

## TWENTY-SEVENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (2017 - A)

For almost five hundred years now, the Church has set aside October as a month of special devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary under her title of Our Lady of the Rosary. In addition, October 7<sup>th</sup> is the Feast of Our Lady of the Rosary and a day of celebration in our Diocese. That's because Mary under her title of Our Lady of the Most Holy Rosary is the patroness of our entire diocese, and I might add that our Cathedral, the Bishop's Church, is dedicated to her.

For these reasons, I would like to say a few words about our Lady and about her Rosary today.

To begin with, every Catholic should have a special devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary because our Lady is the Mother of God, but she is also our Mother. She was given that role by Jesus Himself as He hung upon the cross.

As a mother, Mary loved her divine Son more than anyone else ever could. In addition, as our spiritual mother, Mary wants nothing more than to lead us into a deeper understanding and love of her divine Son, Jesus Christ, and her greatest desire is that we gain a more intense and profound relationship with her Son. Her goal is to lead us to Jesus. Her Rosary is one way in which Mary leads us to Jesus.

So what is the Rosary, and why do we Catholics have such a reverence for it? At first glance, it appears to be just a string of beads attached to a cross. However, the Rosary is much more than just a string of beads. In fact, it is not so much a thing as it is a prayer. The instrument we use for that prayer are the Rosary beads, but the beads are not the prayer.

Another thing is this. Saying the Rosary does not just mean reciting an Our Father, ten Hail Marys and a Glory Be, and then repeating the process four more times. That's because the recitation of these prayers is only part of saying the Rosary. In reality, the Rosary combines both vocal prayers (that is, prayers which we say out loud), and meditation (that is, prayers which involve us thinking about or pondering on some aspect of our faith).

For example, take the Third Joyful Mystery, the Nativity. At the same time as you say the prayers, you are supposed to be thinking about the Birth of Jesus. So you imagine what it was like that first Christmas night. You imagine Mary and Joseph in a stable with the animals and the baby Jesus wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger. You imagine the star, and the angels singing "Glory to God in the highest," and the shepherds coming to adore, and so on.

As another example, take the Fifth Sorrowful Mystery, the Crucifixion. Here you can imagine Jesus being stripped of His garments. How this ripped at His flesh because the blood from the scourging had dried to His clothes. Imagine how He was nailed to the cross. Think about the sound of the hammer blows and the laughing and mocking of the crowds. Consider how Jesus hung in agony on the cross for three hours before He died, and of how He did all of this for love of us.

I think you can see now how Mary leads us to Jesus with her Rosary. By praying the Rosary properly, by combining both vocal prayer and meditation on the mysteries, we are inspired to a greater love for God and a greater sorrow for our sins.

Now let me go over how to say the Rosary in more detail. The Rosary is divided into four sections called Mysteries; there are the Joyful Mysteries, the Luminous Mysteries (which were instituted by Saint John Paul), the Sorrowful Mysteries and the Glorious Mysteries. Each of these is divided in turn into five decades. To each decade is assigned a particular mystery. Finally, each decade begins with the Lord's Prayer, after which are said ten Hail Marys followed by one Glory Be. These prayers are counted on the beads of your Rosary.

The Rosary begins with the Sign of the Cross followed by Apostles' Creed. Next are five beads on which are said, an Our Father, three Hail Marys and a Glory Be. Often these first prayers are offered up for an increase in the divine virtues of faith, hope, and charity. At the end of each decade the Fatima Prayer is added: "O my Jesus forgive us our sins, save us from the fires of hell and lead all souls to heaven especially those most in need of Thy mercy." Next come the five decades of the Mystery selected for that day.

All of these instructions can be found on the Internet. Just type in "how to say the Rosary" and all kinds of sites will come up.

I have already mentioned that the Rosary is a powerful prayer. In addition, it's a prayer which can easily be said at home or on break at work or with your family at home. I strongly encourage you to make this a part of your daily prayer. Really, when you think about it, saying five decades of the Rosary only takes about fifteen minutes; so it's not that hard. I would also like to encourage you to come a little early before Mass to join in our Parish Rosary.

So hunt around and find out what you did with your Rosary or get one if you don't have one. If you don't know the mysteries, learn them so that you can say the Rosary well. You will be amazed at the blessings you will receive by doing so.

As proof of how powerful a prayer the Rosary is, let me conclude today by telling you the story of why October 7<sup>th</sup> was chosen as the Feast of Our Lady of the Rosary.

On that day in 1571, there was a great naval battle. It's called the Battle of Lepanto. It involved the Catholic forces organized by Pope Saint Pius V and the Moslem forces, who were the aggressors, organized by the Turkish Sultan. This battle can truly be called a turning point in human history. The battle was as important as the battle of Midway or the Battle of Gettysburg. Had things gone differently, the world would be a very different place.

Had the Catholic forces not been victorious, most likely, all of Europe would have fallen to the Turks, and we would all be Moslems worshipping Allah in Mosques and bowing to Mecca five times a day. In fact, our whole outlook on life and death and salvation would be very different.

So here's what happened. The Turkish Sultan whose name was Soliman I had decided it was time to eliminate Christianity once and for all. He vowed to repeat what had taken place at Constantinople's great church, Hagia Sophia, the Church of the Holy Wisdom. When Byzantium fell in 1453, the Moslems turned that great church into a mosque. The Sultan vowed that he would do the same with Saint Peter's Basilica and replace the cross on its dome with the Moslem crescent. So he assembled a vast armada to accomplish this.

In the face of this threat posed by the Sultan and his navy, the pope, Saint Pius V, had no place to turn; there was no earthly power able to save Christendom. All of the east, the lands where Christianity had first taken root, Egypt, Syria, the Middle East, Asia Minor and Greece were now Moslem hands. To make matters worse, northern Europe was in turmoil due to the teachings of Luther, Zwingli, Calvin and others. Many who had once been Catholic, had left the faith of their baptism to follow the new Protestant teachings. Things looked very bleak indeed.

So, the Pope turned to Our Lady. Saint Pius proclaimed a Rosary crusade. He ordered fasting, and he urged continual prayer. He sent his blessing to Don John of Austria the commander in chief of the Christian naval forces, and he also directed that any immoral soldiers be left behind.

The great battle that would decide the fate of Christian civilization took place in the Gulf of Corinth off the coast of Lepanto, a Greek seaport. That morning, on October 7<sup>th</sup>, 1571, the entire Christian army knelt and received Holy Communion. Don John gave the signal for battle by raising a banner he had received from the Pope. On it was the image of Christ crucified.

The Turkish forces formed a line in the shape of a crescent and were driven forward by a brisk wind which gave them the advantage. However, just as the battle began, the wind died, and it was followed by a strong wind which favored the Christian ships. That wind blew before the smoke and fire of battle blinding the Turkish ships.

The battle lasted from about six in the morning until darkness fell in the evening, and when it was over, the Christian forces had lost only 17 ships and 7500 men killed while the Turks had lost 15 ships and 177 captured. The Turks also lost between 20,000 and 30,000 men killed, and among them was their commanding general Ali Pasha. In addition, between 12,000 and 15,000 Christian slaves used as rowers were freed from the captured ships.

Back in Rome, hundreds of miles away, Saint Pius received a miraculous vision; he saw the victory. It is said that interrupting his work, he opened the window and looked at the sky crying out, "A truce to business; our great task at present is to thank God for the victory which He has just given the Christian army."

Saint Pius knew who was responsible for the victory. It was Our Lady. In gratitude, he instituted a feast he called "Our Lady of Victory." He declared that "By the Rosary, the darkness of heresy has been dispelled and the light of the Catholic faith shines out in all its brilliancy." Two years later, Pope Gregory XIII, changed the feast's name to Our Lady of the Holy Rosary.

This battle reminds us that in fact we are always at war, but the war is a spiritual one. It is a battle for our souls. To win this battle, we must have spiritual help and spiritual weapons, and indeed spiritual allies, and our greatest ally is the Mother of God, Mary most holy. She will not only help us to triumph over ourselves, and over the devils, but also when necessary over human adversaries who would try to destroy us or God's Holy Catholic Church.

The spiritual weapon Mary has placed in our hands is none other than the Rosary. It is tried and true; and generations have experienced this. Indeed, after the Mass, it is the most powerful of all prayers because it is directed to God through the Blessed Virgin.

Therefore, as we continue through this month of October, this month dedicated to Our Lady of the Rosary, I urge you to say the Rosary every day. Through it, we will conquer and overcome all of our spiritual enemies. Amen.