

# The Rosary Prayer by Prayer

How and Why We Pray  
the Christ-Centered Rosary  
of the Blessed Mother

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## **PRAYER BEFORE THE ROSARY**

My dear Blessed Mother, please pray the holy rosary with me. Assist me with the prayers and reflections so that I may gain greater insight into the mysteries. Help me to keep an open mind and heart to the direction of our Father. Amen.

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# Part I

## How and Why We Pray the Rosary

## THE ROSARY AND JESUS' GIFT OF PEACE

Praying the rosary daily is one of the greatest gifts we can give to ourselves, the world, Mary, and Jesus. This profound Marian devotion can promote peace in our hearts and in the world at large. More importantly, it is a way to grow closer to Jesus.

We pray the rosary in Mary's honor because she is the purest role model for discipleship and evangelization. She was the first person to accept Jesus into her life, and she did so eagerly and without hesitation. Mary's goodness and her love for God resulted in the ultimate blessing: to hold the Son of God within her very being. God chose her to carry and raise Jesus, and she cared for and loved him like no one else could.

Mary also is our mother. Jesus gave us his mother at the cross saying to her, "Woman, behold, your son," and then saying to his disciple, John, who represents all humanity, "Behold, your mother" (John 19:26-27). Mary is concerned for the salvation of her children. Throughout history, visionaries who have claimed to have received apparitions (extraordinary appearances) of her have reported that she always requests an increase in prayer. She asks that we turn toward God and away from anything that keeps us from God.

When saying the rosary we repeatedly ask Mary to

pray for us. Scripture tells us to request prayers from others, particularly those who are holy. “Pray for one another, that you may be healed. The fervent prayer of a righteous person is very powerful” (James 5:16).

Then who better to request prayers from than Mary? When the Angel Gabriel appeared to her to tell her she would conceive Jesus, Gabriel addressed her as “favored one” (Luke 1:28). The angel told her that the Lord was with her. (See Luke 1:28.) If God is with Mary, and she was entrusted to raise the savior of the world, she certainly can be trusted to carry our prayers to her Son.

When we pray to her, we can be confident that she listens. Anyone with a devotion to Mary will tell you how their prayers have been answered. Our Holy Mother takes our prayers straight to her Son, who denies her nothing. Remember the wedding at Cana? Jesus performed his first public miracle at the request of his mother. (See John 2:1-11.)

The rosary may be Marian in tone but it is God’s presence in the world on which we reflect. When we pray the rosary, or participate in any other devotion to Mary, it is God alone whom we adore and worship. “To Jesus through Mary” is a common saying. Showing devotion to Mary always leads to a deeper love of and devotion to her Son. We go to Mary in prayer and with her to Jesus.

Consider for a moment the many ways we honor the Trinity with the rosary. Through the prayers and mysteries we declare our fundamental beliefs, ask for God’s forgiveness and mercy, give praise, and acknowledge the power of the Holy Spirit. Also, we contemplate God’s generosity and compassion through the incarnation, life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus. As with all Marian devotion, the rosary is a means to a greater understand-

ing of the Lord. It can assist us with our conversion—our journey to the Lord and away from anything that prevents this journey.

## Development of the Rosary

The rosary is a devotion which has evolved over nearly a thousand years into the beautiful blend of prayers and meditations that we know today. The use of objects to help count prayers dates back to 500 B.C. In ancient times stones, dried berries, or beads were tossed from one pile to another to track the number of prayers being said. Prayer ropes later were used by Eastern religions including the Orthodox, Hindu, Buddhist, and Moslem faiths.

Some of the dates and details surrounding the rosary vary from source to source, but it appears that it wasn't until the beginning of the second millennium A.D. that this prayer form took hold in the Christian faith. Around 1096 Irish monks continued a daily practice of reciting the 150 psalms of the Book of Psalms of David, known as the Psalter, as had been done since antiquity. However, this practice proved difficult for the monks.

Many of them were illiterate; therefore they could not read the psalms. Others could read but could not afford to purchase the Psalter. Memorizing the 150 psalms was nearly impossible.

As an alternative the monks began reciting 150 Our Fathers. Given that the Lord's Prayer also was found in Scripture, the monks thought the substitution was acceptable. They kept count of the 150 Our Fathers by following knots or beads tied on a string.

During the Middle Ages prayers were said in Latin.



The Our Father was then known as the *Pater Noster*, which is Our Father in Latin. The prayer rope to keep count of the number of prayers became known by the same name.

Not long after that *Ave Marias*, which is Latin for Hail Marys, replaced the Lord's Prayer. The first half of the Hail Mary consists of two verses from Scripture—the greeting by the Angel Gabriel to Mary at the Annunciation and the greeting by Elizabeth to Mary at the Visitation. The second half of the prayer varied until it first appeared in the *Roman Breviary* in 1568.

With the substitution of the Hail Marys the rope became known as the rosary. The word “rosary” comes from the Latin *rosarium*, which means rose garden or grouping of roses in something such as a garland, wreath, or bouquet. In the rosary the Hail Marys are like roses for Mary, our Blessed Mother.

The concept of the mysteries was added possibly as early as the fourteenth century. The Carthusian monasteries are thought to have included little Bible reflections at the end of each Hail Mary. Later these reflections before each decade developed into what we now call mysteries.

Pope Leo X accepted the rosary on behalf of the Church in 1520. Pope Pius V officially approved it as a means of devotion in 1569.

## The Way to Peace

Jesus gave us the gift of peace before his death and resurrection. Jesus said, “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you” (John 14:27). He said that this peace is not like the peace we know in this world and that our hearts should not be troubled or afraid.

But human failings can prevent us from realizing this peace. Weaknesses such as jealousy, envy, hatred, prejudice, selfishness, fear, and social injustices obstruct the ability to accept Jesus and his gift of peace. When we are not loving and serving one another, we are not serving the Lord. We are not trusting in Jesus and holding him in the center of our lives. And there can be no peace without Jesus.

Reading Scripture, receiving the Eucharist, and praying the rosary are powerful means to the gift of peace. We can turn to God in prayer to ask for the needed strength, courage, and humility to overcome our weaknesses and reconcile our differences between us and our brothers and sisters, as well as between us and God. We can pray for our continuous conversion so that we may know God's peace.

Only a handful of apparitions of Mary have been approved out of the several hundred that have been investigated by the Catholic Church. (Church approval indicates that the supernatural character of the case cannot be explained, there was no impediment in the visionary, nor was there any fraud or anything of demonic origin. A positive ruling does not require us to believe.)

The apparitions of Mary to three children in Fatima, Portugal in 1917 were very quickly and emphatically recognized by the Church as "worthy of belief." At Fatima Mary offered the rosary as a weapon against the war that was in progress (World War I) and the war that would follow (World War II). Each time she appeared to the children she asked that the rosary be prayed every day for world peace. On October 13, 1917 Mary referred to herself as the Lady of the Rosary.

Praying the rosary is an effective method of promoting peace in the world because it begins by promoting peace in our own hearts. The meditative rhythm of the prayers

is very calming. This relaxed state enhances our ability to reflect on the events in the lives of Jesus and Mary and engage in an ongoing conversation with them. The repetition frees the mind of the need for analysis and activates the imaginative consciousness. This mindful contemplation allows for a rich religious experience.

While praying the rosary it is often found that answers to problems will surface. What had been a source of stress seems somewhat relieved. When we are quiet and still, we can hear God more clearly. It is not unusual to end the rosary happier and with a renewed level of trust and faith in God.

So imagine for a moment how the world might be if each one of us began our day with the rosary. Everyday would be founded in prayer. Everyday would begin with communication with Mary and Jesus. Everyday would be founded on the Word. Everyone would begin everyday in God's peace. If everyone prayed the rosary everyday, the world could not be anything other than peaceful.

## THE APOSTLES' CREED

I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth. I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord. He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary. He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried. He descended into hell. The third day he rose again. He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again to judge the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and life everlasting. Amen.



## OUR FATHER

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. Amen.



## HAIL MARY

Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with you; blessed are you among women and blessed is the fruit of your womb, Jesus. Holy Mary, mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death. Amen.

## HAIL MARY

Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with you; blessed are you among women and blessed is the fruit of your womb, Jesus. Holy Mary, mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death. Amen.

## HAIL MARY

Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with you; blessed are you among women and blessed is the fruit of your womb, Jesus. Holy Mary, mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death. Amen.



## GLORY BE

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son,  
and to the Holy Spirit, as it was in the  
beginning, is now, and ever shall be,  
world without end. Amen.



## First Joyful Mystery

### THE ANNUNCIATION

And coming to her, he said, "Hail, favored one! The Lord is with you." But she was greatly troubled at what was said and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. Then the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name him Jesus. He will be great and will be called Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give him the throne of David his father, and he will rule over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end." But Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I have no relations with a man?" And the angel said to her in reply, "The holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. Therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God. And behold, Elizabeth, your relative, has also conceived a son in her old age, and this is the sixth month for her who was called barren; for nothing will be impossible for God" (Luke 1:28-37).





## **Reflection**

Mary didn't hesitate to agree to God's request. The young teenager accepted the responsibility for carrying and raising a child that guaranteed the salvation of the people of her time and all future generations. The guidance, education, and childhood safety of the Anointed One was entrusted to her.

Mary knew that she had everything necessary for her role in God's plan. She trusted in God's vocation for her and that God would be with her every step of the way.

Mary conceived a child and yet remained a virgin. Elizabeth conceived a child at an age thought to be beyond childbearing. These two events proved once again that nothing is impossible with God.

When God calls upon us we are allowed the choice to refuse or accept the mission. If you were Mary, how would you have responded?

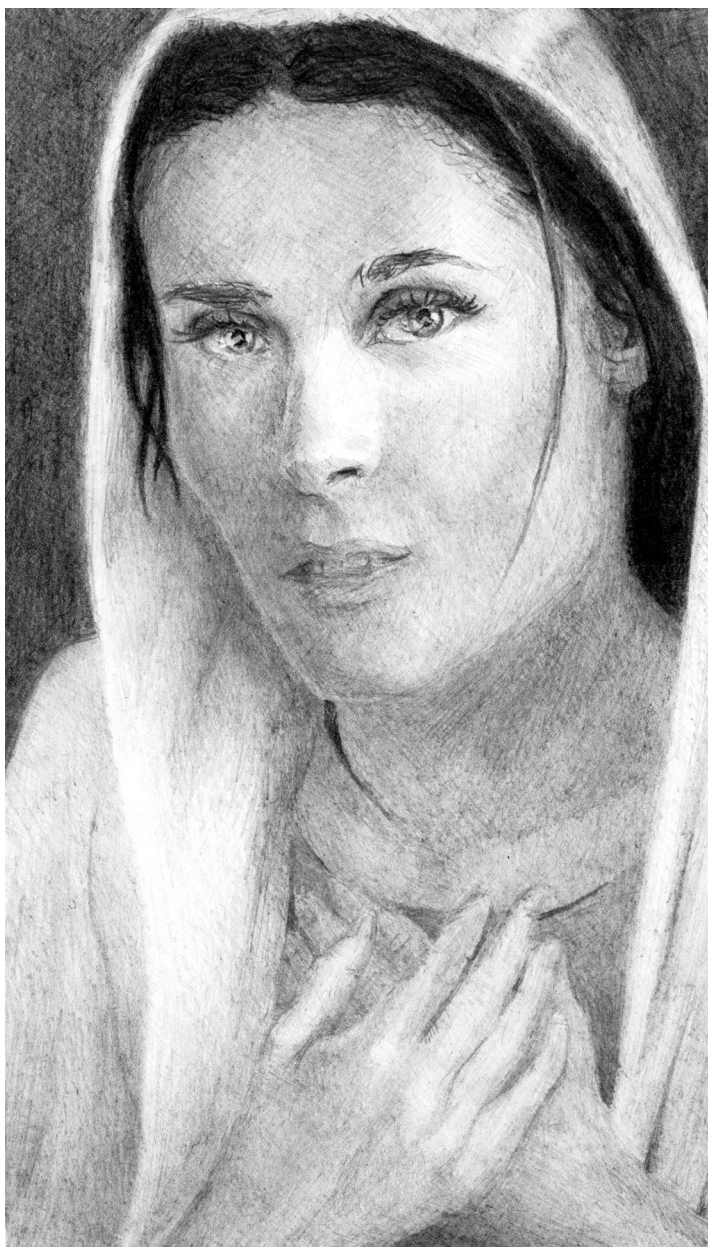
Jesus' cry is heard in the neglected child, the hungry single mother, the ailing cancer patient, the lonely widower, and the forgotten veteran in a military hospital. How do you respond to God's call by responding to people in need of food, shelter, companionship, or guidance? How do you welcome Jesus into your life?

## **Prayer**

Lord, grant me the courage to accept your mission for me and the strength to accomplish it with the dignity, grace, and holiness of Mary.

## **Illustration**

Mary takes God's plan into her heart.



## OUR FATHER

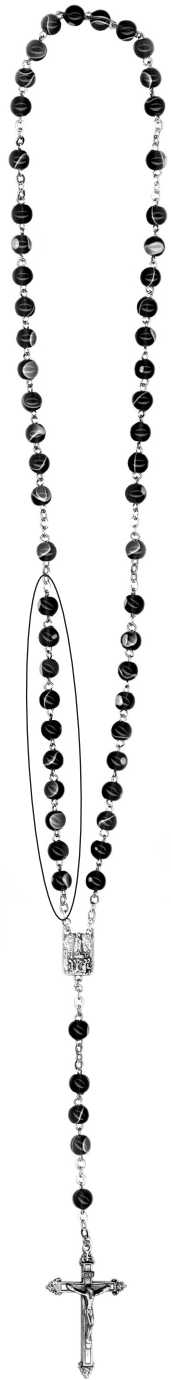
Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. Amen.



*First Decade: Pray one Hail Mary on each bead of the first decade for a total of ten Hail Marys.*

## HAIL MARY

Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with you; blessed are you among women and blessed is the fruit of your womb, Jesus. Holy Mary, mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death. Amen.



## GLORY BE

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son,  
and to the Holy Spirit, as it was in the  
beginning, is now, and ever shall be,  
world without end. Amen.



## Second Joyful Mystery

### THE VISITATION

During those days Mary set out and traveled to the hill country in haste to a town of Judah, where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the infant leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth, filled with the holy Spirit, cried out in a loud voice and said, "Most blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And how does this happen to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For at the moment the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the infant in my womb leaped for joy. Blessed are you who believed that what was spoken to you by the Lord would be fulfilled."

And Mary said: "My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord; / my spirit rejoices in God my savior. / For he has looked upon his handmaid's lowliness; / behold, from now on will all ages call me blessed. / The Mighty One has done great things for me, / and holy is his name" (Luke 1:39-49).

