

# The Rosary

by Sebastian R. Fama

The Rosary is a popular Catholic devotion that consists of several prayers and meditations. The prayers that make up the Rosary are the Apostles Creed, The Our Father, the Hail Mary, the Glory Be, and the Hail Holy Queen. Since the prayers are said in a particular order a set of beads is used to keep track of the progress made.

The Apostles Creed is a statement of faith from the Early Church and is used as the opening prayer. The Our Father comes to us directly from Jesus in Luke 11:2-4. While reciting the Rosary, the Our Father is said six times. The Glory Be is a short prayer of praise for the three persons of the Trinity. The Glory Be is also said six times.

The Hail Mary is said a total of fifty-three times. The Hail Mary's are split up into five groups of ten with a group of three being said at the beginning of the rosary. Each decade is separated by an Our Father a Glory Be and a mystery. Some people add the Fatima Prayer after the Glory Be. The Fatima Prayer is an appeal to Jesus to forgive our sins as well as the sins of others.

There are a total of twenty mysteries and they are divided into four groups. Each group has a different theme. The day of the week determines which set you use. Eighteen deal with the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. The other two concern the Virgin Mary. There is a longer version of the Rosary which is called the Scriptural Rosary. When saying the Scriptural Rosary there is a short scripture meditation before each Hail Mary. This is in addition to the five regular meditations (the mysteries).

When saying the Rosary, it is very important to meditate on the Mysteries. The Rosary is meant to be a deeply contemplative prayer. Christian meditation draws us closer to Jesus as we contemplate His life and death. King David, "a man after God's own heart," (1 Samuel 13:14) understood the value of meditation. He wrote: "I remember the days of old, I meditate on all that thou hast done; I muse on what thy hands have wrought" (Psalm 143:5).

The Hail Mary is probably the most misunderstood Catholic prayer. It is alleged that this prayer somehow elevates Mary to a level equal to God. And that of course would be heresy. But the Hail Mary does no such thing. In fact, it is a very Scriptural prayer.

We begin by recognizing the uniqueness of Mary: "Hail [Mary], full of grace, the Lord is with thee." In doing this we are not exaggerating, as we use the words of God as spoken by the angel Gabriel in Luke 1:28. Next we utter the first recorded words of praise for Jesus in the New Testament. They come from Luke 1:42. Mary went to visit her cousin Elizabeth. Upon her arrival, Elizabeth proclaims, "Blessed art thou among women and blessed is the fruit of thy womb" [Jesus]. Finally, we ask Mary to pray for us. In short, we address Mary as God does, we praise Jesus, and we ask Mary to pray for us.

The Hail Holy Queen is used as a closing prayer. In this prayer Mary is referred to as "most gracious advocate." An advocate is just that. When someone is your advocate before God it means that they pray for you. There is no claim of divinity here just as there is no claim of divinity when we pray for each other here on earth.

Those who have gone to be with the Lord can and do pray for us. One verse of Scripture that is used in an attempt to discredit this belief is Deuteronomy 18:11. This verse condemns those who "consult the dead." But invoking the saints in heaven is not the same as consulting the dead. Reading verse 11 in context helps us to discover the real meaning of it. The New International Version words it this way:

When you enter the land the Lord your God is giving you, do not learn to imitate the detestable ways of the nations there. Let no one be found among you who sacrifices his son or daughter in the fire, who practices divination or sorcery, interprets omens, engages in witchcraft, or casts spells, or who is **a medium or spiritist or who consults the dead (Deuteronomy 18:9-11).**

What is being condemned here is the practice of the occult. Note that it says; "a medium or spiritist who consults the dead." By definition someone who practices the occult seeks power or hidden information from demons posing as departed humans. When someone asks Mary or any other saint in heaven for their prayers, they are not seeking power or hidden information, they are seeking prayers.

Because the Rosary is repetitious, reciting it is thought to be a violation of Matthew 6:7. The King James Version words it this way: "But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do, for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking."

Jesus is not condemning repetition here. He is condemning **vain repetition**. Saying "Praise God" or "Amen" can be a vain repetition if not said from the heart. Was Paul wrong in telling the Ephesians to "Address one another [in] psalms and hymns and spiritual songs" (5:19)? Are we to believe that psalms can only be recited once and that songs can only be sung once? Did God violate his own principles by allowing the 136<sup>th</sup> and the 150<sup>th</sup> Psalms into the Bible? In Psalm 136 the phrase "His steadfast love endures forever" appears 26 times (1-26). In Psalm 150 we read in a short span of six verses "praise the Lord," "praise God" or "praise him" thirteen times (1-6).

Another point needs to be made here. Jesus qualifies His statement. In condemning vain repetition. He says: "Use not vain repetitions, **as the heathen do.**" So, what exactly was it that the heathen were doing? Tim Staples notes:

We have to remember that the main idea of prayer and sacrifice among the pagans was to appease the gods so that you could go on with your own life. You had to be careful to "take care of" all of the gods by mentioning them, and saying all the right words, lest you bring a curse upon yourself.

The Greek word translated as "vain repetitions" is *battologeō* (βαττολογέω). *Battologeō* means to stammer, babble, prate, or to repeat the same things over and over mindlessly. The efficacy of your prayers is determined by your attitude, not the number of times you say them. Heartfelt prayers, even when repeated, are always acceptable to God. The Bible itself illustrates this:

In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor regarded man; and there was a widow in that city who kept coming to him and saying, "Vindicate me against my adversary." For a while he refused; but afterward he said to himself, "Though I neither fear God nor regard man, yet because this widow bothers me, I will vindicate her, or she will wear me out by her continual coming." And the Lord said, "Hear what the unrighteous judge says. And will not God vindicate his elect, who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long over them? I tell you, he will vindicate them speedily (Luke 18:1-8).

The widow's request was repeated many times. And yet Jesus uses this as a model for our own prayers. St. Monica prayed for her wayward son for 30 years. As a result, her son, St. Augustine of Hippo, converted to Christianity and became one of its greatest defenders.

Another objection to the Rosary is that there are 10 Hail Mary's said for every Our Father and Glory Be. But as we saw earlier there should be no problem with that as the Hail Mary is Biblical. And since this type of prayer is one that asks for intercession, you would expect it to focus on its purpose. And, as I think we have demonstrated, nothing in the Rosary diminishes God. When we pray to God, we call upon His power. When we petition Mary, we are asking her to call upon God's power. Every prayer said in the Rosary results in an appeal to God's power.

Catholics seek Mary's intercession because of her unique role as mother of the Church (Revelation 12:17). The apostle James wrote: "the prayer of a righteous person has great power" (James 5:16). I think it is safe to say that Mary is the most righteous of all believers. And as we saw at the wedding at Cana, her prayers can accomplish much (John 2:1-11).