October Celebrates the Month of the Rosary

Each October, our Church has a special focus on the Rosary as October, along with May, are months honoring Mary.

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. After the naval victory at the Battle of Lepanto on Oct. 7, 1571 by Christian forces over a fleet of Turkish Muslims, 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. He did have a vision of our Blessed Mother and used the rosary in his missionary work and at least a dozen popes have mentioned his role in development of the rosary. However, elements of it actually goes back before his time.

Third-century Christian hermits and monks in Egypt used stories and later prayer ropes to keep track when praying the 150 Psalms. Various forms of the "Jesus Prayer" (which is "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me") became popular; this short prayer was said while counting beads. The Our Father would also be prayed 150 times using a string of beads.

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 they womb" coming from Elizabeth's greeting to Mary in Luke 1:42. (Elizabeth's greeting was added many years later to the "Hail Mary prayer). The second part, "Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death, amen" was added as the last part of the prayer over time from Saint Peter Canisus with "now and at the hour of our death" coming from the Catechism of the Council of Trent. The Rosary as we know it developed between the 12th and 15th centuries, eventually having 50 Hail Marys recited and linked with verses of psalms or other phrases evoking the lives of Jesus and Mary. The prayer became known as the "rosarium" or "rose garden," a term to designate a collection of similar material.

Meditation is a big part of the rosary. 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. Saint Dominic gave us the first sets of mysteries, the Joyful, Sorrowful and Glorious. 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 (or “Mysteries of Light”) 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. 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.

So why pray the Rosary? It’s a long list! Personally, I believe the Rosary allows us to meditate a bit on how Mary intercedes for us, but it also helps to give us strength as we live our lives, being mindful of Mary walking with us as does her Son. The Rosary is also a powerful tool for giving us inner peace. When I ponder the Sorrowful Mysteries in particular, I think of Mary’s trust in God through all of the suffering she was seeing her Son go through; it reminds me of how in my anxieties and worries I need to also have trust that things will be OK, for God is with me. The Rosary can be a great comfort in times of distress. The Rosary is also a great tool in our battles against temptation - for as the feast of Our Lady of the Rosary originally commemorated a naval battle, for us we can call on Mary for our spiritual battles. And lastly, I also think the Rosary is a great tool for us as we go into spiritual battle in the world. Remember as people of hope we are meant to point people towards heaven and help people come to understand what God’s love really means. This is why when we gather at Planned Parenthood for the “40 Days of Life” (which we’ll be doing on Friday the 24th) we pray the Rosary; we are asking Mary to help people there make different choices, but also through this action we are peacefully trying to engage the evil that takes place there reminding them through this prayer that they are loved by God, but being lied to by the Evil One - remember it is Mary who is often depicted as crushing the Serpent at her feet, the same Evil One who deceived the first Eve and who continues to deceive and destroy so many lives. Mary in so many ways brings us to her Son.

Archbishop Fulton Sheen said, "The rosary is the book of the blind, where souls see and there enact the greatest drama of love the world has ever known; it is the book of

the simple, which initiates them into mysteries and knowledge more satisfying than the education of other men; it is the book of the aged, whose eyes close upon the shadow of this world, and open on the substance of the next. The power of the rosary is beyond description." May we use that power and with our Blessed Mother help change the world and win souls for heaven.

God bless,

Fr. Paul