



LIGHT & LIFE

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A TIME OF GRACE

By Fr. Joseph Sergott, O.P.

We live in a time of grace. —That’s right, this is a time of grace for the Church.

We have been besieged by scandals of sexual abuse by bishops, both with minors and adults, and the covering up of that abuse by many other cardinals and bishops. There are factions within the Church opposing each other in open hostility. There is a dearth in leadership. There are many bishops, priests and laity alike who don’t like the leadership of Pope Francis and are very angry with him. Then there are those who defend his decisions and his pontificate. The crisis seems to be more severe here in the United States where we are also observing the left and right warring in the political sphere. The Church is in rocky waters: she is being attacked by her enemies (as usual), but she also suffers because many of her members are warring against each other or living sinful lives. It is indeed a difficult time for the Church.

Nevertheless, I repeat, we live in a time of grace.

St. Paul says, “Where sin increased, grace overflowed all the more” (Rom 5:20). Thus, even though we are overwhelmed by the onslaught of human sin and error—and let us not overlook our own participation in this—we should hold fast to the grace that is present to us and that anchors the Church. Why should we be so hopeful? Because we do not stand alone. Jesus Christ stands with us, even in our sins. The death of Jesus reminds us of how the Lord has responded to our sinfulness, and his death on the Cross continues to be a source of grace for the Church:

“For Christ, while we were still helpless, died at the appointed time for the ungodly. Indeed, only with difficulty does one die for a just person, though perhaps for a

good person one might even find courage to die. But God proves his love for us in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us. How much more then, since we are now justified by his blood, will we be saved through him from the wrath. Indeed, if, while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, how much more, once reconciled, will we be saved by his life.

Not only that, but we also boast of God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.” (Rom 5:6-11)

In her long history, the Church has often sailed through rocky waters. This is not the first time, nor will it be the last. However, in times like this we should ask ourselves, “How do we move forward as a Church?” I believe that it is by living our faith daily in a tangible way and by striving for personal holiness.

Too many people put their faith in the clergy. Then, when the clergy don’t live up to our expectations we begin doubting the Lord. The clergy should be held to a higher standard—and the laity have the right to challenge them in that regard; however, each person should have their faith grounded in

Jesus Christ. People whom we look up to and count on can fail us, but if we put our faith in the Lord, then we stand on solid ground.

Don’t forget the words of Our Lord, “Everyone who listens to these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock. The rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and buffeted the house. But it did not collapse; it had been set solidly on rock. And everyone who listens to these words of mine but does not act on them will be like a fool who built his house on sand. The rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and buffeted the house. And it collapsed and was completely ruined.” (Matthew 7:24-27)

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Christ Carrying the Cross
Giovanni Maineri - 1506

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THEOLOGY FOR THE LAITY

A Mystery in Mysteries

By Fr. Bryan Kromholtz, O.P.

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In his Apostolic Letter on the Most Holy Rosary (*Rosarium Virginis Mariae*, October 16, 2002), Pope Saint John Paul II introduced a new set of mysteries to be contemplated while praying the Rosary. The letter drew renewed attention to the mysteries of the life of Christ, both to the traditional schema and to the "Luminous" series recently added. As those praying the Rosary, we have had to reconsider the selection or distribution of mysteries; it is well for us also to ponder the overall meaning and purpose of meditating on mysteries while praying. In the context of the Rosary, what is a "mystery"?" How does a mystery help us pray? Why should we meditate upon the events of the life of Jesus, while praying the Rosary?

To begin to answer such questions, a word about prayer in general is in order. Prayer is more God's work than ours. Certainly, we do many things in prayer: we offer words, postures, gestures, inward intentions, etc., lifting of our mind and heart to God as expressions of our own devotion toward God. However, our primary attitude in prayer must be receptive and responsive, for "God calls man first." (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2567; see also 2558-2566) If we call out to God in prayer, it is because God has first called us to prayer. To pray is first to listen to God, to be attentive to what God has to say to us, to listen to Him, allowing him to show Himself to us and to enlighten us.

How, then, are we to "listen" to God? To consider how to listen to God, we must first reflect upon the many ways God has already spoken to us. As recounted in the Sacred Scriptures, He reveals to us many things: what we are to do, what we are to say to Him in worship, what He has done for us, and, above all, Who He is. He has spoken to us most clearly and completely by sending his Son, Jesus Christ. "In times past, God spoke in partial and various ways to our ancestors through the prophets; in these last days, He spoke to us through a Son, whom he made heir of all things and through whom he created the universe." (Hebrews 1:1-2).

Citing this text, the Second Vatican Council, in its Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation (*Dei Verbum*), has taught that Jesus Christ is "both the mediator and the fullness of all revelation" (no. 2), for to see Jesus is to see His Father (John 14:9). Jesus, in his Person, in all that He said and did, is the fullness of revelation, for he "perfected

revelation by fulfilling it through his whole work of making Himself present and manifesting Himself: through His words and deeds, His signs and wonders, but especially through His death and glorious resurrection from the dead and final sending of the Spirit of truth." (*Dei Verbum* no. 4) Jesus Christ Himself, in the total fact of his presence, is God's fullest revelation of Himself. In Christ, revelation is so complete that there is no need for us to wait for any further message from God that is destined for the whole Church or world; so "we now await no further new public revelation" until He comes again (*Dei Verbum* no. 4).

Thus, the most complete account of what has been revealed by God is Jesus Himself. That is, the best way for us to "listen" to God, is truly to "listen" to this entire life of Jesus, who is the Word spoken to man – the Word made flesh, Who dwelt among us. Meditating in prayer on the life of Christ – and on Mary's life as proclamation of his – is a most fitting way for us to listen to God, because meditating on Jesus's life and work is meditation on what God has said to us, both about Who God is and about what He has done for us. Even the very name of his Son, Jesus, tells us this twin mystery: "God saves."

Now, for us to receive God's revelation of Himself involves much more than what happens when we learn about other things. Our learning about the things of the world can vary greatly in depth and breadth, from sensing the world around us and hearing reports of very ordinary facts, to learning the most subtle of theories by undertaking an educational program lasting many years. Perhaps the most profound kind of learning in the world happens in our encounters with other persons, particularly with those closest to us: friends, family members, and spouses. We learn about them, we come to know them, and they reveal themselves to us through what they say and how they act. However, we can never claim to know in a complete way even one other person. No matter how close we become to another human being, the full reality of the other person will always remain beyond our comprehensive grasp. If that is true even of coming to understand one other human person in our world, it is much more true of approaching a knowledge of the living God.

Indeed, because God is infinitely beyond what our finite minds can grasp, whatever we learn of God, even when he reveals himself, remains for us only partly comprehended, because of our limitations. Indirectly, we gain knowledge of Him through creation. Yet we have something more. God has revealed himself to us, time and again, from Adam to Abraham to Moses and the Prophets. In this way, He tells us about Himself. Finally, in the most explicit way possible for us, God revealed himself by sending his Son, Jesus Christ, Who became flesh and dwelt among us: "What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we looked upon and touched

with our hands concerns the Word of life— for the life was made visible; we have seen it and testify to it.” (1 John 1:1-2) We have heard the Word and seen the Word made flesh. Still, in Jesus, there remains a depth that will not be exhausted, “the mystery of God, Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Colossians 2:2-3). These “hidden” treasures within the mystery of God are to be pondered in what has been revealed of Christ himself. This is the essence of mystery: it is that which is made known and intelligible, but whose inner essence remains beyond reach. The Latin word “sacrament” names the same reality: what is felt, heard, seen, touched, tasted – but which also remains beyond the capacity of the created spirit. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (nos. 512-521) states that Christ’s “whole life” is a mystery of redemption (no. 517). This is the mystery that we allow to penetrate our hearts in the praying of the Rosary.

But if Christ’s whole life is a mystery, why do we meditate on such specific, varying events in the life of Christ when praying the Rosary? Why do we not simply meditate on the life of Christ as a whole? Why should it be important to meditate on certain aspects of the life of Christ?

This brings us to a reflection upon our own humanity and its limitations in the face of mystery. We human beings are not capable of simultaneously thinking about all the things we know. Instead, we consider things a few at a time, grouping some things together, relating to others, making comparisons... and on and on. This is true of anything that we care to ponder in any depth. When the Subject upon which we are meditating is the mystery of Christ Himself, we must, all the more, take our time with the various aspects. We simply cannot take in, at once, all the ways in which our Lord’s life is a pattern for our life, all the implications of our Lord’s saving work for us, or all the wonders of God Himself. Considering and pondering, one after the other, the many ways we have seen the God-made-man act and work among us helps us to digest, spiritually, the food that is his Word – slowly, calmly, so that we can truly be nourished by it. It is no surprise then, that the same Catechism that speaks of the “mystery” of the whole life of Christ will go on to name specific aspects of his life as aspects of that mystery: the blood of his cross, his Incarnation, his obedience, his words, his healings and exorcisms, and his Resurrection (CCC no. 517), speaking also, in various places, about certain stages of the “mysteries” of his life: the Mysteries of his Infancy and Hidden Life, the Mysteries of his Public Life, and of course the Paschal Mystery (see 517-571, *passim*).

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**Rend your hearts, not your garments,
and return to the LORD, your God,
for he is gracious and merciful, slow
to anger, abounding in steadfast
love . . . (Joel 2:13)**

What would the Blessed Virgin say about the Mysteries?

by Fr. Bryan Kromholz, O.P.

When we pray the Rosary, we meditate on significant events or “mysteries” in the life of Jesus Christ, and in the life of his mother, Mary – focusing on one mystery at a time. Each mystery contains within it an inexhaustible superabundance of meaning. This is why it is fruitful for us to ponder the same mysteries over and over, in prayer.

But *how* should we ponder them? If we could ask Mary directly, she could enlighten us about any mystery, because she could see it in light of her vision of the eternal Word, in Whom is all wisdom and insight. This is not a privilege that is available to us yet. However, by the grace of the Holy Spirit, we, too, have some grasp of the Word, through faith (2 Corinthians 5:7). Thus, the Church teaches that we are to interpret the Scriptures – and, by extension, any aspect of our faith – in the light of the content and unity of Scripture, the living Tradition of the whole Church, and the “analogy of faith,” which is “the coherence of the truths of faith among themselves and within the whole plan of Revelation” (CCC 112-114). That is, we are to try to see how the mysteries of faith all “cohere” with one another, fitting together consistently. For example, in considering the mystery of the twelve-year-old Jesus teaching in the Temple, we are not to consider the incident in isolation, drawing whatever conclusions we can concoct. So, we are obviously *not* to draw the lesson that just any boy should keep his parents uninformed of his whereabouts – because this would contradict the commandment, taught elsewhere in Scripture and by the Tradition, to “honor your father and mother.” Still less are we to conclude that our Lord himself was careless – for this would not be in harmony with his status as Son of God, Who, even in his humanity, was like us in all things *but sin* (e.g., 2 Corinthians 5:21, Hebrews 4:15, 1 Peter 2:22). Neither of these conclusions would accord with our faith as a whole.

Instead, let us consider how it may indeed be consistent with Scripture and Tradition that Jesus “had to be in his Father’s house.” Jesus’ behavior may remind us of the first commandment: to love God above all else. Given Jesus’ status as the only begotten Son of God, his actions show us clearly that his relation to his Father surpasses in importance any earthly relation – including his relation with his earthly father, St. Joseph. Thus, we see the connections among many mysteries of faith: Jesus’ divinity, the commandments, the events of the Gospel, etc. For when we ponder what Christ has done for us in the light of the *whole* of our faith, we are approaching what Mary does: pondering all these things in our heart – a heart enlightened by the *whole* Word of God. ■

A Mystery in Mysteries (continued from page 3)

Even the best of us, in our best moments, then, have limitations in what we can contemplate, because our human intellect is limited. But there is a further reason for us to take our time with the mysteries of Christ: none of us is entirely balanced in our life of faith. None of us, at any one time, is in need of precisely the same aspect of the Gospel to the same degree. Some are more attuned to activity, others to contemplation; some are more ready to be joyful in celebrating the wonders of God's love, while others, in more sorrowful moments, need comfort in the face of pain or loss, and the reminder that, in the Cross, suffering can be redemptive. All of us need forgiveness, but some have more often been victims of others' sins; still others need to apologize to someone. Given the limitations of each of us, there is a wisdom and balance in the distribution of the mysteries: the Rosary offers a comprehensive and balanced presentation of the life of Christ. The mysteries of the Rosary allow us to focus our attention on this aspect or that aspect of Christ's life and work among us. In this way, the Rosary is something like the liturgical year, over the course of which the church celebrates the Annunciation, the Birth of Christ, his Baptism, Crucifixion, Resurrection, and the outpouring of his Spirit at Pentecost, to name only some of the prominent observances. It is this question of balance that led St. John Paul to propose the Luminous Mysteries as a certain "complement" to the form of praying the Rosary that had become generally established with the Church's approval. The contemplation of this new set of mysteries, he stated, would allow the Rosary "to become more fully a 'compendium of the Gospel.'" (*Rosarium Virginis Mariae*, 19, citing St. Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Marialis Cultus* [2 February 1974], 42). While the mysteries cannot replace the Gospel, they allow its breadth and depth to sink in, partly because they offer a comprehensive view of the whole of Christ's life and work, one mystery at a time.

So, those meditating in prayer upon the mysteries of the Most Holy Rosary, by the grace of God, are led, step by step, to contemplate the entire Gospel of Christ Himself and to conform their lives to Him, in order to be brought to the eternal life toward which his mysteries point. That is, they are led to "imitate what they contain and obtain what they promise." In this way, those praying the Rosary "travel" with the Blessed Virgin Mary on a kind of pilgrimage with Christ, Who, being the Truth of God, is also the Way to God, thus bearing in Himself what the mysteries of the Rosary promise: eternal Life (see John 14:6). ■

Note from the Director

Dear faithful supporters of the Rosary Center & Confraternity, we are grateful for your support. We could not fulfill our Mission if not for our benefactors. After decades of constant use, the Rosary Center, the home of the Rosary Confraternity, is greatly in need of renovation. Please consider making a special gift to help make badly needed repairs, and to refurbish the offices, chapel and kitchen. Thank you for your generosity!

Fr. Joseph Sergott, O.P.

For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life. (John 3:16)

A Time of Grace (continued from page 1)

Thus, even though we are presently beset by sin, evil, discord, scandal and disobedience, God's grace is enough for us! Therefore, the grace that flows from Christ's death on the Cross is enough for us to persevere and trust in the Lord. The Lord has things in hand even though we may not.

It is important though for each of us to focus on living our own faith. If we call out others for not living the faith and we don't live holy lives either, what we say and do rings empty.

Recall the imagery of Psalm 1:

Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, nor stand in the way of sinners, nor sit in company with scoffers. Rather, the law of the LORD is his joy; and on his law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted near streams of water, that yields its fruit in season; its leaves never wither; whatever he does prospers. (Psalm 1: 1-3)

In order to build our house on solid ground, we need to stretch our roots in the Catholic faith by attending Mass daily, if possible; scheduling daily quality prayer time; reading and reflecting upon the Holy Scriptures; going to confession at least monthly, and more if needed; being active in our parish; volunteering in serving the poor or the vulnerable in some capacity—there are so many places and ways in which we could impact people's lives; and studying and reflecting upon the teachings of our Catholic faith. Like the tree whose roots are nourished by the underground stream, let us stretch our roots deep within God's grace; otherwise we will not hold up amidst the storm.

In our struggle of faith, we can always look to the Blessed Virgin Mary, for when almost all of the disciples fled in Jesus' final agony on the Cross, his Mother stood at his feet and carried the faith of the Church through until Easter Sunday. Let us ask the Blessed Virgin to accompany us now in our Church and help us to ground ourselves in the grace that only comes from her Son.

Let us heed the words of St. Bernard of Clairvaux:

If the winds of temptation arise; If you are driven upon the rocks of tribulation look to the star, call on Mary; If you are tossed upon the waves of pride, of ambition, of envy, of rivalry, look to the star, call on Mary. Should anger, or avarice, or fleshly desire violently assail the frail vessel of your soul, look at the star, call upon Mary. ■

