

logo©2004 by R Fulwiler

# Doing Rite!™

The Institute for Christian Formation, Inc.

Text©2007 by Sandra A. Chakeres. All rights reserved.

The Rosary

## The Rosary

Many Catholic Christians grew up praying the rosary. While not unique to Roman Catholics, the rosary is generally considered by many non-Catholics to be a very Catholic tradition.

The devotion of the rosary has been part of our tradition for almost a thousand years, having developed in the second millennium of Christianity. The Dominican Religious Order did much to spread the popularity of this devotion, and therefore the rosary is often attributed to their founder, Saint Dominic, who died in the year 1221.

The Psalms have often been referred to as the “prayer book” of Christians. In fact, the Psalms are part of the Hebrew Scriptures, and we get these beautiful song prayers from our Jewish brothers and sisters. For centuries, the psalms have been prayed daily in the Liturgy of the Hours. There are 150 Psalms in the Bible. Centuries ago, those who couldn’t read to pray these psalms began substituting the Lord’s Prayer for the Psalms. By the 12th century, the Hail Mary prayer replaced the Lord’s Prayer in this regard, and Christians who couldn’t read the Psalms were praying 150 Hail Mary prayers. This is why the rosary is sometimes called the “Psalter of Mary”, referring to the 150 Psalms. Christians used prayer beads to count the number of prayers recited. The 150 prayers were broken down into three groups of 50, and these 50 were then broken down into groups of ten each, or a decade. For each decade of the rosary, Christians reflected on an event, or “mystery”, in the life of Jesus and Mary. There were five Joyful Mysteries, five Sorrowful Mysteries and five Glorious Mysteries. In this third millennium of Christianity, Pope John Paul II gave the Church five new mysteries to meditate upon, the Luminous Mysteries. With twenty mysteries, it is not as obvious to see the connection between the rosary and the Psalms. But the “Psalter of Mary” remains a beautiful devotion.



## Rosary Facts

- \* The rosary is a private devotion which involves the practice of repetitive prayer using prayer beads.
- \* The mysteries of the rosary help us meditate on the major events in the life of Jesus and Mary.
- \* The Rosary is a Scriptural devotion.
- \* There are four groups of mysteries of the rosary: Joyful, Luminous, Sorrowful, and Glorious.



## Devotions

The rosary has been so popular that many Catholics are surprised to find out that the rosary is not part of the official “prayer of the Church.” Unlike the celebration of the sacraments and the Liturgy of the Hours, for example, there is no official “rite” for praying the rosary. The rosary is a private devotion. Devotions such as the rosary, or the Stations

of the Cross, while playing a role in our personal spiritual life, are not included in our official Church liturgical books.

While families and groups of Catholics might come together to pray the rosary, as a devotion the rosary was never meant to replace the public prayer of the Church. This is why, for example, the rosary would never be prayed during Mass.



### Inside this issue:

|  |   |
|--|---|
| Joyful Mysteries                       | 2 |
| The Rosary and the Liturgical Calendar | 2 |
| Luminous Mysteries                     | 2 |
| Sorrowful Mysteries                    | 3 |
| Praying with Scripture                 | 3 |
| Glorious Mysteries                     | 3 |
| Meditation                             | 4 |

## The Joyful Mysteries

For each decade of the rosary, we meditate on an event (a mystery) in the life of Jesus and Mary. These are not mysteries in the sense of a puzzle that needs to be solved, but rather as an event we are invited to enter into more deeply. The first group of Mysteries is called the Joyful Mysteries: the Annunciation of Our Lord, the Visitation, the Nativity of Jesus, the Presentation of Jesus in the Temple,

and the Finding of Jesus in the Temple.

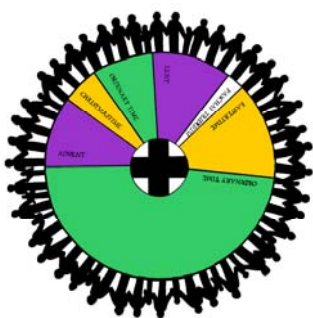
The Hail Mary is the most repeated prayer of the rosary. This prayer comes from the first two joyful mysteries. At the Annunciation, the Angel Gabriel greets Mary with the salutation, "hail", and then tells Mary that "the Lord is with you" (Luke 1:28). At the Visitation, Elizabeth greets Mary with the words, "blessed are you among women, and

blessed is the fruit of your womb" (Luke 1:42).

While we often refer to the rosary as a Marian devotion, it is essentially Christ-centered. Think of the Visitation. Most people think the key figures here are Mary and Elizabeth. But from an Orthodox perspective, the two key figures are Jesus and John the Baptist, the babies in the wombs of their mothers. It is their first encounter, an encounter of the Old Law and the New!



## The Rosary and the Liturgical Calendar



Art ©2004 by R. Fulwiler.  
Used with permission

While some Christians pray all twenty decades of the rosary each day, others try to pray one set of mysteries daily. The suggested manner of praying the groups of Mysteries is to pray the Joyful Mysteries on Monday and Saturday, the Luminous Mysteries on Thursday, the Sorrowful Mysteries on Tuesday and Friday, and the Glorious Mysteries on Wednesday and Sunday.

Already here you can see some connections with the Liturgical Calendar, or the Christian week. We are praying the Sorrowful Mysteries on Friday, the day our Lord died, and the Glorious Mysteries on Sunday, the day of Christ's resurrection.

Certain Seasons of the Church Year also lend themselves well to certain groups of Mysteries. The Joyful

Mysteries, centered on the Incarnation of Christ, are particularly suited to the Advent and Christmas Seasons. The Sorrowful Mysteries provide a sobering Lenten meditation. The Glorious Mysteries are well-suited to the glorious fifty days of Easter. And the Luminous Mysteries can help us meditate on Christ during Ordinary Time.

## The Luminous Mysteries

The devotion of the rosary was an important part of Pope John Paul II's personal prayer life. He declared October 2002-October 2003 the Year of the Rosary. At that time he wrote an Apostolic Letter, *Rosarium Virginis Mariae (On the Most Holy Rosary)*. This short, easily readable document is certainly recommended for anyone wishing to enter more deeply into the praying of the rosary.

At this same time, Pope John Paul II gave the Church five new mysteries of the rosary, the *Luminous Mysteries*, or the Mysteries of Light. These mysteries help us meditate upon the public ministry of Jesus.

The Luminous Mysteries are the Baptism in the Jordan, the Manifestation of Jesus at the Wedding of Cana, the Proclamation of the Kingdom of God, the Transfiguration, and, the Institution of the Eucharist. The Mysteries of Light certainly help us meditate upon many years in Christ's life that had not been explicit in the previous three groups of mysteries. Prior to the Mysteries of Light, we had jumped from Jesus as a child in the Temple to his Passion, Death and Resurrection.

Now those who pray the twenty mysteries of the rosary are able to meditate upon more major events in the life of Jesus and Mary.



## The Sorrowful Mysteries

The Paschal Mystery, the Passion, Death, Resurrection and Ascension into Spirit-filled Glory of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, is at the heart of our Christian faith. And the Sorrowful, and subsequently the Glorious, Mysteries of the rosary help us meditate upon the core events of this Paschal Mystery.

The Sorrowful Mysteries of the Rosary are the Agony in the Garden, the Scourging at the Pillar, the Crowning with Thorns, the Carrying of the Cross, and the Crucifixion. The Sorrowful Mysteries provide us with an opportunity to slow down and meditate in a profound way on the events which took place in the last hours of Jesus' earthly life. The other three groups of mysteries reflect upon events which took place over the course of a few years, maybe even a few decades. But in the Sorrowful Mysteries we are dealing with events which took place in less than a day.

The Sorrowful Mysteries bring to mind another private spiritual devotion, the Stations of the Cross. From the earliest days of Christianity, pilgrims would journey to Jerusalem to follow Jesus' footsteps through his passion and death. And in meditating on the Sorrowful Mysteries, we too, are able to mentally and spiritually be present with Christ as we enter prayerfully into some of the key moments of his passion and death. The first mystery sets the tone, as Christ in Gethsemane asked his disciples to be alert and pray.



## Praying with Scripture

The rosary is a very Scriptural, or Biblical, devotion. We have already seen how some of the words from the *Hail Mary* prayer come directly from Scripture. The same, of course, is true of the Lord's Prayer, the prayer which Jesus taught us.

And in meditating upon the events in the life of Jesus and Mary via the mysteries of the rosary, we are reminded once again of just how deeply rooted in Scripture is this devotion. Of the twenty mysteries of the rosary, all but two are very explicitly found in the Gospels.

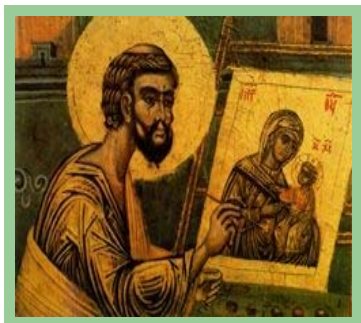
In his Gospel, Luke provides us with a portrait of Mary that is not found in the

other Gospels. Perhaps this is why tradition tells us that it was Luke who painted the first icon of Mary. And it is in Luke's Gospel that we find accounts of more of the events of the mysteries of the rosary than in any of the other Gospels.

In fact, of the five Joyful Mysteries, all except the Nativity of Jesus are unique to Luke's Gospel.

As for the Luminous Mysteries, the Manifestation of Jesus at the Wedding at Cana is unique to John's Gospel.

And, as we will see below, the last two of the Glorious Mysteries are not found in the Gospels, but have a long history in the tradition of our Church.



**St. Luke Painting the First Icon  
Serbian (1672-73)  
Moraca Monastery,  
Montenegro, Serbia**

## The Glorious Mysteries

In the Glorious Mysteries, we meditate upon the fulfillment of Jesus' Paschal Mystery - his resurrection and ascension into Spirit-filled Glory. The first three Glorious Mysteries are the Resurrection, the Ascension, and the Descent of the Holy Spirit.

The final two Glorious Mysteries are the Assumption of Mary, and the Coronation (Crowning) of Mary.

While these final two mysteries are not explicitly found in the Gospels, they have been celebrated by the community of faith for centuries and are part of our faith tradition. In fact, the Assumption (called the Dormition by Eastern Christians) has been celebrated in both the Eastern and the Western Church since the 5th century. In 1950 Pope Pius XII declared the Assumption of

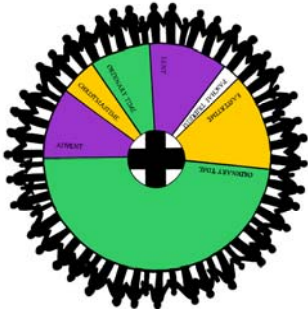
Mary to be infallible dogma.

The Glorious Mysteries complete our meditation on the life of Jesus and Mary, and bring us full-circle. The rosary began with the Joyful Mysteries, the first being the annunciation to Mary of Jesus' birth. We conclude the rosary with Mary reigning as Queen of Heaven, where her son is Christ the King. And we know in faith that the eternal glory Mary now shares with Jesus will someday be ours, as well.



# The Institute for Christian Formation

P.O. Box 20174  
Cincinnati, OH 45220



logo ©2004 R Julewiler

E-mail: [info@instituteforchristianformation.org](mailto:info@instituteforchristianformation.org)

Visit us on the Web:  
[www.instituteforchristianformation.org](http://www.instituteforchristianformation.org)

***Doing Rite!™*** is a mark of The Institute for Christian Formation, Inc. These resources are created as a tool for reflection to aid liturgical formation. They focus on ritual and gesture we use in our prayer and liturgy, and on the liturgical rites of the Roman Catholic Church.

The Institute for Christian Formation, Inc. (ICF) is a non-profit corporation that assists the faithful – families, catechists, parishes, schools, etc. – with holistic faith formation centered on Jesus Christ revealing himself to us in Word (Scripture), Sacrament, and the Liturgical Calendar. Founded in 2004, the ICF strives to assist Catholic Christians in celebrating and handing on faith in a manner authentic to our Roman Catholic tradition.

Text ©2007 by Sandra A. Chakeres. Cincinnati, Ohio.  
All rights reserved.

## Meditation

I was twelve years old the first time I traveled to Greece, the country where my paternal grandparents were born and grew up prior to immigrating to the United States. I have many wonderful memories of that trip, as well as subsequent visits to Greece. And one memory that stands out is that everywhere I looked the Greek men, especially the older ones, always had beads in their hands. As they walked and as they talked, their hands were often behind their backs fingering their “worry beads”, as these beads were called.

My maternal grandparents were also immigrants, but they were Roman Catholic. Growing up, it was a usual sight to see these relatives, especially the older women, holding and fingering rosary beads. As far back as I can remember in my childhood, it was a nightly ritual in my home to kneel by the bedside with my mother leading the rosary.

As an adult, I have both rosary beads and worry beads in my home. But it was only recently that I really made the connection between the two - both are a form of meditation. The beads not only provide a means of “counting”, they also provide a focal point, and that is calming and quieting in a world that can be so hectic and noisy.

We often think of the rosary, or “praying the beads”, as specifically Roman Catholic. Yet other Christian denominations also use a rosary in their prayer. For example, if you were to “Google” an Anglican rosary, you would find many sites on how to pray this rosary and where to purchase the rosary beads. And Orthodox Christians use a prayer rope, with knots, to pray. As they finger the knots in the rope, just as we would finger the rosary beads, they repetitively pray the Jesus Prayer, “*Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the Living God, have mercy on me.*”



Meditation is neither a new, nor a specifically Christian, prayer form. From the dawn of time, meditation has been practiced. And it continues to be practiced by people of every religion on earth, and even by many who claim no religious affiliation. It is through meditation that we leave the periphery and enter into the depth, the core. And in a society that can be so shallow, that is very good, indeed!