



“Hail, Full of Grace”

A Reflection on Our Blessed Mother and her

Holy Rosary

Seventh Festival Letter of

✠ Most Reverend Daniel R. Jenky, C.S.C.

BISHOP OF PEORIA

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Our Blessed Mother

Catholics love Our Lady. Churches in every era of our history and everywhere in the world have been named in her honor. Her image is revered in our places of worship, in our classrooms, and in our homes. Her name is praised in the liturgy, and her prayers are requested in a multitude of our devotions. Mary is an essential symbol of human cooperation with divine grace, and she is honored as the first and the greatest of the Lord’s disciples. This received tradition about Mary is firmly grounded both in the scriptures and in the living faith of Catholic believers.

To begin at the beginning in our understanding of Mary, we need to remember another woman mentioned in the Bible. Eve of the Old Testament is the mother of us all. Her story is a kind of parable of our sad human story. She heard the Word of God but believed the promises of the evil spirit. Through disobedience Adam and Eve brought sin and death into this world and lost paradise for their children. In the New Testament Mary is presented as the New Eve, a new mother of us all. Mary hears the Word of God and believes the promises of the Holy Spirit. With her fiat the promises of paradise are renewed for the children of grace.

Just as in the beginning, when the Holy Spirit soared over the waters of chaos and created everything out of nothing, so also in the fullness of time, the Holy Spirit overshadowed the virginity of Mary and effected a whole new creation. Through the power of the Holy Spirit Mary was made more holy than was the Holy of Holies in the Temple of Jerusalem, because He whom the whole universe could not contain was truly sheltered in her chaste womb.

Through the faith of this woman, the image and likeness of God was restored to our human nature when the Word became flesh. He who was ever consubstantial with the divinity of the Father became consubstantial with the humanity of Mary. Everything that was human in Jesus came from his mother, the perfect mirror of his face. Our Lord is rightly called the Son of God and the Son of Mary. Our Lady is rightly called the Mother of God, because the child she brought to birth was God. This saving mystery came about through the grace and mercy of Almighty God but also through the faith and free will of the woman Mary.

Although Christians have always celebrated the essential role of Mary's maternity, they have also recognized her greater dignity as a disciple. Just as Mary conceived by faith, so also did she walk by faith. Predestined in grace and preserved from every stain of sin, Mary was the true virgin daughter of Israel. She personifies the ancient faith that first received God's Law and believed in God's promises. Mary is also the beloved bride, the New Israel of God, the type and symbol of the Christian Church. She was the first to receive Jesus into her life, and she was the very first to love and serve him. Preeminent among the company of believers, Mary is everything Christians are called to become.

Filled with the Holy Spirit, Mary's soul magnifies the Lord who had done such great things for her. All generations in this new era of grace call her blessed. Mary always followed in the footsteps of Christ. What she did not understand, she pondered prayerfully in her heart. She was also the preface to all the miracles of the Savior. His first great sign was manifested at her confident request, when at the marriage feast of Cana; Jesus changed ordinary water into the new wine of the Kingdom. Even at Calvary this woman of great valor, whose heart was pierced with a sword of sorrow, remained entirely faithful. It was from the cross, as if from a lofty throne, that Our Lord gave this woman as mother to the beloved disciple, establishing a new family of faith.

On Pentecost Sunday Mary was gathered in prayer with the Apostles in the upper room. It was then that the Church, which is Christ's Body, was born into this world through another outpouring of the Holy Spirit. In the Book of Revelation, the Blessed Mother is clothed with the sun and all the stars, with the moon at her feet, symbolizing the People of God waiting with hope and expectation for the glorious Day of the Lord.

In Catholic tradition, Mary's role in our salvation is completely grounded in her relationship to her Son. In accord with the teaching of the ancient Fathers of the Church, the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council taught: "All the saving influence of the Blessed Virgin Mary originates in the Divine pleasure. This role flows from the superabundance of the merits of Christ, rests upon his mediation, and depends entirely upon it. In no way does the role of Mary impede the immediate union of the faithful with Jesus Christ. Rather Mary fosters this union with the Lord."

In Christ and in the great Communion of Saints Mary continues to pray with and for his Church. The Blessed Mother also brings the Lord to birth in the hearts of those she inspires to know, love, and serve him. When we imitate her faith and follow her example, we too can bring Christ into this passing world. When we honor Our Lady in glory as a living text of the Good News, we also catch a glimpse of our eternal destiny in the world to come.

The Holy Rosary

It is because of these deeply Marian components of our shared Catholic faith, that I have asked our Diocese to observe this year as a Year of the Rosary. By praying the Rosary of the Blessed Virgin Mary, we can in a certain sense enter into Mary's school, learning more about Jesus from Mary. We can become more fully conformed to Christ in the company of Mary. Through the heart of Mary the Rosary invites us to enter more deeply into prayer of the heart. Through faith, silence, and attentive listening the Rosary offers an opportunity for greater inward

knowledge of the Lord. As Pope John Paul II once observed, “a Rosary without contemplation is like a body without a soul.”

In meditation there must always be a certain tension between our hunger to understand and our wonder before what is truly infinite. Every Christian mystery is entirely dependent upon God’s hidden purposes. So in any authentic prayer there must always be a profound sense of humility before the boundless richness of Almighty God. John Paul II repeated the teaching of Pius XII when he described the Mysteries of the Rosary as “a compendium of the entire Gospel.” Reflecting upon the Joyful, Sorrowful, Glorious, and Luminous Mysteries is a most effective way to assimilate the grace and awesome truth of the Gospels into our everyday lives.

Patently repeating simple prayers taken almost entirely from the words of the scriptures is rather like repeating words of love. The circling of these inspired words invites us to embrace the core images of our faith and the most profound hopes of our human existence. The Rosary helps us to calm our minds that are so often impatient and distracted. The Rosary invites us to see Jesus through the luminous eyes of Mary and to rest more fully in his peace. The Rosary humbly and simply makes a space to savor the great goodness of the Lord.

The Rosary is a most accessible means of reflection and intercession. You can pray the Rosary recollected or distracted. You can pray the Rosary wide awake or half asleep. You can pray the Rosary in deep trouble or in great joy. You can pray the Rosary in churches and cathedrals, in the city or the country, at home, in cars, trains, subways, boats, or planes. The healthy and the sick can pray the Rosary. Both the young and the old can pray the Rosary, but sometimes near the end of life, the Rosary may be the only prayer some folks are still able to pray.

In its origins the Rosary is derived from the very ancient practice of counting prayers by the means of pebbles or beads. By the time of Saint Benedict and his “Rule for Monks,” the Our Father and somewhat later the Hail Mary (at least the first half of the prayer we now say) was connected with the conclusion of specific liturgical hours, and multiple repetition of these prayers were encouraged for those monks and nuns who could neither read nor chant. In the passage of time this series of prayers came to serve as a kind of psalter for the whole body of the faithful. Praying the Paters and Aves helped to mark the liturgical seasons and related personal prayers to the official prayers of the Divine Office. What eventually was called the Psalter of the Blessed Virgin Mary soon entered into the shared piety of nearly all Catholics, including priests and laity, the rich and the poor, the highly educated and the illiterate, saints and sinners.

There were and still are various traditions of this prayer associated with different religious orders, congregations, confraternities, and their related devotions. It was the Dominicans who promoted the basic form as we now know it. It was only in the late Middle Ages that this popular prayer with its prayer beads connected by a chain came to be called the Rosary; a word derived from *rosarium* or rose garden.

The Rosary appears rather frequently in religious art. In Michelangelo’s dramatic depiction of the Last Judgment in the Sistine Chapel, a Rosary can be seen pulling a sinner up from the grasp of hell. Almost every Pope since Saint Pius V and the Battle of Lepanto has

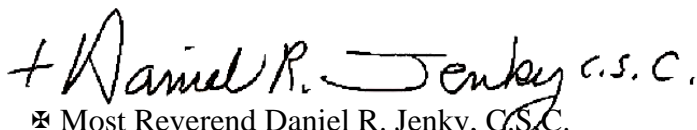
strongly recommended the Rosary and enriched this important Catholic prayer with indulgences. In every year of his long pontificate Leo XIII issued an encyclical letter promoting the Rosary. Blessed Pope John XXIII once declared that “the only wasted Rosary is the one never said.” Peoria’s own Servant of God Fulton J. Sheen encouraged: “Learn to sanctify the idle moments of life. It can be done thanks to the Rosary.” Most significantly for Catholic believers, Our Blessed Mother at Lourdes, Fatima, and in other great occurrences of vision and grace, has herself recommended this prayer as a means of conversion, renewal, and intercession.

Very sadly, fifty percent of marriages today end in divorce, but when a married couple shares even a brief daily prayer, that statistic is reduced to less than one in one thousand. Certainly if husbands and wives prayed even a part of the Rosary together, their love and commitment for one another would be enormously enriched. If children see their parents pray together, they would themselves be more easily drawn to lifelong habits of prayer and personal devotion. Father Patrick Peyton from my Holy Cross religious family insistently and accurately taught: “The family that prays together stays together.”

In the midst of culture wars, the deconstruction of marriage, a moral meltdown, the mass media’s intense hatred for the Catholic Church, the economic crisis, foreign wars, and a culture of death, perhaps we now need the Rosary in our arsenal of prayers more than ever. It is often said that more people own Bibles than read them. I am also afraid that many of the Rosaries that are blessed at Baptisms, Confirmations, First Communions, graduations, and marriages remain in their cases rather than are used for prayer. I have therefore asked that all our Catholic primary and secondary schools, religious education programs, Newman Centers, Koinonia retreats, and TEC programs, annually teach our young people how to pray the Rosary. I have also asked that all our parishes, our Catholic hospitals, Cursillo, all our adult renewal programs, Bible studies, prayer groups, RCIA programs, this year and every subsequent year, teach about the Rosary.

As a Holy Cross religious who is so undeservedly blessed to live under Mary’s loving patronage, as a priest once privileged to serve at the University of Our Lady, as a bishop whose cathedral and diocese proudly honors by name Mary’s Immaculate Conception, I entrust my ministry and my whole life to Mary’s maternal protection. With the help of God may the entire Catholic Diocese of Peoria renew our love for the Blessed Mother and our appreciation for her Holy Rosary.

Given at my Chancery,
January 4, 2009
Solemnity of the Epiphany


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How to Pray the Rosary

1. Looking at the cross, we hold it while we make the sign of the cross and pray the Apostles' Creed which is a summary of all the things we believe as Catholics.
2. On the first bead, we pray an Our Father, the prayer that Jesus taught us.
3. On each of the next three beads, we pray the Hail Mary for an increase in the theological virtues of Faith, Hope and Charity.
4. While advancing to the next bead, we pray the Glory Be.
5. On the next bead we announce the first mystery. (e.g.. Joyful) We reflect on what happened to Jesus at this time and we think about what it means in our lives today. We pray the Our Father.
6. We pray one Hail Mary on each of the next 10 beads. Then we pray the Glory Be and the Fatima Prayer.
7. On the separate bead, we announce the second mystery, reflect, and pray the Our Father.
8. We follow this pattern for each of the five mysteries around the Rosary.
9. We have now reached the end of the Rosary. On the medal that connects the beads we pray the Hail Holy Queen.
10. Make the sign of the Cross.

Prayers of the Rosary

The Apostles' Creed

I believe in God, the Father Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth; and in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord: Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary; suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried. He descended into hell; on the third day He rose again in fulfillment of the scriptures; He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence He shall come to judge the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Holy Catholic Church, the communion of Saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and life everlasting. Amen.

The Our Father

Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy Kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us, and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. Amen.

The Hail Mary

Hail Mary full of Grace, the Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou amongst women and blessed is the fruit of thy womb Jesus. Holy Mary Mother of God, pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death Amen.

The Glory Be

Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit. As it was in the beginning is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.

The Fatima Prayer

Oh my Jesus, forgive us our sins and save us from the fires of hell. Lead all souls to heaven, especially those in most need of thy mercy. Amen.

The Hail Holy Queen

Hail, Holy Queen, Mother of Mercy, our life, our sweetness and our hope! To thee do we cry, poor banished children of Eve; to thee do we send up our sighs, mourning and weeping in this valley of tears. Turn then, most gracious advocate, thine eyes of mercy toward us, and after this our exile, show unto us the blessed fruit of thy womb, Jesus. O clement, O loving, O sweet Virgin Mary!

V. Pray for us, O Holy Mother of God.

R. That we may be made worthy of the promises of Christ.

Let us pray.

O GOD, whose only begotten Son, by His life, death, and resurrection, has purchased for us the rewards of eternal life, grant, we beseech Thee, that meditating upon these mysteries of the Most Holy Rosary of the Blessed Virgin Mary, we may imitate what they contain and obtain what they promise, through the same Christ Our Lord. Amen.

The Mysteries of the Rosary

Joyful (Traditionally prayed on Monday and Saturday)

1. The Annunciation
2. The Visitation
3. The Nativity of Our Lord
4. The Presentation in the Temple
5. The Finding of the Child Jesus in the Temple

Luminous (Traditionally prayed on Thursday)

1. The Baptism in the Jordan
2. The Wedding at Cana
3. The Proclamation of the Kingdom
4. The Transfiguration
5. The Institution of the Eucharist

Sorrowful (Traditionally prayed on Tuesday and Friday)

1. The Agony in the Garden
2. The Scourging at the Pillar
3. The Crowning with Thorns
4. The Carrying of the Cross
5. The Crucifixion

Glorious (Traditionally prayed on Sunday and Wednesday)

1. The Resurrection
2. The Ascension of Our Lord
3. The Descent of the Holy Spirit
4. The Assumption of Our Lady into Heaven
5. The Coronation of the Blessed Virgin Mary