

WHY THE ROSARY?

A POWERFUL PRAYER

Battle of Lepanto

On the 7th October, we celebrate the Feast of the Holy Rosary which was instituted by the Church in 1571. This was following the miraculous victory of Christians over the Muslim Turks at the Battle of Lepanto.

At this battle, a coalition of Christian ships were vastly outnumbered when having to face the naval forces of the Ottoman Empire. So, putting his trust in prayer, Pope Pius V urged all the crews to resort to praying the Rosary. He also sent word out to all of Christian Europe to join them in praying the Rosary to obtain victory. He too engaged himself in prayer by leading a Rosary procession in Rome.

The triumphant outcome of the battle was hugely significant for the Church, for if they had ended up defeated it would have meant the invasion and inevitable capture of all Europe by the Muslims and the banishment of Christianity. Certainly, thousands, upon thousands of Christians would have been slaughtered and the Islamic Ottoman Empire would have made a huge step towards world domination.

To commemorate the victory at Lepanto, which he attributed to the Blessed Virgin Mary, Pius V instituted "Our Lady of Victory" as an annual feast. However, two years later, in 1573, Pope Gregory XIII changed the title to "The Feast of the Holy Rosary."

I thought this story was important to include in our talk tonight because it is a perfect illustration of just what a powerful prayer the Rosary is. When enough people pray it together for a special cause/intention – it can change the course of global events!

The Rosary is truly a prayer that gets results!

As we heard from Tony with the example of St Dominic and his battle to overcome the Albigensian heresy, it was only after praying the Rosary that he was eventually successful.

“Suction Power”

Back in the 1980's, when I was in my 20's, I was a part time salesman for Kirby vacuum cleaners (an American company). They were very expensive vacuum cleaners (£400 then – now you can pay over £2000 +). It also shampooed carpets and could be used as a buffer and polisher for furniture, even for your car. But it's biggest selling feature was it's **SUCTION POWER**. It had the deepest and most effective suction ability than any other vacuum cleaner on the market (it could suck 3

inches deep into any carpet and it was especially good in dealing with shagpile carpets which were all the rage in the 80,s). Because it had such powerful suction it really did do a good job. It was regarded as the Rolls Royce of vacuum cleaners. Why am I talking about vacuum cleaners? Because in his book : “The Power of Positive Thinking”, Dale Carnegie writes about a Christian minister who would often speak about prayer in terms of suction. He would say that with a big problem you need a prayer with “big prayer suction”. A prayer, if you like, that can “get hold of the problem” - that can “swallow the problem up” as it were, and remove it out of the way. A big enough prayer that will overpower, uproot and get rid of whatever is threatening us. This is the kind of prayer the Rosary is – it’s a prayer with great suction power!

A PRAYER RECOMMENDED BY POPES (AND SAINTS)

St Pope John Paul II

Like many Popes before him, St Pope John Paul II was a big fan and promoter of the Rosary and constantly encouraged the faithful in the practice of praying it daily in their lives. When proclaiming October 2002 to October 2003 to be the ‘Year of the Rosary’, he released an Apostolic Letter entitled :“Rosarium Virginis Mariae” (The Rosary of the Virgin Mary). In his open words, he speaks of how influential the Holy Rosary has been in the life of the Church over the centuries. He says it is “a prayer loved by countless Saints, and encouraged by the Magisterium. Simple yet profound, it still remains, at the dawn of the third millennium, a prayer of great significance, destined to bring forth a harvest of holiness.”

He points out that though it is “Marian in character” at heart it is “a Christocentric prayer” and “has the depth of the gospel message in its entirety.” He explains that “with the Rosary the Christian sits at the school of Mary and is led to contemplate the beauty on the face of Christ and to experience the depth of his love.”

St Pope John Paul II’s devotion to Mary and the Holy Rosary was greatly influenced by St Louis Marie de Montfort who wrote a book called ‘The Secret of the Rosary’. If you wish to learn more about the Rosary, this is a very inspiring book and well worth reading. It explains what kind of prayer it is, how to recite it and why it is such a powerful prayer. It contains many quotes from different Saints and the reasons why they were such strong believers in the power of the Rosary. It also has many anecdotes about the powerful effects the Rosary has had on the lives of many different people, bringing them great blessings and graces of conversion and helping them grow in holiness.

Holding back no punches, St Louis says: “I beg you to beware of thinking of the Rosary as something of little importance – as do ignorant people and even several great but proud scholars. Far from being insignificant, the Rosary is a priceless treasure which is inspired by God.”

In his book, St Louis lists seven benefits for those who practise praying the Rosary. He says: “I should like to give you even more reason for embracing this devotion which so many great souls have practised; the Rosary recited with meditation on the mysteries brings the following marvellous results:

1. It gradually gives us a perfect knowledge of Jesus Christ.
2. It purifies our souls, washing away sin.
3. It gives us victory over our enemies.
4. It makes it easy to practise virtue.
5. It sets us on fire with love of Our Blessed Lord.
6. It enriches us with graces and merits.
7. It supplies us with what is needed to pay our debts to God and our neighbour, and finally, it obtains for us all kinds of graces from Almighty God.”

St Pope Paul VI

In 1974, St Pope Paul VI issued an Apostolic Exhortation entitled ‘*Marialis Cultus*’ (Devotion to Mary). Seven pages of it are dedicated to speaking about the Rosary with the intention of, as he puts it, to dwell on the renewal of “its pious practice”.

He describes it as a “Gospel prayer”. He says: “In the harmonious succession of the Hail Mary’s the Rosary puts before us once more the fundamental mystery of the Gospel – The Incarnation of the Word contemplated at the decisive moment of the Annunciation to Mary.” He emphasises that because the Rosary is centered on the mystery of the redemptive Incarnation, it is therefore “a prayer with a clearly Christological orientation.”

Addressing one of the biggest criticisms that is levelled against the Rosary, i.e. it is just a meaningless circle of repetitive prayers, St Pope Paul VI points out that the element of contemplation is absolutely essential to the Rosary. He stresses that “without this the Rosary is a body without a soul, and its recitation is in danger of becoming a mechanical repetition of formulas and of going counter to the warning of Christ.... ‘And in praying do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do; for they think they will will be heard for their many words.’ (Mat 6:7). He then beautifully explains how it should be prayed “By its nature the recitation of the Rosary calls for a quiet rhythm and lingering pace, helping the individual to meditate on the mysteries of the Lord’s life as seen through the eyes of her who was closest to the Lord.”