



The LUMINOUS MYSTERIES of the ROSARY

SSPX PRESS RELEASE FROM D. I. C. I.

SSPX FAQs

- DONATE
- ARTICLES INDEX
- APOLOGETIC MATERIALS
- FOR PRIESTS
- CHAPELS
- SCHOOLS
- CAMPS
- RETREATS
- APOSTOLATES
- DISTRICT HEADQUARTERS
- SSPX LINKS
- THIRD ORDERS
- VOCATIONAL INFO
- PILGRIMAGES
- AGAINST THE SOUND BITES
- CATHOLIC FAQs
- REGINA COELI REPORT
- DISTRICT SUPERIOR'S LTRs
- SUPERIOR GENERAL'S NEWS

Join our e-mail list

Sign up

EDOCERE.ORG

CONTACT INFO

The Rosary modified

On Wednesday, October 16, Pope John Paul II published the apostolic letter *Rosarium Virginis Mariae* by which he decreed the Year of the Rosary, to run from October 2002 to October 2003. He also proposed five new mysteries to the meditation of the faithful. This long document calls for a few comments.

Firstly, it is heartening to see the pope strive to restore to honor the praying of the rosary. It has fallen into disuse and even contempt, especially among ecclesiastics, a fact which led, to give one example from among thousands, to the dismissal of seminarians for the habitual recitation of the rosary. No word could be too scornful for stigmatizing this fetishism from another age. It has to be said, though, that this prayer has remained in high esteem among many pious Catholics.

The papal letter represents first of all a welcome exhortation to recite the rosary, but it also dwells lengthily on the method for reciting it well. It passes in review the different mysteries and concludes by suggesting two special intentions: peace and the family. These passages contain beautiful meditations and judicious advice, such as the need for families to pray the rosary together and for reflecting on the interior life of the Blessed Virgin in order to imitate her in contemplating the mysteries of the rosary. Still, at the risk of seeming incorrigible, we must point out difficulties with the letter on several planes.

A Vatican II appropriation

Firstly, we are more than surprised by the affirmation that *"the rosary is, in some sense, a prayer-commentary on the final chapter of the Vatican II Constitution Lumen Gentium, a chapter which discusses the wondrous presence of the Mother of God in the mystery of Christ"* (§2), for it is well-known that this chapter is in fact the result of a sustained attack against the privileges of the Virgin Mary, in particular against her title of Mediatrix. Initially it had been intended to treat of the Blessed Virgin Mary at the Council in a separate schema prepared by the Preparatory Commission. At the moment of discussions in the Council hall, the modernists vigorously attacked this schema, for it represented a major obstacle to ecumenism with the Protestants.[1] It was decided to reject the schema and to reduce it to a chapter of the Constitution on the Church, avoiding thereby everything that bothered its most virulent opponents and yet allowing some suitable part to remain to the Queen of Heaven. Let us add that more than a hundred bishops, among whom were Bishop Rendeiro and Cardinal Cerejeira, asked that, in the newly constituted chapter, the rosary be mentioned among the practices and pious exercises in honor of the most Holy Virgin. The Theological Commission refused. These facts explain our astonishment.

A false pacifism

Another difficulty is found in the presentation of one of the prayer intentions proposed by the pope. It is true that *"the rosary has many times been proposed by my predecessors and myself as a prayer for peace."* But, with all due respect to the pope's words, this presentation is simplistic. If one considers in fact the history and development of the rosary, it becomes immediately evident that this marvelous prayer is linked to the Church's combat against all her enemies. The history of its placement in the liturgical calendar follows the successes of the Christian armies: against the Albigenses at the time of St. Dominic, against Islam under St. Pius V, who had recruited the prayers of all the rosary confraternities of Christendom, by the victory of Lepanto on October 7, 1571. In honor of that event, a feast of Our Lady of Victories was instituted, which was changed by Gregory XIII into the Feast of Holy Mary of the Rosary. Clement XI inscribed the feast in the calendar of the universal Church in thanksgiving for the victory that Prince Eugene of Savoy had just gained at Peterwardein (today Petrovaradin, suburb of Novi Sad, Serbia) on August 5, 1716, against the Turks. Leo X declared that it was instituted to oppose all pernicious heresiarchs and heresies, and Jules III called it the glory of the Church. Finally, Leo XIII, who devoted twelve encyclicals to the holy rosary, did not hesitate to recall these facts frequently, and to call this prayer *"like a most powerful warlike weapon for combating the enemies of the Faith,"*[2] affirming that *"it is clearly evident that this form of prayer is particularly pleasing to the Blessed Virgin, and that it is especially suitable as a means of defense for the Church and all Christians."*[3]

The source of this simplification can be found in a sort of pacifism according to which there are no more enemies to fight. This stance follows from the idea of religious liberty and from the politics of ecumenism and interreligious harmony which are in vogue today, and from a spirit that aims *"to make this world more beautiful, more just, more closely conformed to God's plan."*[4] It is clear that we must avoid bellicosity and pointless confrontation, and that we must seek the will of God for the world, but it is equally clear on the one hand that numerous, divers, and organized forces have it in for the Church, and on the other that beauty and justice in the world can only be obtained by conversion to Our Lord, which neither ecumenism nor interreligious dialogue seeks. The sense of fighting for the Faith, for one's own and for that of others, is a constant in the Church's history. We must seek peace in every way, but pacifism is incapable of giving it. Leo XIII is explicit on this point in his encyclicals on the holy rosary.

The new "Luminous" Mysteries

We come to the point that constitutes the principal difficulty: the addition of five *"mysteries of light."* It is true that, in itself, the choice of the mysteries of the rosary is not untouchable; in itself, the form of the rosary could equally be different. But in fact, the mysteries that are meditated and the form which we know have been established over centuries of usage, confirmed by the office of Our Lady of the Rosary, and sanctioned by the immemorial practice of the Church. As Pope Leo XIII reminds us, this prayer was called the Psalter of the Blessed Virgin by several Roman Pontiffs5 from the 150 Aves that correspond to the 150 Psalms, as, indeed, is acknowledged in the Letter *Rosarium Virginis Mariae* §19. To decree that henceforth the rosary will comprise 200 Aves will efface this symbolism. In this there is an attack against tradition written with a little *t*, but by the very fact troubles Christian life and piety. The pope was entirely free to create a new chaplet. Whether in the form of a *corona* (the Latin word for chaplet) or in the form of a rosary, there are dozens of devotions to the Blessed Virgin, like the chaplet of St. Brigit, or of St. Joseph, or of the Holy Trinity, or of the Precious Blood, etc. To give an example, the chaplet of the Seven Dolours of Our Lady, proper to the Servite Order which is consecrated to the contemplation of our Lady's sufferings, is composed of seven series of seven Aves, to which are added four others in order to total the 53 of the ordinary rosary. It would have been easy enough to add to this list a chaplet of John Paul II comprising the Mysteries of Light. In this regard, consider the story of the psalms themselves. In the fourth century St. Jerome had been asked to revise the old Latin translation, which was linguistically defective. The saint refused in the name of tradition, and proceeded merely to make a few minor corrections because he did not want to alter a version which had already entered men's memories. Yet it was scarcely a hundred years old. He later proceeded to make his own, excellent translation which remains to us as testimony to his genius.

After the extrinsic argument from tradition, we come to the consideration of the five *"mysteries of light"* or luminous mysteries to be inserted between the joyful mysteries and the sorrowful mysteries, and which are meant to be a meditation on Our Lord's public life. Here is the enumeration of the mysteries as found in the Apostolic Letter:

1. [Christ's] Baptism in the Jordan,
2. his self-manifestation at the wedding of Cana,
3. his proclamation of the Kingdom of God, with his call to conversion,
4. his Transfiguration, and finally,
5. his institution of the Eucharist, as the sacramental expression of the Paschal Mystery (§21).

Let us note first of all that the central mystery, the *"proclamation of the Kingdom of God,"* is not an precise historic event like the other mysteries of the rosary, but a general aspect of the preaching of the gospel, which makes its meditation difficult. As Leo XIII says,

It is not dogmas of faith or doctrinal principles that the rosary offers to our meditation, but rather events to contemplate with one's eyes and to remember, and these events presented with their circumstances of person, place, and time are thereby the better impressed upon our souls.[5]

This fact is moreover recognized by the Letter (cf. §29), whence a certain illogicality. Moreover, the proclamation of the Kingdom of God is one of the central themes of the Council, for which the Kingdom of God is humanity taken as a whole. Furthermore, the fifth mystery refers to the "Paschal mystery," a traditional theological concept that has been reinterpreted by the new theology to signify a novel appreciation of the mystery of Redemption. These mysteries thus appear more or less imbued with the conciliar coloring which has invested them with a new meaning.

Let us conclude by recognizing what is evident, that the Christian soul cannot but profit from meditating on all the actions of Our Lord, and that the wedding feast at Cana or the institution of the Blessed Sacrament plunge the soul into the marvels of divine charity. Nonetheless, they could have been included in the new chaplet of John Paul II instead of upsetting tradition.

In the wake of Dei Verbum

This addition of the new mysteries has an expressly humanistic connotation, a reflection of John Paul II's thinking. The pope explains himself in the Apostolic Letter:

In the light of what has been said so far on the mysteries of Christ, it is not difficult to go deeper into this *anthropological significance* of the rosary, which is far deeper than may appear at first sight. Anyone who contemplates Christ through the various stages of his life cannot fail to perceive in him *the truth about man*. This is the great affirmation of the Second Vatican Council which I have so often discussed in my own teaching since the encyclical letter *Redemptor Hominis*: *"It is only in the mystery of the Word made flesh that the mystery of man is seen in its true light."*[6] The rosary helps to open up the way to this light. Following in the path of Christ, in whom man's path is *"recapitulated,"*[7] revealed and redeemed, believers come face to face with the image of the true man. Contemplating Christ's birth, they learn of the sanctity of life; seeing the household of Nazareth, they learn the original truth of the family according to God's plan; listening to the Master in the mysteries of his public ministry, they find the light which leads them to enter the Kingdom of God; and following him on the way to Calvary, they learn the meaning of salvific suffering. Finally, contemplating Christ and his Blessed Mother in glory, they see the goal towards which each of us is called, if we allow ourselves to be healed and transformed by the Holy Spirit. It could be said that each mystery of the rosary, carefully meditated, sheds light on the mystery of man. (§25)

Conclusion

Here we find the fundamental novelty of the Council: Divine revelation is no longer the revelation to man of the supernatural mystery of God, but *"by revealing the Father and by being revealed by him, the Christ ultimately reveals man to himself."*[8] In conclusion, it seems that we can state that this novelty fits the pattern of preceding reforms: integrate elements of the Church's tradition into the new thinking of Vatican II. While wanting to honor the Virgin Mary and restore the rosary to its place of honor, the pope tends to give it a new twist and a different spirit than the one Tradition has bequeathed to us. Still, and precisely in order to try to maintain this prayer in the place and form in which it has come down to us from antiquity, we welcome the Year of the rosary that the pope has given to Christendom, and throughout the year we shall study all the Church documents and teaching which show its richness, grandeur, virtue, power, and beauty. We place this initiative under the patronage of the Queen of the Most Holy Rosary.

Translated from the SSPX's international news bulletin, DIC1, #63, October 26, 2002

Footnotes

1 *"Were the text to be accepted as it stood, [Fr. Karl Rahner] contended, 'unimaginable harm would result from an ecumenical point of view,' and [he] added, 'that all the success achieved in the field of ecumenism through the Council and in connection with the Council will be rendered worthless by the retention of the schema as it stands.'*" Cited by Ralph Wiltgen, *The Rhine Flows into the Tiber* (Devon: Augustine Publishing Co., 1979), p. 91.

2 Encyclical *Octobri Mense*, September 22, 1891.

3 Encyclical *Supremi Apostolatus*, September 1, 1883. Further information on the development of the rosary and the military victories which Christendom owes to it, see the articles by Rev. Fr. Marie-Dominique in the French review *Sel de la terre*, Nos. 38 and 41, as well as the article by Fr. Thomas Esser, "The Rosary and Islam" in No. 39.

4 Letter *Rosarium Virginis Mariae*, §40.

5 Encyclical *Augustissimae Virginis*, September 12, 1897.

6 On this topic one can consult Jakob Schutz, *Die Geschichte des Rosenkranzes*, vol. 6 (Paderborn, 1909), and also the pages of the *Roman Ritual*.

7 Conc. Oecum. Vat. II, *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (Gaudium et Spes)*, §22.

8 Henri de Lubac, *Catholicisme: Gaudium et Spes*.