

October: The Month of the Rosary

One of the most common Catholic devotions is the rosary. Many of us are familiar with it and the prayers, but did you know that October is known as the month of the rosary?

The history of October having a special focus on the rosary goes back to 1571, and the day that became known as the feast of Our Lady of Victory (also the name of my home parish). We celebrated this feast this past Thursday. After the naval victory at the Battle of Lepanto on Oct. 7, 1571, the feast of Our Lady of the Rosary was introduced into the calendar. From 1716 until the early 20th century it was celebrated on the first Sunday of October. Since 1913, it has been observed on Oct. 7.

As for the history of the rosary, it's commonly said that St. Dominic, the founder of the Order of Preachers (the Dominicans), instituted the rosary. It actually goes back before his time. Borrowing from the web site "Catholic Answers:"

"Certain parts of the rosary predated Dominic; others arose only after his death. Centuries before Dominic, monks had begun to recite all 150 psalms on a regular basis. As time went on, it was felt that the lay brothers, known as the *conversi*, should have some form of prayer of their own. They were distinct from the choir monks, and a chief distinction was that they were illiterate. Since they couldn't read the psalms, they couldn't recite them with the monks. They needed an easily remembered prayer. The prayer first chosen was the Our Father, and, depending on circumstances, it was said either fifty or a hundred times. These *conversi* used rosaries to keep count, and the rosaries were known then as Paternosters ("Our Fathers").

In England there arose a craftsmen's guild of some importance, the members of which made these rosaries. In London you can find a street, named Paternoster Row, which preserves the memory of the area where these craftsmen worked.

The rosaries that originally were used to count Our Fathers came to be used, during the twelfth century, to count Hail Marys—or, more properly, the first half of what we now call the Hail Mary. (The second half was added some time later.)"

Both Catholics and non-Catholics, as they learn more about the rosary and make more frequent use of it, come to see how its meditations bring to mind the sweet fragrance not only of the Mother of God, but of Christ himself.

Over time, the rosary became to be a popular devotion. It includes various prayers that are often said on their own, namely the Apostles Creed, which expresses the teachings of the apostles that came into use around 125 A.D.; the Lord's Prayer; the Hail Mary, which is based on the greeting of Gabriel to Mary in Luke 1:28 and "Blessed are thou among women and blessed is the fruit of thy womb" coming from Elizabeth's greeting to Mary in Luke 1:42. (Remember that if a Protestant accuses you of the "Hail Mary" not being scriptural). The second part, "Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death, amen" also reflects Scripture. Mary was a Christian,

and Christians are called holy and saints, which means “holy ones” in Eph.1:1 and Phil. 1:1). Mary is called “Mother of God” as she bore Christ, who is God. “Mother of God” does not deify Mary, it means the person who was born of her was divine. Saint Paul also told Christians to pray for one another, which is why we ask Mary to pray for us.

The Glory Be dates to the fourth century, and is a brief hymn of praise.

The closing prayer of “Hail Holy Queen”

Most important in all of this though is meditation. The rosary allows us to meditate more deeply on moments in the life of Jesus and Mary. Each one gives us the chance to ponder different things; from the annunciation, thinking about the anxiety Mary must have felt and how we can feel that way too; to the Nativity; how God came to be one of us; to the Crucifixion, how Jesus gave His life for us; to the Resurrection in how Jesus triumphed over death and how this allows us to do so too. In 2002, added were the “Luminous Mysteries” by Saint John Paul II as he wanted to revive interest in the rosary, and he felt there was a gap between the childhood of Jesus in the Joyful Mysteries and the Passion of our Lord in the Sorrowful Mysteries. These Luminous Mysteries are the Baptism of Jesus by John; The First Miracle of Jesus at Cana; Jesus Proclaiming the Kingdom of God; the Transfiguration and the Institution of the Eucharist.

The beauty of our faith is there are so many devotions. Some people enjoy praying the rosary; others prefer other devotions, and either way is perfectly acceptable. Most important though is to use what works, and also to think about why we do what we do. If we use the rosary as a form of superstition, or think by saying a certain amount of rosaries we somehow earn our way to heaven, that’s not a good thing. Rather, the rosary can bring us closer to Jesus, as we invoke the intercession of our Blessed Mother, and reflect on the moments in her life and in our Lord, which in so many ways are like our very own. Remember when Jesus said from the Cross to John “Behold your mother” (John 19:27) John would have certainly looked after Mary; Jesus saying these words though signifies how Jesus gives us the gift of His Mother to be our intercessor, our friend, and someone who hears our prayers and brings them to our Lord. What a gift our Blessed Mother is! Mary and Our Lord were real people who experienced many of the same things we do. Both though are in heaven; one is our Redeemer, and the other can bring us closer to Him.

Indeed, everything we do in our faith we do for a reason. The rosary is one of the most easily recognizable symbols in our faith - but it can be easy to lose sight of why we use it, or how we use it. So just as in real life we often call our moms who are there for us, in our spiritual life we can always count on our Heavenly Mother to be there for us too.

God bless,

Fr. Paul