

Introduction

The Holy Rosary is one of the most popular Marian Devotions and one of the greatest prayers of the Church after the Mass and the Liturgy of the Hours. It has been frequently and earnestly recommended to the faithful by many saints and popes.

The origins of the Rosary may be found in the practice of lay people reciting the Hail Mary 150 times in imitation of the 150 Psalms said by monks in fulfilment of the Divine Office. However, it is to Saint Dominic – the thirteenth century founder of the Order of Preachers – that Our Lady is said to have appeared in 1206 and revealed the Rosary. Tradition recounts that this was to assist Saint Dominic in his ongoing battle against the Albigensian heresy.

Another Dominican, Alan de la Roche, established Rosary Confraternities in the fifteenth century to promote the prayer which had by now assumed a recognisable structure in the form of mysteries.

With the addition of the Mysteries of Light the Rosary now comprises twenty mysteries that recall the important events in the life of Our Lord and the Blessed Mother. The Rosary is Christocentric because the mysteries compel us to meditate upon the Incarnation and the work of Redemption undertaken by the Saviour. In doing so we also honour and contemplate the role of Mary who accompanied Jesus in His earthly ministry, Passion, Death and glorious Resurrection. It can therefore be appreciated how the Rosary offers a veritable summary of the Gospel and constitutes a compendium of the Liturgical Year in which all these events are recalled by the Church.

Whether recited individually or in a group the Rosary combines vocal and meditative prayer. Often clasping beads the hands join a person's lips in the prayers while the mind is drawn to meditating upon the particular mysteries. The person is encouraged to follow the example of Christ and His First Disciple, Mary. In this way the Rosary encourages the Christian to develop a deep prayer life and to grow in holiness.

Many figures in the Church have attested to the powerful nature of the Rosary and have strongly urged recourse to this prayer by the faithful:

“Among all the devotions approved by the Church none has been so favoured by so many miracles as the devotion of the Most Holy Rosary.” (Pope Pius IX)

“There is no surer means of calling down God's blessings upon the family than the daily recitation of the Rosary.” (Pope Pius XII)

“The Rosary is the compendium of the entire Gospel.” (Pope Paul VI)

“To recite the Rosary is nothing other than to contemplate the face of Christ with Mary.” (Pope John Paul II)