

MI Monthly Formation (9)

In Fr. Kolbe's Marian and Missionary Spirituality

SEPTEMBER 2004 PRAYER INTENTION:

That in charity and faith we will be more welcoming to “fallen-away” and “non-practicing” Catholics.

Dear Friends,

This time I would like to share with you my experience about the prayer of the Rosary, so that we may celebrate our Lady's birthday (September 8) by renewing our bond with her and with all our brethren.

The Rosary in My Life

I remember that when I was a little girl, during the month of May dedicated to Our Lady, we used to gather every evening to pray the Rosary in one of the several Marian chapels located in my Parish. For us children it was fun and exciting because every day we went to a different place in our town, met friends, relatives and new people, and discovered new corners of ...the world! It was a small world but for us was big enough to make our gathering an adventure!

After praying and singing to our Lady, people used to stay there for a little while, exchanging news, planning future events or simply speaking with friends and acquaintances.

In this way I learned to pray the Rosary and also to love it as a precious means not only for praying but also for meeting friends and experiencing belonging to the bigger family that is the Church.

As I grew up, I neglected to say the Rosary, thinking that it was a prayer for elders or children. But when I began to perceive the call to the consecrated life and came in contact with the spirituality of St. Francis of Assisi who expressed such a great confidence in and devotion to Mary, I felt the need of starting again to pray the Rosary.

This time, I prayed it with a greater awareness and personal participation. I remember I used to say the Rosary including a different

intention before each Hail Mary and meditating upon the mysteries by reading the corresponding Gospel account. I was 17 and from then on I have never omitted saying the Rosary every single day.

Through this prayer, Mary became my companion, my model for following Christ and serving others; but, above all, my mother to whom I looked to for refuge, consolation, courage and enlightenment.

Throughout the 26 years of my missionary life, the Rosary has not only sustained my faith journey and my consecrated life, but has also become my favorite apostolic prayer. Through it, I entrust to Mary's Heart all the people I meet daily, especially those in most need of God's grace and mercy. I am sure that Mary takes care of them in the most perfect and complete way, as only the Mother of God can. I am also persuaded that in this way the persons for whom I'm praying receive the strength for daily life and peace of heart. I also include in my dialogue with Christ all the bad and good news of the world offering them through the Immaculate Heart of Mary, so that they may be purified and transformed by grace.

How the Rosary Came to Be

As you probably know, the Rosary gradually took form in the second millennium, as a substitutive prayer for those who weren't able to read and understand the Psalms. That's why it was set in a sequence of 150 Hail Marys, since in the Bible there are 150 Psalms.

The Rosary is a prayer loved by countless Saints and encouraged by the Magisterium. In its simplicity, the Rosary is destined to bring forth a harvest of holiness because whoever takes Mary as model and Mother for the journey becomes more readily like her, the perfect disciple of Christ.

In his Apostolic Letter on the Rosary, the Pope notes that, *The Rosary, though clearly Marian in character, is at heart a Christocentric prayer. ... It has all the depth of the Gospel message in its entirety. ... With the Rosary, the Christian people sits at the school of Mary and is led to contemplate the beauty on the face of Christ and to experience the depths of his love. Through the Rosary the faithful receive abundant grace, as though from the very hands of the Mother of the Redeemer* (n. 1).

We live in a world that needs to find ways for achieving true justice for all people, so that we all can live in peace and harmony. *To rediscover the Rosary means to immerse oneself in contemplation of the mystery of Christ who "is our peace," since he ...broke down the dividing wall of hostility* (n.6).

How to Pray the Rosary

There are many ways, according to many different traditions, customs and personal attitudes or emotions. I suggest that you read chapter III of the Pope's Letter where you can find very interesting methodological remarks. In any case, when praying the Rosary we should always contemplate Christ with Mary: with her eyes and with her heart, remembering that her gaze was always filled with adoration and wonder.

As the Pope suggests in his Letter (cf. n. 10), at times our gaze too, like Mary's, would be a questioning look, a penetrating gaze, a look of sorrow, a gaze radiant with joy or afire, according to the mysteries that we are contemplating, digging into Mary's memories of Jesus. No one can introduce us to a profound knowledge of Jesus better than his Mother, because *she lives from him and through him* (n. 24).

A Way of Assimilating Christ's Love for Man

Praying the Rosary is also a way of assimilating Christ's love for man. It is a school of fraternal love for the fruits of charity which it produces. *When prayed well in a truly meditative way -the Pope writes- the Rosary leads to an encounter with Christ in his mysteries and so cannot fail to draw attention to the face of Christ in others, especially in the most afflicted.*

How could one possibly contemplate the mystery of the Child of Bethlehem, in the joyful mysteries, without experiencing the desire to welcome, defend and promote life, and to shoulder the burdens of suffering children all over the world? How could one possibly follow in the footsteps of Christ the Revealer, in the mysteries of light, without resolving to bear witness to his "Beatitudes" in daily life? And how could one contemplate Christ carrying the Cross and Christ Crucified, without feeling the need to act as a "Simon of Cyrene" for our brothers and sisters weighed down by grief or crushed by despair? Finally, how could one possibly gaze upon the glory of the Risen Christ or of Mary Queen of Heaven, without yearning to make this world more beautiful, more just, more closely conformed to God's plan?

In a word, by focusing our eyes on Christ, the Rosary also makes us peacemakers in the world. By its nature as an insistent choral petition in harmony with Christ's invitation to "pray ceaselessly" (Lk 18:1), the Rosary allows us to hope that, even today, the difficult "battle" for peace can be won. Far from offering an escape from the problems of the world, the Rosary obliges us to see them with responsible and generous eyes, and obtains for us the strength to face them with the certainty of God's help and the firm intention of bearing witness in every situation to "love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony" (Col 3:14) (n. 40).

Really, a prayer so simple and yet so rich and profound deserves to be rediscovered and passed on to our children and grandchildren.

Let us pray it with greater fervor and profundity; let us promote it with conviction and confidence, so that we may be strengthened in our faith journey by the example and the prayer of the Blessed Virgin Mary and of so many other brothers and sisters.

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As usual, for your personal or group formation as MIers, I recommend to use the articles that are published in *Immaculata* magazine. As you know, this year many articles

develop different aspects of the Dogma of the Immaculate Conception of Mary and the meaning of this grace here and now. The National center has also prepared a brochure on this subject that is very useful for a wider sowing of this truth.

Suggested Readings for the Month

John Paul II, *Message for World Mission Sunday*, that you can download from the Vatican web site: www.Vatican.va/Holy_Father/John_Paul_II/messages; or www.Vatican.va/latest.

John Paul II, *Rosarium Virginis Mariae*, Apostolic letter on the Most Holy Rosary.

SK, *Scritti Kolbe (Fr. Kolbe's writings)*, in *Stronger than Hatred*, New City Press, New York, 1991.

Or in : *The Kolbe Reader*, Marytown Press, Libertyville, IL, 1987. Or in: *Maria Was His Middle Name*, The Benziger Sisters Publishers, Altadena, CA, 1977.

For those who prefer John Paul II's reflections, I suggest meditating upon his general audience of November 12, 1997, *Our Separated Brethren Also Honor Mary*, that you can find in *Theotókos, Woman, Mother, Disciple*, a collection of the Pope's Catechesis on Mary, Mother of God, edited by Pauline Books & Media, Boston, 2000, pp. 258-260.

Dates to Remember

- 4 First Saturday of the month.
- 6 Labor Day (USA).
- 8 **The Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary**
- 14 **THE EXALTATION OF THE HOLY CROSS**
- 15 **Our Lady of Sorrows**
- 17 **Stigmata of St. Francis of Assisi**
- 29 **Michael, Gabriel, and Raphael Archangels**

From St. Maximilian's Writings

"Everyday, and often, especially in difficult moments, look upon the Crucified and learn, most impoverished one, to follow the Lord Jesus in all suffering, however great, and in all the contempt to which you are subject.

Be obedient to God in all things, in everyone, always, entirely, and blindly. Love your enemies the more, in fact live them all the more when they cause you pain, for Jesus said: 'Father forgive them, for they know not what they do.' The more you will suffer in this short life, the greater will be your glory in heaven.

*Love God for the sake of God Himself, and do so all the more peacefully and lovingly, and in peace and love, suffer and work."*¹



¹ In *Maria Was His Middle Name*, The Benziger Sisters Publishers, Altadena, CA, 1977, page 37.