

# THE ROSARY

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Voice of the Rosary Confraternity

# LIGHT & LIFE

FATHER REGINALD MARTIN, O.P., *DIRECTOR*

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## FROM THE DIRECTOR

The days of Lent are a time of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving, the traditional practices by which we strive to unite ourselves with the Christ who endured hunger for our sake, taught us how to pray, and gave His very life for our salvation.

These days of sober colors and liturgical restraint are an essential part of our spiritual lives, and as we look forward to our celebrations of the Lord's Resurrection and Divine Mercy, we realize that Easter is the goal of a pilgrimage we began on Ash Wednesday. The pilgrimage ends calmly enough in a garden, but we get there by way of a desert and all the sad confusion and noise of Calvary.

Many crucifixes show a skull and crossbones under the feet of the crucified Jesus. These are a chilling tribute to our First Parents, and they remind us that Our Savior is the New Adam. The Resurrection takes place in a garden (and Mary Magdalen mistakes the Risen Jesus for a gardener) so we may recall what took place in another garden, where the first gardeners failed to live up to their noble calling.

These days of prayer and fasting give us an opportunity to undo some of the harm we have suffered as a result of our First Parents' pride and disobedience. These days end with the joy of Easter, but unless we take Lent seriously, and embrace its discipline, our celebration of Easter is somewhat hollow. Dominican saint, Rose of Lima (1586-1617), said, "*without the cross there is no road to heaven,*" and these words remind us that the events of Holy Week did not occur once only or in only one place: they are eternal events that must become part of the landscape of our hearts.

No other time of the Church year calls us quite so clearly to conform our lives to the example we receive from Christ. The Rosary is a prayer for all times and seasons, but it is an especially valuable aid during the days of Lent and Easter, when the liturgy calls us to a special participation in Our Lord's saving death and triumphant Resurrection.



## THE RESURRECTION

*Silhouette by Sr. Jean Dorcy, O.P.*

## LENT AND ALMSGIVING

In his 2008 Lenten message, Pope Benedict XVI identified almsgiving as "*...a specific way to assist those in need and, at the same time, an exercise in self-denial to free us from attachment to worldly goods.*"

The Pontiff praised almsgiving as one of the traditional tasks that "*...accompany the faithful in [the]...process of interior renewal,*" and went on to explain that the practice of helping the poor can be a productive first step for those who feel alienated from God and the practice of their faith.

The Holy Father distinguished almsgiving from "*mere philanthropy,*" calling it "*a concrete expression of charity, a theological virtue that demands inner conversion to love of God and neighbor, in imitation of Jesus Christ.*"

Fr. Reginald Martin, director of the Rosary Confraternity, feels the impact of these words. "They remind us how much we depend on our friends," he says, "and how their generosity allows us to offer the consolation of the Rosary to so many who are seeking an anchor for their lives." Fr. Reginald added, "I hope our friends realize that their support of our work is one more way they imitate Mary, by giving flesh and blood, and a human face to God's Word."

## THE ROSARY LIGHT & LIFE

Rosary Center, PO Box 3617, Portland OR 97208

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## EASTER AND THE DIVINE MERCY

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TO BE OFFERED FOR YOUR INTENTIONS

# THEOLOGY FOR THE LAITY

## The “Hail Mary”

By Father Reginald Martin, O.P.

### SCRIPTURAL BASIS OF THE PRAYER

The prayer we call the “Hail Mary” has evolved over time. The first two sentences (beginning with the angel’s greeting and closing with Elizabeth’s words, “*blessed is the fruit of thy womb*”) are taken directly from the Scripture (Lk. 1:28). The name of Jesus, to identify Mary’s Son, was added in the 13th Century, and the closing petitions, in which we acknowledge Mary as the Mother of God, and beg her prayers, were added in the 16th Century.

### A PART OF EARLY PUBLIC WORSHIP

The opening words of the Hail Mary were part of the Church’s public worship by the 7th Century, and St. Gregory the Great included them as the Offertory verse for the Fourth Sunday of Advent. However, these words did not assume the form of a separate prayer until several centuries later, probably an outgrowth of monastic spirituality. By the end of the 12th Century, however, the bishop of Paris ordered his clergy to make certain the faithful were as well acquainted with the “Salutation of the Blessed Virgin” as they were with the words of the Creed and the Lord’s Prayer.

### EVOLUTION OF THE PRAYER

Initially, the words “Hail Mary,” etc. retained their character as a greeting, so the words often accompanied a genuflection or bow to honor the Blessed Virgin. As these exercises took more formal shape, we can probably see a connection with the form of the Rosary that we know today. One 12th Century saint repeated the words 150 times each day, kneeling one hundred times, and prostrating for fifty. St. Louis of France (1226 – 1270) knelt, stood, and then knelt again as he said the prayer. His biographers state he repeated this action fifty times each night, in addition to his other prayers.

### A PRAYER OF PENANCE

Because such activity can soon become tiring, the Hail Mary often assumed a penitential character when monastic communities adopted the practice of attaching physical action to the prayer. Nevertheless, the practice was apparently widespread, and those who embraced it felt it reflected, on earth, the ceaseless hymns of praise the saints and angels offer in heaven.

### DEVELOPMENT OF THE PRESENT PRAYER

The Hail Mary began to assume its present form in the 14th and 15th centuries, as individuals added some

sort of petition to the angel’s words of greeting. Initially, the words of petition reflected the personal devotion of those who said the prayer, but a prayer for help at the time of death gradually became the norm. The form of today’s prayer can be found in breviaries used in religious communities as early as 1514.

### THE COUNCIL OF TRENT

The catechism of the Council of Trent (1545 – 1563) embraced the “Hail Mary” as we know it, applauding it as the organic effort of the Church to complete what the Scripture initiated.

*Most rightly has the Church of God added to this thanksgiving, petition also and the invocation of the most holy Mother of God, thereby implying that we should piously and suppliantly have recourse to her in order that by her intercession she may reconcile God with us sinners and obtain for us the blessings we need both for this present life and for the life which has no end.*

After the Council, in 1568, the “Hail Mary” in its present form appeared in the Roman Breviary. (This information is summarized from The Catholic Encyclopedia.)

### ANGELS AND MEN

Scripture records numerous instances of angelic visits, and the honor paid to angels by our ancestors in the faith. However, the angel’s greeting to Mary, “*Hail, full of grace,*” is unique, the very first instance of an angel showing reverence to a human being. To understand the magnitude of the angel’s paying homage to Mary, we must understand how far superior angels are to us.

### THE NATURE OF ANGELS

Angels are pure, spiritual beings. Because they have no material component, as we do, angels are not subject to the corruption and decay that will destroy our mortal frame. Furthermore, the angel’s intellectual powers surpass ours. The human mind learns by steps, proceeding from one truth to another, and often making mistakes in the process. Angels, by contrast, understand truth immediately and completely.

### THE ANGELS’ CLOSENESS TO GOD

Although equality with angels is promised God’s saints (S.T., Ia 62.5), this everlasting happiness is something we look forward to, yet our progress in grace is often impeded by our bodily senses. An angel’s immaterial nature is not subject to such distraction,

so angels are able to love God without hindrance. Thus, Scripture speaks of angels' standing before God and ministering to Him. Our human experience of sin reveals how far we are from God, at least occasionally.

## ANGELS AND GRACE

Grace moves both men and angels to love God. However, because nothing stands between angels and their vision of God, the angels share God's love more fully than we can hope to, in this life.

## THE SOLE EXCEPTION

Because angels surpass mankind in dignity, grace and nearness to Our Creator, they are worthy of our honor. We depend upon angels to assist us, but we do not expect them to pay us tribute. In the Virgin Mary, however, the angels discovered a human being whose closeness to God was greater than theirs. Reasonably, then, the angel honored Mary by saying, "*Hail, full of grace!*" which expressed the angel's respect and awe when faced with Mary's excellence.

## MARY, FULL OF GRACE

God's gift of grace enables us to do good and avoid evil. By sparing Mary the stain of Original Sin, God gave her a greater measure of grace than any saint other than Christ, Himself. St Augustine turns to the Scripture to express this beautifully

*Except the Holy Virgin Mary, if all the saints... while living here below had been asked whether they were without sin, all would have cried aloud with one voice: "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us" (1 Jn 1:8).*

## THE MODEL OF ALL VIRTUE

When we read the lives of the saints we discover that certain individuals were known for particular good works; Mary excels in all virtue. For example, she shows her humility when she replies to the angel, "*I am the handmaid of the Lord,*" and her chastity when she asserts she has had no relations with a man.

## A SPIRITUAL VESSEL

Although many saints are known for the penances they imposed on their bodies, the saints' true claim to holiness lies in the holiness of their souls. By contrast, Mary was so filled with grace that it filled her body, making her flesh fit to bear God's Son. One medieval theologian wrote "*The Holy Ghost so kindled in her heart the fire of divine love that it worked wonders in her flesh... that she gave birth to God made man.*"

## A GIFT TO THE WORLD

Our theology teaches no gift is given simply to enrich the one who receives it. Thus, we honor the saints because their virtues are a source of inspiration for others. Mary surpasses all the saints in virtue so the grace her Son gives through her is immense enough to save all mankind.

## THE LORD IS WITH THEE

Mary's participation in the Incarnation gives her a unique place in relation to the Blessed Trinity. God's Son is her son, something that can be said of no other individual, and the union between Mary and God the Father exceeds the intimacy of God with any other creature.

In giving birth to Jesus, Mary gives flesh and blood to God's Word. Christ is Lord of creation – even Lord of the angels – but He is Mary's Son, a relation no one else can know. Because the Incarnation is the work of the Holy Spirit, Mary enjoys a union with the Trinity unknown to any of the saints or angels.

## MOTHER OF THE LORD, OUR LADY

In the Old Testament, the most significant woman in a kingdom was not the king's wife, for rulers could have many wives; the highest honor was paid the king's mother. We pay Mary similar honor in our devotion. When Elizabeth greets Mary, she asks, "*why is this granted me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?*" (Lk 1:43) The words, "*Mother of my Lord,*" echo the title given the queen-mother in Scripture. They are also the basis for one of the most common titles by which we address the Blessed Virgin. Because Mary is Mother of our Lord, she is "Our Lady."

## BLESSED AMONG WOMEN

Mary is often called a "New Eve" because God spared her the punishments He pronounced on the wife of Adam. Chief among these is the mortality, which consigns our bodies to the dust from which they were created. Mary is "blessed" in herself because she was spared the punishments God imposed on mankind, but she is also blessed by the actions of her life – giving us Our Savoir, showing us the supreme example of Christian virtue, and, in her Assumption, giving us a promise of the glory that God's love calls us to enjoy.

## BLESSED IS THE FRUIT OF THY WOMB

The notion of "fruit" provides further reason for considering Mary the New Eve. The first Eve ate fruit which, she was promised, would make her like God. Instead, through her disobedience, she became unlike God and was sent out of the earthly Paradise. Eve's children have suffered the same fate for millennia.

Mary reverses the Original Sin. By sharing her Fruit – Jesus Christ – with the world, she invites us to reclaim the image and identity we lost in the Garden. "*When He shall appear, we shall be like Him,*" St. John promises, "*for we shall see Him as He is*" (1 Jn 3:2). Our baptism unites us with Christ and, through Him, to the Father, restoring in us the likeness of God sacrificed to sin.

## DELIGHT AND BEAUTY

The book of Genesis tells us "*the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes*" (Gen. 3:6). Once they tasted it, however, our First Parents realized, in an instant, the fruit of the tree was neither useful nor pleasant. Instead, it brought them

shame and exile. The Fruit of Mary's womb is both the summit of our humanity and food for our salvation, useful and beautiful. Eve discovered no pleasure in the fruit she ate, and ultimately we find as little pleasure in sin. In the Fruit Mary gives us, however, we find blessing, hope, and promise.

## PRAY FOR US SINNERS

The Hail Mary, as St. Thomas Aquinas knew it, and as he preached upon it during Lent in 1273, ends with acknowledgement of Our Savior, the blessed fruit of Mary's womb. Surely, these words from the Scripture are sufficient, and perfect in their simplicity. Why, we may ask, has the Church added to the "Angelical Salutation" we find in the gospel?

Academic study will undoubtedly reveal manifold answers to this question, but human need can tell us as much. As children, we are taught that beauty is as beauty does, and the Hail Mary is a prayer that God will enable us to live up to the image in which we have been created.

One of the Church's hymns honors Mary by saying, "*Mary, mother meek and mild, blessed was she in her Child.*" When we pray the Hail Mary we begin by acknowledging Mary's unique and honored place in our humanity. But as we continue the prayer, we realize that Mary is not simply blessed in who she is, but in what she has done. In the Hail Mary we ask for the grace to discover, as Mary did, all that our human frame is capable of – if we are willing to place ourselves in God's hands and surrender to God's will. ■

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## DOMINICANS AND ROSARY, 2008

Fr. Carlos Azpiroz Costa, O.P., Master of the Order of Preachers, sent a New Year's Day message to Dominican men and women throughout the world. Fr. Carlos noted that the Solemnity of the Epiphany, 2008, brought to a close the 800th anniversary of St. Dominic's founding the first communities of Dominican women.

*...the whole Order has come to a better appreciation that the nuns are at the heart of the Order and that the foundation of our preaching is nothing less than the profound contemplation of our faith.*

The Master devoted one section of his address to the Rosary, and challenged Dominicans to rededicate themselves to the Rosary, which, for centuries, has been particularly associated with the spirituality and preaching of the Dominican Order. Citing the numerous visitors to international Marian shrines, such as Lourdes and Guadalupe, Fr. Carlos called the Rosary "*a beloved universal prayer,*" and said, "*it is something we can touch, hold and even grasp at difficult moments, of our life; it is like grasping the hand of Mary herself.*"

Friends of the Rosary Center will surely share Fr. Carlos' conviction that the prayers of the Rosary "*are summaries*

*of our faith,*" that accompany the faithful throughout their lives, allowing one to say "thy will be done" at every moment, perhaps most importantly "at the hour of our death."

To commemorate the anniversary celebrations that mark the Dominicans' eighth centenary, Fr. Carlos announced he has appointed a Dominican friar to establish an international Rosary web-site, which will be of service to all who love the Rosary. The Rosary Center will provide more information on this important resource as it is developed further.

## THE ROSARY AND THE LIFE OF MOTHER TERESA

Those investigating inspirational – and inspiring – reading during the days of Lent will be interested in the new book, *Mother Teresa, In the Shadow of Our Lady*. The author, Fr. Joseph Langford, MC, worked with Mother Teresa for thirty years, and she invited him to help establish the men's branch of her Missionaries of Charity.

Fr. Langford's book is more than a diary of a long friendship with an astounding woman; it is a profound reflection on the power of Mary's love to transform the world, one heart at a time.

*...Our Lady will begin to arrange the events and details of our life as soon as we give her permission. This remarkable promise appears in our life then increasingly becomes an adventure of grace as she takes the reins of our existence and begins to exercise her spiritual maternity.*

Fr. Langford's story begins in 1947, when Mother Teresa experienced a profound revelation of God's thirst for the salvation of His children. It continues by examining Mother Teresa's first efforts to touch the lives of the poor and dying, and provides encouragement and practical steps to follow Mother Teresa in a life of contemplation lived in the world, through a deep commitment to the Blessed Virgin.

The book understands that faithful individuals have many claims on their time, and gives practical guidance for deepening one's spirituality, while coping with the realities of a busy life in the 21st Century.

*It was Mother Teresa's daily encounter with Our Lady that strengthened and equipped her for her work...[and] lets us live beyond our limitations, wrapped in her presence and sharing her spirit and her heart.*

(Fr. Langford's book is available from the Rosary Center; to order it, turn to the form that accompanies this bulletin or order it online at [www.rosary-center.org](http://www.rosary-center.org))

