their holy religion. For if, as we all know from Holy Scripture, "faith without works is dead."[4] -- because faith draws its life from charity and charity flowers forth in a profusion of holy actions -- then the Christian will gain nothing for eternal life from his faith unless his life be ordered in accordance with what faith prescribes. "What shall it profit, my brethren, if a man say he hath faith, but hath not works? Shall faith be able to save him?"[5] A man of this sort will incur a much heavier rebuke from Christ the Judge than those who are, unfortunately, ignorant of Christian faith and its teaching: they, unlike the former, who believes one thing and practices another, have some excuse or at least are less blameworthy, because they lack the light of the Gospel.

20. In order therefore that the faith we profess may the better bring forth a harvest of fruits in keeping with its nature, while the mind is dwelling on mysteries of the Rosary the heart is wonderfully enkindled by them to make virtuous resolutions. What an example we have set before us! This shines forth everywhere in our Lord's work of salvation. Almighty God, in the excess of His love for us, takes upon Himself the form of lowly man. He dwells in our midst as one of the multitude, converses with us as a friend, instructs and teaches the way of justice to individuals and to multitudes. In His discourse He is the teacher unexcelled; in the

authority of His teaching He is God. To all He shows Himself a doer of good; He relieves the sick of the ills of their bodies and, with paternal compassion, heals the most serious sickness of their souls. Those above all whom sorrow troubles or whom the weight of worry crushes, He comforts with the gentle invitation: "Come to me, all you that labor, and are burdened, and I will refresh you."[6] Then into us, at rest in His embrace, He breathes that mystic fire which He has brought to all men, and benignly imbues us with the meekness and humility of His own heart, with the hope that, by the practice of these virtues, we may share the true and solid peace of which He is the Author: "Learn of me, because I am meek, and humble of heart; and you shall find rest to your souls."[7] For Himself, in return for that light of heavenly wisdom and that stupendous abundance of blessings which only He could merit for mankind, He suffers the hatred of men and their most atrocious insults; and, nailed to the cross, He pours out His blood and yields up His soul, holding it to be the highest glory to beget life in men by His death.

21. It would be utterly impossible for anyone to meditate on and attentively consider these most precious memorials of our loving Redeemer and not have a heart on fire with gratitude to Him. Such is the power of a faith sincerely practiced that, through the light it brings to man's mind and the vigor with which it moves his heart, he will straightway set out in the footsteps of Christ and follow them through every obstacle, making his own a protestation worthy of a St. Paul: "Who then shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation? or distress? or famine? or nakedness? or danger? or persecution? or the sword?"[8] "I live, now not I; but Christ liveth in me."[9]

22. But lest we be dismayed by the consciousness of our native weakness and grow faint when confronted with the unattainable example which Christ, who is Man and at the same time God, has given, along with mysteries which portray Him, we have before our eyes for contemplation the mysteries of His most holy Mother.

23. She was born, it is true, of the royal family of David, but she fell heir to none of the wealth and grandeur of her ancestors. She passed her life in obscurity, in a humble town, in a home humbler still, the more content with her retirement and the poverty of her home because they left her freer to lift up her heart to God and to cling to Him closely as the supreme Goodness for which her heart yearned.

24. The Lord is with her whom He has filled with His grace and made blessed. She is designated by the heavenly messenger sent to her as the Virgin from whom, by the power of the Holy Ghost, the expected Savior of nations is to come forth clothed in our humanity. The more she wonders at the sublime dignity and gives thanks to the power and mercy of God, the more does she, conscious of no merit in herself, grow in humility, promptly proclaiming and consecrating herself the handmaid of God even while she becomes His Mother.

25. Her sacred promise was as sacredly kept with a joyous heart; henceforth she leads a life in perpetual union with her son Jesus, sharing with Him His joys and

sorrows. It is thus that she will reach a height of glory granted to no other creature, whether human or angelic, because no one will receive a reward for virtue to be compared with hers; it is thus that the crown of the kingdoms of heaven and of earth will await her because she will be the invincible Queen of Martyrs. It is thus that she will be seated in the heavenly city of God by the side of her Son, crowned for all eternity, because she will drink with Him the cup overflowing with sorrow faithfully through all her life, most faithfully on Calvary.

26. In Mary we see how a truly good and provident God has established for us a most suitable example of every virtue. As we look upon her and think about her we are not cast down as though stricken by the overpowering splendor of God's power; but, on the contrary, attracted by the closeness of the common nature we share with her, we strive with greater confidence to imitate her. If we, with her powerful help, should dedicate ourselves wholly and entirely to the undertaking, we can portray at least an outline of such great virtue and sanctity, and reproducing that perfect conformity of our lives to all God's designs which she possessed in so marvelous a degree, we shall follow her into heaven.

27. Undaunted and full of courage, let us go on with the pilgrimage we have undertaken even though the way be rough and full of obstacle Amid the vexation and toil let us not cease to hold out suppliant hands to Mary with the words of the Church: "To thee do we send up our sigh mourning and weeping in this valley of tears; turn then, most gracious advocate, thine eyes of mercy toward us. . . Keep our lives all spotless, make our ways secure, till we find in Jesus joys that will endure."[10]

28. Although she was never subject to the frailty and perversity of our nature, Mary we knows its condition and is the best and most solicitous of mothers. How willingly will she hasten to our aid when we need her; with what love will she refresh us, and with what strength sustain us. For those of us who follow the journey hallowed by the blood of Christ and by the tears of Mary, our entrance into their company and the enjoyment of their most blessed glory will be certain and easy.

29. Therefore the Rosary of the Blessed Virgin Mary, combining in a convenient and practical form an unexcelled form of prayer, an instrument well adapted to preserve the faith and an illustrious example of perfect virtue, should be often in the hands of the true Christian and be devoutly recited and meditated upon. We address this commendation especially to the Confraternity of the Holy Family which We recently praised and approved. Since the mystery of the hidden life which Christ our Lord long led within the walls of the house in Nazareth is the reason for the existence of this association, that its members may constantly conform themselves to Christian life on the model of the Holy Family established by God Himself, its intimate connection with the Rosary is plain.

30. Especially is this so in the joyful mysteries, which end with the one in which

Jesus, after manifesting His wisdom in the temple, came with Mary and Joseph to Nazareth and was subject to them, preparing, as it were, for the other mysteries which are more closely connected with the instruction and the Redemption of mankind. From this all the members may understand that it is their duty to be devotees of the Rosary themselves and to be diligent in propagating devotion to it among others.

31. For Our part, We confirm and ratify the grants of sacred indulgences made in years past in favor of the faithful who spend the month of October in the manner We have prescribed. Because of your authority and zeal, Venerable Brethren, We know that the Catholic people will be fired with devotion and holy emulation in venerating through the Rosary, the Blessed Virgin, Help of Christians.

32. And now let Us bring Our exhortation to a close in the way it began, proclaiming once more and even more openly the devotion we cherish toward the great Mother of God, a devotion both mindful of past blessings and full of joyous hope. We ask the prayers of the Christian people in devout supplication before her altars on behalf of the Church, tormented by such adverse and turbulent times, and on behalf of Ourself as well. Advanced in age, worn out with labors, fettered by distressingly difficult events with no human help to rely upon, We must yet carry on the government of the Church. Our hope in Mary, powerful and benign Mother, is daily more confirmed and more sweetly consoling. To her intercession We attribute the many and remarkable gifts We have obtained from God; with thanks still more profuse do we attribute the fact that it has been given Us to reach the fiftieth anniversary of Our episcopal consecration.

33. It is, indeed, a great comfort to us, looking back over the long years of Our pastoral charge, troubled as they have been by daily worry, that We are still engaged in ruling the whole Christian flock. During that time We have had, as happens in men's lives and as the mysteries of Christ and Mary illustrate, reasons for joy mixed with reasons for many and bitter sorrows, as well as occasions to glory in gains won for Christ. All of this We, with a mind submissive to God and with a grateful heart, have tried to turn to the good and the honor of the Church. And now -- for the rest of Our life will run a course not unlike the past -- should new joys come to gladden Our heart, or sorrow to threaten Us, or honors to glory in, We, steadfast in the same heart and mind, yearning only for the heavenly glory which God confers, say with David: "Blessed be the name of the Lord";[11] Not to us, but to thy name give glory."[12]

34. From Our devoted children, whose filial and affectionate concern for us We know burns bright, We look for heartfelt thanks to God, prayers, and holy aspirations, rather than for congratulations and honors. It will be a special joy to Us if they ask for Us this grace, that all the strength and life that remain to Us, all the authority and grace with which We are invested, may profit the Church, and in the first place bring back into her fold her enemies and those who have wandered from the right way, to whom our voice has this long time been appealing for

reconciliation.

35. Upon all of Our dearly beloved children may there flow, from the happiness and joy of Our coming Jubilee, God granting, gifts of justice, peace, prosperity, holiness, and all good things. This, with paternal love, We beg God; this do We exhort in the words of His Holy Scriptures: "Hear me. . . and bud forth as the rose planted by the brooks of waters: Give ye a sweet odor as frankincense. . . Send forth flowers, as the lily, and yield a smell, and bring forth leaves in grace and praise with canticles and bless the Lord in his works. Magnify his name, and give glory to him with the voice of your lips, and with the canticles of your mouths. and with harps. . . With the whole heart and mouth praise ye him, and bless the name of the Lord."[13]

36. If these plans, so ardently desired, be scoffed at by the wicked who blaspheme that of which they are ignorant, may God mercifully spare them. But that He may give Our hopes His propitious aid through the prayers of the Queen of the Most Holy Rosary, take as a token of divine favor and at the same time as a pledge of Our affection, Venerable Brethren, the Apostolic Benediction, which We, lovingly in the Lord, bestow on each of you, on your clergy, and on your people.

Given at Rome, at St. Peter's, the eighth of September, 1892, in the fifteenth year of Our Pontificate.

Endnotes:
1. St. Thomas Aquinas, Super Salut. Ang.
2. Hebr. 2:17.
3. Jn. 17:3.
4. James 2:20.
5. James 2:14.
6. Mt. 11:28.
7. Mt. 11:29.
8. Rom. 8:35.
9. Gal. 2:20.
10. Sacred Liturgy.
11. Ps. 112:2.
12. Ps. 113:1.
13. Ecclus. 39:17-20, 41.