



The Rosary: A Lifeline to Heaven

One of the great works of art is Michelangelo's *Last Judgment* on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel. His uplifting mural combines the horror of damnation with the joy of eternal salvation in a vivid scene that should inspire any right-minded person to holiness. Amid the panorama of the saved and the damned is an easily overlooked figure of an angel who is pulling up two saved souls, using a beaded rope as their lifeline to salvation.

A PRAYER FOR ALL SEASONS

The Rosary has been an important sacramental that has enriched the faith of Catholics for centuries. It is a timeless aid to contemplation that marks the special rhythm of human life on a *beaded rope* that can serve as a lifeline to individual salvation. But what makes the Rosary an aid to salvation is the fact of its deep and powerful connection to the Bible and the Divine mysteries that are tied to Jesus' redemptive stay on earth. As author Father Oscar Lukefahr has written, *the mysteries of the rosary translate the Bible into prayer*. The Rosary then binds Catholics to the historical life of Christ and foreshadows their eternal destiny and union with Christ in heaven.

Catholics must not forget that while a devotion to the Blessed Mother is a vital part of the Rosary's historical and spiritual importance, it is primarily a Christ-centered prayer in which Catholics pray to the Son through His Mother. In the words of the *Hail Mary*, it is Christ, as Luke reported, *who is the ultimate object both of the announcement and of the greeting of the Mother of John the Baptist: Blessed is the fruit of your womb*.

The Rosary blends easily with the Christian way of life. In her essay, *The Rosary: A Prayer for All Seasons*, Gloria Hutchinson compares the Rosary to an *Olympic champion emerging from early retirement*. She writes that the Rosary has regained its lofty position as *an ever-reliable prayer for all seasons* since Pope John Paul II proclaimed 2002 the *Year of the Rosary*. Hutchinson reminds Catholics that the Rosary has always been a peoples' prayer. Poets have delighted in its mystical powers for centuries. Robert Cameron Rogers called it

a string of pearls while Joyce Kilmer saw it as *a harp that any hand can play*.

AN UNLIKELY BATTLEGROUND

The recent history of the Rosary has been anything but rosy. This simple devotion has become an unlikely setting in the battle for the spiritual direction of the modern Church. Since Vatican II the Rosary has suffered a precipitous decline in popularity among post-conciliar Catholics. Some fault the Rosary for being too mechanical, repetitive and boring. Others contend that the Rosary is an exercise in false piety and even a superstition. Many of the Church's so-called *reformers* have chided the Rosary for being *theologically retrograde*, a veritable relic of the *preconciliar church*, destined to the ash heap of outmoded devotions.

At the heart of some of these attacks is the Rosary's inadvertent guilt by association with the sale of indulgences that rocked the pillars of the Church in the 15th and 16th centuries. At that time indulgences or papal dispensations of purgatory sentences were often attached to the recitation of the Rosary. Some prelates were abusing this privilege by selling the indulgences to the highest bidder. When Martin Luther broke with the universal church in the early 16th century, the Rosary was tarred with the stain of this corrupt practice.

While traditionalists have always come to the prompt aid of the Rosary, one of its best defenses has come from Garry Wills' 2005 book, *The Rosary: Prayer Comes Round*. Wills, who is known for his heterodox views on Catholic morality and papal history, has written a splendid apologia for the time-honored religious tradition that surprises because of its truly traditional point of view and the author's deep-felt devotion. *The Rosary* is a marvelously written exercise in love and respect for one of the Church's oldest traditions. Wills clearly demonstrates that the Rosary is deeply grounded in Scripture and serves as an excellent way for Catholics to participate in the life of Christ.

As many post-conciliar Catholics have ignored the Rosary's saving powers, countless have sought inner fulfillment in the Eastern methods of meditation, such as transcendental meditation, yoga and mysticism. The bookstore shelves bristle

and groan with a plethora of titles that promise *inner peace* through meditation. The Rosary is relevant for these times, a way for Catholics to satisfy their need to meditate, contemplate, and find the inner calm (with Christ) that the Eastern methods only promise.

A CONFLICTED HISTORY

The true history of the Rosary is not without its own controversy. Its roots lie in the efforts of lay people in the Middle Ages to have their own extended prayer, not unlike the Divine Office that was reserved for the religious, friars and monks. A new prayer for the layman began with the recitation of the 150 entries in the Book of Psalms in the Old Testament. When this practice proved cumbersome, they divided the 150 Psalms into three parts. Soon even the shortened use of the Psalms proved too unwieldy to become widely accepted. Others suggested that they say the *Pater Noster* (Our Father) 150 times, 100 times or even 50 times. This new form of prayer became known as the *Pater Noster Psalter*, later changed to the *Pater Noster Rosary*.

Some histories attribute the Rosary's origins to Saint Dominic (1170-1221). Legend has it that the Virgin Mary appeared to him in 1208 in a French church in Prouille and gave him the Rosary to help combat the Albigensian heresy of that time. Another Dominic, a Carthusian monk from Prussia, (1382-1460) is regarded as the first to connect the Rosary to different episodes in the life of Christ. In keeping with the psalm-based numerology, this Dominic proposed 50 events in Christ's life to serve as meditations for the Rosary.

The history of the Rosary is further conflicted by the fact that the word Rosary comes from *rosarium*, or *rose garden*. *Rosarium* was used as a secular symbol for romantic love in classical times. This prompted the 15th century Dominican monk, Alanus de Rupe, to reject its use for the Virgin. He favored the old designation, the *Psalter of the Virgin*. However, Christian usage increasingly connected the word with a rose garland or chaplet of the Virgin to suggest a circulet of beads, so even the word has a life of its own. History does prove that whatever its true origins, the Dominican Order has been the principal promoter and defender of the Rosary throughout history.

PAPAL DEVOTIONS

The Rosary has always enjoyed a long and intimate relationship with the papacy. Popes have used the Rosary to fight battles, defeat diseases, overcome natural disasters and reinvigorate the faith. In 1571 Pope Pius V instituted *Our Lady of Victory* as an annual feast to commemorate the victory of Lepanto. As a Rosary procession was offered in St. Peter's Square in Rome for the success of the mission of the Holy League, just before Lepanto, this seminal Christian naval victory over the invading Muslim forces was attributed to Our Lady's intercession.

Since then most of the modern popes have enjoyed a

special devotion to the Rosary. In the 1880s Pope Leo XIII highlighted devotion to the Rosary with several encyclicals to Catholics urging the faithful to a devout recitation of Mary's Rosary, especially during October. He saw the Rosary as *an effective spiritual weapon against the evils afflicting society*. Pope John XXIII also had a special devotion to the Rosary. In his 1959 letter, *Grata Recordatio Prayer For the Church, Missions, International and Social Problems* the Pope stressed *a special call to the rosary*. Pope Paul VI said that *by its very nature the recitation of the rosary calls for a quiet rhythm and lingering pace*. He is also reported to have held up his Rosary and proclaimed *this is the Bible for those who can neither read nor write*.

No pontiff had a greater devotion to the Rosary and Our Lady than Pope John Paul II. When he nearly was assassinated in St. Peter's Square on May 13, 1981, he credited his survival to the protection of Mary and expressed his gratitude by way of the Rosary. He knew only too well that May 13th was the anniversary of the first appearance of Our Lady to the children at Fatima in 1917.

In his Apostolic Letter, *Rosarium Virginis Mariae (The Rosary of the Virgin Mary)* Pope John Paul II proclaimed 2002 as the *Year of the Rosary* and expressed his hope that families would once again embrace the Holy Rosary. The pontiff emphasized that *the West is now experiencing a renewed demand for meditation, which at times leads to a keen interest in aspects of their religions...* He added that the Rosary is situated *within the broad gamut of religious phenomena and transports the person into the heart and soul of so many of the pivotal events in Jesus' life*.

THE SWEET CHAIN OF PRAYER

The form of the Rosary remained essentially unchanged until 2002 when John Paul II instituted five new mysteries. He called them the *Luminous Mysteries* because they portray Jesus' public ministry, including His baptism, Cana, the Sermon on the Mount, the Transfiguration and the Last Supper in a new light. Since His public ministry is an important link between His early years and His passion and death on the Cross, these new mysteries reveal the true meaning of His earthly presence, while filling in the public gap between his joyful youth and the sadness and pain associated with Calvary. The Pope also added the *Luminous Mysteries* to enkindle a renewed interest in the Rosary as a true gateway into the Incarnation.

With the addition of the *Luminous Mysteries* the Rosary's intimate connection with the Gospels is even more apparent. It completed what Blessed Bartolo Longo (1841-1926) called *the sweet chain linking us to God*. It is Christ's years of his public ministry that most demonstrate the Incarnation as a *mystery of light*. As John's Gospel says *while I am in the world, I am the light of the world*.

The *mystery of light* that best illustrates the importance of the *Luminous Mysteries* is the Transfiguration. The glory of the

Godhead shines forth from the face of Christ as the Father commands the astonished apostles to *listen to him* and to prepare to experience with Him the agonies of Good Friday, so that they may be able to enjoy their own Easter with Him in heaven.

MARY AND THE ROSARY

Even Mary's relationship to the Rosary has not been without conflict. Since the Hail Mary is the dominant prayer of the Rosary, her critics contend that Mary and her Rosary are a distraction from Jesus Christ, the true focal point of Christianity. Religious scholars have long noted that this is a canard that has no bearing on the Rosary's true history. The Council of Ephesus in 431 settled her title in the Hail Mary, *the Mother of God* in light of the Arian heresy that denied Christ's divinity. Arians called Mary only *the Mother of Christ* because they believed Jesus to be just a man and so His mother could not be the *Mother of God*. On another note, to correct what some theologians thought was an *unbalanced devotion to Mary*, the post-Vatican II Church has toned down its devotional practices honoring Mary in order to refocus on her Son.

Mary's Fatima apparitions are the event that has most dramatized the power and majesty of the Rosary. On October 13, 1917, *Our Lady of Fatima* told three Portuguese shepherd children, *I am the Lady of the Rosary. I have come to warn the faithful to amend their lives and to ask pardon for their sins.... People must say the Rosary.* Mary impressed upon the children how important it was to pray the Rosary daily for world peace. She warned them that Russia would spread its errors throughout the world.

During a 1957 interview, the sole surviving witness, Sister Lucy, urged her interviewer: *Tell them...that many times the Most Holy Virgin told my cousins Francisco and Jacinta, as well as myself, that many nations will disappear from the face of the earth. She also said that Russia would be the instrument of chastisement chosen by Heaven to punish the world if we do not beforehand obtain the conversion of that poor nation.*

A SECRET WEAPON

In fact the Rosary has been a constant source of devotion throughout the history of the Church. Garry Wills' book, *The Rosary* highlights that for countless Catholics who matured

before the Second Vatican Council the Rosary was a daily habit. He cites the story of the late William F. Buckley who developed the habit of saying the rosary as a small boy. In his published diary, *Overdrive*, Buckley revealed that he had learned to count on his fingers the decades of the Rosary when one wasn't available. It was to him *a lifelong habit acquired in childhood*.

It is a fact that innumerable preconiliar Catholics fervently prayed the Rosary in their homes or parishes. To them saying the Rosary has always brought back fond memories of their grandparents and parents who used the Rosary to further their devotion to Christ and His Church. The Rosary can help Catholics transform their communities into *genuine schools of prayer*.

The late Joseph Cardinal Mindszenty, who knew more about Communism than his contemporaries, strongly believed that the Rosary was a *secret military weapon of the Catholic Church*. In his last sermon before his Communist imprisonment he said, *Give me a million families with Rosaries in their hands, uplifted to Mary, they will be a military power, not against other people but for all mankind...for their welfare, for their healing...*

The Cardinal echoed the fact that since the Albigensian heresy in the 12th century through modernism with its socialist, fascist and communist derivatives, the Rosary has stood up to the evils that have plagued mankind. But the message of its power as a lifeline for salvation needs to be revitalized for a new generation of families who have been battered in a sea of moral relativity, secularism and apostasy.

All this underscores the fact that the Rosary can be an effective antidote for the tremors of the times and an important way of fostering among Catholics a deeper commitment to the contemplation of the Christian mystery and as a genuine *training in holiness*. And more importantly the regular devout use of the Rosary can serve as a Michelangeloan Lifeline to Heaven.



William A. Borst, Ph.D., is the author of *Liberalism: Fatal Consequences* and *The Scorpion and the Frog: A Natural Conspiracy* which are available from the author at P.O. Box 16271, St. Louis, MO 63105 or write BBPROF@sbcglobal.net.

The Mindszenty Report is published monthly by the
Cardinal Mindszenty Foundation,
7800 Bonhomme Ave.
P.O. Box 11321
St. Louis, MO 63105
314-727-6279
Fax 314-727-5897

Subscription rate: \$20.00/year, \$36.00/two years.
Outside the U.S.A. \$28.00

The Mindszenty Report is not copyrighted, and
subscribers are invited to have it printed in
their local newspapers.

Contributions to the Cardinal Mindszenty Foundation
are tax deductible as allowed by law.

Eleanor Schlafly, *Publisher*
William A. Borst, Ph.D., *Feature Editor*
e-mail: info@mindszenty.org
web site: www.mindszenty.org

Louisville, KY—Conference 2008

July 18 & 19, 2008

The Church Teaches Forum

The Galt House – East Tower

P.O. Box 757, Louisville, KY

Faith-based Hope: The Church Evangelizing the World

Friday

Mass: 5:00 p.m. His Em. Francis Cardinal Arinze

Banquet: 7:00 p.m.

Keynote Address: Cardinal Arinze

Obligation, Readiness & Freedom to Evangelize

Saturday

Rev. Edmund McCaffrey, President of Eternal Life

Most Rev. Thomas G. Doran, Bishop of Rockford, IL

Hope is the Anchor of Life

Rev. Roger Arnsparger, Diocese of Charlotte, NC

Rev. Wade Menezes, Fathers of Mercy, Auburn, KY

Information:

Eternal Life

902 West Stephen Foster, Bardstown, KY 40004

tel. 1-800-842-2871 fax 502-348-2224

ST LUKE 1:46-48

My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my savior; because he has regarded the lowliness of his handmaid; for behold all generations will call me blessed.

Mindszenty Report Reprints

AGENTS OF SUBVERSION: HOW FOUNDATIONS HAVE UNDERMINED AMERICA—A new world order of Foundations, especially the Rockefeller, Carnegie and Ford Foundations, have been an invisible government attempting to destroy America's free enterprise system and promote their socialist ideologies in academia, our social culture, and even religion. Ask for 4/08

THE CROWNING HEIGHTS: THE MARXIST DRIVE TOWARD SOCIALIZED MEDICINE—reviews the costs of U.S. healthcare, insurance, and the ideology of those pushing for universal health care; traces the history of liberal fascism in 19th century Germany up to the present-day push by Marxists-Socialists for absolute control of America's health coverage. Ask for 3/08

WHAT'S SO GREAT ABOUT CHRISTIANITY?—In a question-and-answer format, author Dinesh D'Souza makes the case for Christianity's ideas, institutions and values. He explains why the "new" atheists are so militant and how Christians must strengthen their moral and intellectual defenses. Ask for 2/08

1 copy	\$.50	100 copies	\$20.00
20 copies	\$5.00	500 copies	\$85.00
50 copies	\$11.00	1000 copies	\$160.00

Father's Day, June 15



FATHER CARD—Due to many requests, we are happy to offer you our Father Card:

The Importance of a Father

St. Joseph was strong in the face of adversity and poverty of his time.

He is a model of the virtues of prudence, humility, strength and fortitude. Even though Joseph is "silent" in Scripture, his actions speak to us more clearly than recorded words. Just as Joseph resigned his own will to the will of God, so a good father walks the path as God sets it out for him. The greatest gift any father can give to his children is lifelong fidelity to his Marriage Covenant. Children learn about love through a father's affection, prayer, honor, self-control, forgiveness and integrity.

St. Joseph showed Jesus all the natural love, all the affectionate solicitude that a father's heart can know. —Pope John Paul II

The full message shown above is on a cream 5 1/2" x 3 1/2" card. Order these cards to insert with notes, letters, payments, and to give out at church, school and family gatherings.

Cost of cards	20 for \$2.00	50 for \$4.00
including postage:	100 for \$7.00	500 for \$32.50
		1,000 for \$60.00

Persecution of Christians

Two recent deaths remind us of the present persecution of Christians in the mid-east, and the past brutality of the Communists in Asia.

In March 2008, Chaldean Catholic Archbishop Paulos Faraj Rahho was kidnapped and murdered, his body found in the city of Mosul, Iraq, a hotbed of Islamic extremism.

Dith Pran, the Cambodian-born journalist, died in a U.S. hospital on March 30 at the age of 65. In 1979 Dith was an interpreter in Phnom Penh, when the communist-led Khmer Rouge began its murderous rampage, killing nearly 2-million people. Dith coined the term "Killing Fields" as he witnessed the horrific clusters of corpses and skeletal remains during his escape. His story became the award-winning film, "The Killing Fields".