

The rosary has a long history and deep roots as a method of contemplative prayer. As Blessed John Paul II has reminded us, when we pray the rosary, we entrust ourselves to the Blessed Virgin Mary in seeking to contemplate the face of Jesus Christ. To contemplate the face of Christ and to meditate on the mysteries of his life and death, his illumination and glorification, deepens our relationship with the Trinitarian God whose divine face our human hearts desire to contemplate forever. One of the aspects of the rosary—an aspect that in large part accounts for its widespread popularity down through the generations and across cultures—is its plasticity and adaptability. The rosary resonates with many people in many diverse ways. In particular, on this Rosary Sunday in this year of faith, perhaps we can contemplate together one of these ways: the rosary as a way of faith. How can the rosary function as an instrument of faith and how can it contribute to solving some of the crises of faith that we see in our world today? Perhaps we can consider three significant problems in particular: first, ignorance of the faith; second, apathy towards the faith; third, withholding of the faith.

First, it seems that our world continues on its path towards becoming progressively secular. More and more people are becoming more and more forgetful of God. In turning their minds to other considerations and other concerns, people tend to ignore God and fall into ignorance of God. Things consume the minds of many of our contemporaries. The trends and the excitements and the fascinations of the world captivate people's attention. People tend to look down rather than up, to focus on the temporary present rather than the eternal future. And so, they ignore those sublime realities of truth and goodness, beauty and love, which ennoble our human existence. They direct their minds away from the God who is at once both more interior than their deepest depths and more superior than their highest heights. But without knowing in faith who God is, how can people come to realize their purpose of their lives? Without knowing God and being known by God, how can people come to perfect peace?

Perhaps the rosary, as an instrument in instruction and faith formation, helps us respond to this problem. When a person prays the rosary, he or she learns the lessons of the Gospel. But this learning process, this education in the faith, happens in a way that is not just cerebral or catechetical. With the rosary, a person learns the faith not so much through rote memorization and the accumulation of facts. Rather, such a person learns by entering into the mysteries of the faith. Praying the rosary is a way of entering and penetrating the mystery of Jesus Christ so that

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one's mind is not only filled with information, but also renewed by transformation. So for example, someone could come to know the basic facts of the event of the incarnation. He or she could know that the angel Gabriel appeared to the Blessed Virgin Mary and announced to her that, in God's providential plan of salvation, she was chosen to be the Mother of his Son, Jesus Christ. Such a person could know that she said "yes" to God and opened her heart and her womb to God becoming flesh. However, let us consider how these facts of the faith can be contemplated when we pray this mystery of the rosary. In praying this mystery, we enter into it. We experience from within, as it were, the event of the incarnation. In fact, in praying the rosary, we enter into the very words of salutation which the angel Gabriel announced to Mary: "Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee..." And these words of the Gospel, these words of God become flesh in us when we say them and meditate upon them. Our minds and hearts contemplate the mystery of God's eternal love poured forth in the fullness of time in the incarnation of his beloved Son. We can see with the eyes of faith that God has performed these events of salvation with us and all of humanity in mind. And God continues to rehearse these definitive events and apply them to us in our contemplation of them. We can participate in Mary's reception of God's Word. We can hear God's invitation spoken to us: "Behold you will conceive in your soul and bear God's Son, and you shall name him Jesus." In faith, we conceive the Word of God so that we can bear Jesus Christ forth into the world through our labors of love. And we can progressively enter into Mary's perfect "yes." We can allow God's grace to open us up more completely so that God's will may be done to us according to his Word. Such mysteries of the rosary provide us a way not only to know the faith, but also to live the faith. We live these mysteries by dwelling within them and by being transformed by them in contemplation.

The second problem of faith today seems to be that, even if people know the faith there can be a certain degree of apathy towards the faith. A person may believe in God and may even believe that God is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. He or she may attend Mass if not regularly, at least on occasion. Such a person may find him- or herself praying to God when there happens to be some situation for which the power of prayer would be helpful. Such a person may identify him- or herself as a Christian or a Catholic. But perhaps he or she hides the faith when it becomes inconvenient. Perhaps he or she sets it aside when it becomes even disadvantageous to other pursuits. He or she may profess the faith at Church on Sunday, but spend Monday through

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Saturday at a distance from God. This apathy towards the faith can take as many forms as the number of pursuits such a person can seek apart from the faith: the pursuit of social events, the pursuit of career promotions, the pursuit of personal accomplishments, the pursuit of pleasures. These various pursuits do not pose problems in themselves, but rather become problematic when they are sought out after for themselves, when they become the ultimate goal of someone's life instead of God. This replacement of God with some other thing expresses the apathy towards God and the mysteries of faith.

The rosary addresses the apathy towards the faith by rekindling passion for the faith. Every now and then, our hearts need to be renewed and rekindled with the fire of divine love. The passionate love of God has descended into the depths of humanity in the incarnation of Jesus Christ and in the pentecostal epiclesis of the Holy Spirit. We have received this anointing in the sacraments of faith. But when we grow cold or at least lukewarm in the faith, when we become apathetic in the practice of our faith, when we get bored with living out the faith because of its difficulty or its disinterest, praying the rosary reignites our passion. How? Because the rosary disposes our souls and makes them docile to the Holy Spirit who prays within us. No authentic form of Christian prayer is prayed without the Holy Spirit. This is true also of the rosary. But even more, by entering the upper room of our souls through the contemplation of its mysteries, we sit with Mary in anticipation of the descent of the Holy Spirit who activates our faith even more and sets us on fire for the faith. Each bead of the rosary is like kindling, each decade of the rosary is like timber, each rosary itself is like a pile of wood ready for the bonfire from heaven. What the Holy Spirit ignites or reignites through the rosary is our souls. He fills them with passion and love for the light of faith. And with faith rekindled, all of our pursuits become done with love for God.

The third worry about the faith today is that although people may know the faith and love the faith, nevertheless sometimes they know and love it as if for themselves. There can be too little of a concern and consideration for others who may not know the faith or love the faith very much, or even at all. Perhaps there is a certain worry or fear of rejection. If someone opens his or her mouth to speak a word of faith, the audience might reject either what was said or the one who said it. And so, nothing is said, the faith goes unspoken. But when a person withholds the faith, when he or she clutches onto the faith for him- or herself, what happens is not so much

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preservation of the faith, but rather its diminution. Faith actually increases when it is distributed. Faith grows when it is disseminated. How? It increases in two ways. First, it increases extensively so that, when it is scattered and spread and shared, there are more and more people who are invited to come to believe. Second, it increases intensively so that the person who evangelizes, the person who scatters the seeds of faith, receives a more intense and living faith.

The rosary encourages us to be faithful in the work of evangelization. When it seems that our preaching of the Gospel falls upon deaf ears and hard hearts, praying the rosary reminds us that contemplation is the soul of the apostolate. Without being grounded in such a contemplative form of prayer as the rosary, then all our efforts cannot bear much fruit. By seeking to contemplate the face of Jesus Christ through the rosary, we discover how much we depend upon Christ for everything, including our mission to evangelize the world. The mysteries of the rosary sum up the Gospel and so, when the words of our own invention fail to take root in the hearts of our hearers, we can turn to the rosary as a method of evangelization. We can pray the rosary not only for others, but also with others. The public recitation of the rosary is a powerful witness to our world today that seeks to push any form of religious expression into the purely private sphere. Such a secularization of the public forum is not only an attack on religion, but also on the human person as a religious creature. Praying the rosary together in churches and in our chapels, in our cities and in our streets, in front of places that attack human dignity or even kill human life, is itself a witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Jesus has reconciled human persons not only with God, but also with one another. The rosary recited in community, whether in manifest or hidden ways, expresses the reality that the Gospel has accomplished and continues to accomplish the formation of a community of faith. None of us has to evangelize alone. We can do it together. And the rosary can bring us together, as contemplative co-workers of God, to transform our world from the secular and godless condition it seeks for itself into a place where faith is not only tolerated, but also welcomed and can even serve as leaven for society.

As we continue not only to celebrate this year of faith, but also be challenged by it, perhaps we can continue to reflect on the ways that the rosary can increase our faith and help us respond to the problems of faith in our world today. And perhaps one of the best ways to reflect on these matters is to pray faithfully the rosary itself. With the various demands and distractions of our daily lives, it can be a struggle to pray the rosary and to pray it well. But given the

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condition of our world and of ourselves, it is a struggle worth engaging. We can take confidence not so much in our own efforts to be faithful with the rosary, but rather in the grace of God without whom nothing can be done. We can be encouraged and instructed by the person who, in all humility and confidence, entrusted herself completely to God. We can pray to her, “Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now” *so that in all things, even at the hour of our death, God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.*¹

¹ 1Pt 4:11.