

# A New Rosary of MARY?

Is The Prayer Of The Rosary Relevant Today?



Fr. Juan José Gallego Salvadores, O.P.

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“How much peace would flow again in family relationships if the family would begin again to pray the Holy Rosary.”

Pope John Paul II



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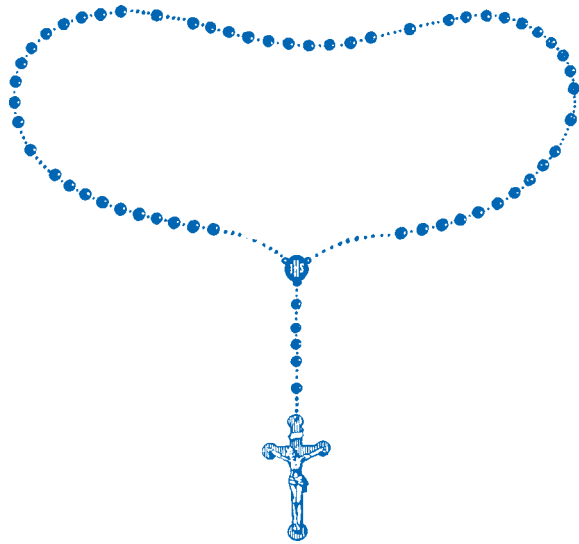
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The Rosary is a prayer. It is a method of prayer, and like any method, it is, or can be, a help. However, we have to be aware of certain conditions. The first one is that we understand that to pray is to speak, to dialogue with God, and the Saints. It has been said over and over again that the prayer of the Rosary is out of fashion and not relevant to our times. Is this so? The Holy Father, John Paul II, surprised the world lately with two unexpected announcements. On 16<sup>th</sup> October 2002, the twenty-fourth anniversary of his election as successor of St. Peter, he astonished the whole Church with the Apostolic Letter, *Rosarium Virginis Mariae*, in which he declared the Year of the Rosary – from October 2002 to October 2003. He also added a new series of mysteries to the three traditional sets, the Mysteries of Light.

The two announcements of the Holy Father were rather disconcerting, all the more so at the present time when it would seem that, according to some, the Rosary is obsolete and has no future.

I hope that these reflections<sup>1</sup> that I am offering will help you (and all who may possibly read them) to understand more fully the historical origin of this venerable tradition of the Church and, secondly, that it is a devotion very much in tune with the feelings of the People of God. Paul VI, in the Encyclical *Christi Matri Rosarii*, says:

*“The Rosary is a form of prayer very well adapted to the feelings of God’s people, very pleasing to the Mother of God and efficacious in obtaining graces from Heaven. The Second Vatican Council recommended this prayer to all the children of the Church, in a very definite manner, although without being explicit, merely stating that great importance should be attached to those practices and exercises of devotion to Mary which the Magisterium of the Church has always recommended down through the centuries.”*

And Blessed John XXIII affirmed: *“For priests, the Rosary takes its place after the Mass and the Breviary, or the Liturgy of the Hours; for lay people, it ranks after participation in the Sacraments.”*

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<sup>1</sup> From the 11<sup>th</sup> to the 13<sup>th</sup> of September, 2003, in the well known Marian Shrine of Nuestra Senora del Camino (Leon, Spain) took place the Fourth Congress of the Rosary, organized by the Promoters of the Rosary in the Iberian Peninsula. This Congress, due to the excellent summaries written by Fr. Jaime R. Labrato, OP, a journalist, and the Acts of the Congress drawn up by Father Miguel Ibertezzi Oraso, OP, had a tremendous impact. The title of the Acts is, “El Rosario de Maria”, published by Editorial S. Estaban de Salamanca, Apdo 17 – 37080, Salamanca, a very impressive collection of studies. Among them I had the satisfaction of seeing one of my own articles in print.



*Pope John Paul II with the author  
Fr. Juan José Gallego Salvadores, OP*

Pope Pius XII described the Rosary as a compendium of the Gospel. And Pope Paul VI would later use the same expression.

In an article of mine, which was published not long ago in "Paraula, the Church in Valencia", a weekly periodical, with the same title as this reflection, I wrote: *"The Holy Father, John Paul II, in the Angelus allocution on the 29<sup>th</sup> September, 2002, said: "We are already on the threshold of the month of October, which, with the liturgical memorial of Our Lady of the Rosary, inspires us to rediscover this traditional prayer, so simple yet so profound. The Rosary is a way of contemplating the face of Christ seeing Him - we may say - with the eyes of Mary. For this reason, it is a prayer that drawing upon the*

*core of the Gospel is in full accord with the inspiration of the Second Vatican Council and very much in keeping with the direction I gave in the Apostolic Letter, Novo Millennium ineunte, the Church has to launch out "into the deep" in the new millennium beginning with the contemplation of the face of Christ."*

For my part, as a Dominican, I feel very proud of this devotion, which, throughout history has always been very particularly ours, although, with the historical information we have at present, we cannot say that St. Dominic started the Rosary as we know it now. We can, however, legitimately claim, as recent Popes have reminded us, that the Dominicans have always been the great promoters and guardians of the Rosary. Furthermore, we cannot doubt, from all the information we have, that St. Dominic had a special devotion to Our Lady and that he used to join meditation on the mysteries of the life of Christ and of Mary to the recitation of the Hail Mary. It is a question of linking vocal and contemplative prayer. It is not simply a mechanical recitation of some formulas, even if these are holy.

I am dividing this reflection into four parts:

- I - *A short history of the Rosary*
- II - *The five new mysteries which Pope John Paul II has added. Are they within the tradition of the Church?*
- III - *The Rosary and Peace in the world, with a brief reference to the Message of Fatima.*
- IV - *Is the prayer of the Rosary a living reality in the Catholic Church today?*

## I - History of the Rosary

### 1. The repetition of the Our Father

The Our Father was always the fundamental prayer of the Christians; the one which all the baptized had to know. We know that the Fathers of the Church very often commented on the Lord's Prayer in their homilies.

In the Middle Ages, in monasteries, the brothers and sisters who could not read substituted the repetition of 150 Our Fathers for the recitation of the 150 psalms. To count the *Our Father*, they used cords with either knots or beads, which they called '*our fathers*'. A set of 150 Our Fathers was known also by the name of '*Christ's Psalter*'. From the 11<sup>th</sup> century, this instrument called the '*our father*' was used for counting Hail Mary's also.

### 2. Mary's Psalter

We have evidence that in Rome, in the 7<sup>th</sup> century, in Masses in which the Gospel of the Annunciation was read (before Christmas and on the 25<sup>th</sup> March) in the Offertory anthem, the 'Hail Mary, full of grace' was recited or sung. Our Lady had a place of honour in the devotion of the monks and, thus, in the Little Office in Her honour, this versicle is frequently found.

When, in the 11<sup>th</sup> century, the custom of saluting statues of Our Lady was introduced, the Hail Mary was recited or sung. Hermits and pious lay people, who did not recite the office of Psalms, repeated with joy the salutation of the Archangel Gabriel to Mary, making genuflections and counting them on '*our fathers*', the instruments already mentioned.

The name '*Our Lady's Psalter*' was given to a series of 150 Hail Mary's, divided into three groups of 50, like the



(by Sr. Jean Dorcy, O.P.)



Psalms in the Bible. The custom of crowning statues of Our Lady with flowers was the origin of giving the name 'crown' to a group of 50 Hail Mary's.

The '*Holy Mary, Mother of God*' became officially the second part of the Hail Mary with the breviary of St. Pius V in the year 1568. Little by little, the invocation was introduced into the recitation of the Rosary during the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

### **3. The Joys of Mary**

The Hail Mary is called the greatest joy of Mary: *the Incarnation of the Saviour*. This joy was shared with her cousin, St. Elizabeth, and John the Baptist at the Visitation.

From the 12<sup>th</sup> century, the repetition of the Hail Mary, often in decades, began to be associated with the five joys of Mary: the Annunciation, Nativity, Resurrection, Ascension, Assumption. The number, five, was inspired by the five joys in the responsorial "*Gaude, Dei genitrix*" in reference to the five great feasts of the liturgical year. If we add the Epiphany, Pentecost or the Visitation, we have the seven joys, one for each day of the week or each Hour of the daily Divine Office. In the 13<sup>th</sup> century, the Franciscans spread the devotion of the seven joys.

### **4. The Sorrows of Mary**

The Christians of the Middle Ages were given to venerating the five wounds of Christ: hands, feet and side; also the five outpourings of the Precious Blood: in the agony, scourging, crowning with thorns, crucifixion and pierced Heart.

At the beginning of the 14<sup>th</sup> century, in relation to the five wounds of Christ, but also to the five joys of Mary, the devotion to the five sorrows of Mary began and, in the same way, then, to the seven sorrows of Mary in relation to the

Passion of Christ. Parallel to these, another series of seven sorrows was composed, including the Infancy of Jesus, (the 'sword', the death of the Holy Innocents, Jesus lost and found in the Temple).

### **5. The Rosary of Dominic the Carthusian**

We have already encountered in the 14<sup>th</sup> century, the custom of joining the Hail Mary to any event in Christ's life, and adding some words to the end of the prayer. For example, for the Passion, "*Hail Mary, full of grace....and blessed is the fruit of your womb, cruelly wounded*".

Adding the Name of Jesus during the 14<sup>th</sup> century facilitated the use of similar little phrases. Father Pascual Meseguer, O.P.,<sup>2</sup> of the Province of Aragon, did something similar but with some variations, adding a sentence or phrase from the Gospel before each Hail Mary. This practice had great influence in various German-speaking regions.

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<sup>2</sup> Father Pascual Meseguer, O.P. was born in Guiar-Ternel in 1919 and died in Barcelona on 12<sup>th</sup> November, 2003. He spent an important part of his life in the formation of youth, in the Dominican schools in Zaragoza, in Cardinal Xaviere College where he was Rector twice and in Valencia, in the College of St. Vincent Ferrer. Although he had never neglected pastoral work, when he was 65, he asked to leave youth work in order to dedicate himself more fully to the pastoral ministry, which he then exercised in the Convent of St. Catherine in Barcelona. When Father Isidio Diez, also a Dominican, retired from his apostolic work as Promoter of the Rosary Teams in Spain, Father Pascual Meseguer took over this direction. With the Rosary teams he traveled all over Spain and started teams in many provinces. The number of these teams increased to ten thousand in Spain alone. In 1999 Edibesa Editorial published a booklet by Father Pascual Meseguer under the title, "*The Rosary Meditated, A Reflection from the Gospel for each Hail Mary*", which had great success among the people and has already gone into several editions. When Pope John Paul II published the Apostolic Letter on the Rosary, Father Pascual had already included these mysteries with the appropriate biblical quotations. May he rest in peace, this generous, good man.

## 6. The new Psalter of Alan de la Roche

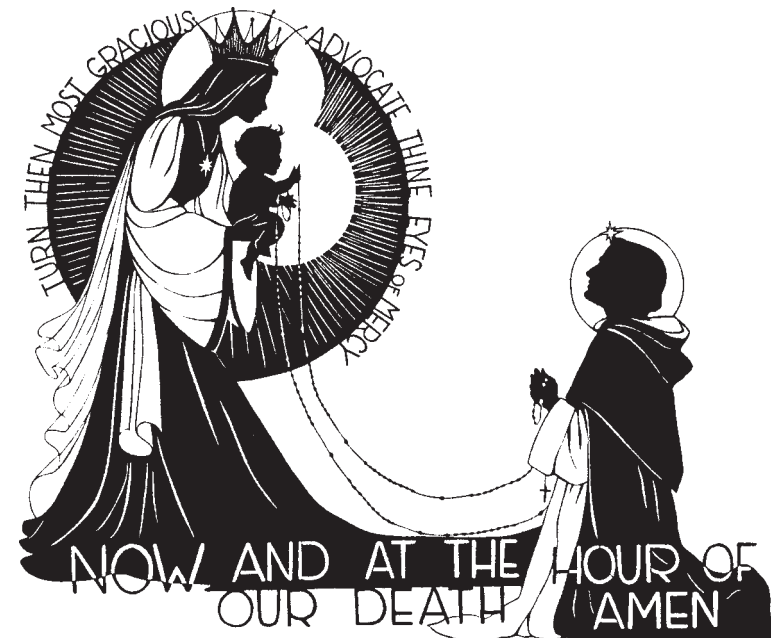
It was in 1464 that the Dominican, Alan de la Roche began his ardent preaching campaign on the *Psalter of the Virgin Mary*. Fifteen decades of Hail Mary's were to be recited every day. He himself attributed the origin of the Rosary to St. Dominic, who had received it from the hands of Our Lady herself as an instrument of evangelization. This Psalter was new because it always had to be accompanied by a meditation. Among the different ways of saying the Psalter of Mary, the first one Blessed Alan proposed was this: "Praying directly to Christ. Thus, the first group of fifty Hail Mary's are to be said in honour of His Incarnation, the second in honour of the Suffering Christ and the third in honour of Christ, Risen and ascended into Heaven, sending the Holy Spirit and seated at the right hand of the Father."

It is to Alan de la Roche that we owe the structure of the mysteries in three series, following the mystery of Christ in His Incarnation, Crucifixion and Resurrection. I believe that it is in this context that the present Pope, John Paul II, wanted to place the Mysteries of Light, which embrace Christ's public life. It seems to be that the mysteries we have at present came from Spain where they were established in 1488. And it is in this manner that Pope St. Pius V (1504 -1572), himself a Dominican, in the Brief *Consueverunt* of 1569 defined them as they have been until now. We have already said that the second part of the Hail Mary, "Holy Mary, Mother of God..." became official in the Breviary of St. Pius V, published in 1568.

This Dominican Pope tells us that the Rosary is a form of prayer, which is quite easy and in the reach of everyone. It consists of two essential elements:

1. To meditate on the mysteries of the Life, Sufferings and Glorification of our Saviour, Jesus Christ.
2. To pray at each mystery one Our Father, ten Hail

Mary's and one Gloria. Short ejaculations are added in some places but they do not form part of the Rosary as such and do not add anything to its immense value.



(by Sr. Jean Dorcy, O.P.)

## II - Pope John Paul's Five New Mysteries of the Rosary

The Holy Father John Paul II, in his allocution for the Angelus on 29<sup>th</sup> September, 2002, already quoted, said, “We are already on the threshold of the month of October, which, with the liturgical memorial of Our Lady of the Rosary, inspires us to rediscover this traditional prayer; so simple yet so profound. The Rosary is a way of contemplating the face of Christ seeing Him - we may say - with the eyes of Mary. For this reason, it is a prayer that drawing upon the core of the Gospel is in full accord with the inspiration of the Second Vatican Council and very much in keeping with the direction I gave in the Apostolic Letter, *Novo Millennium ineunte*, the Church has to launch out “into the deep” in the new millennium beginning with the contemplation of the face of Christ.”<sup>3</sup>

These words have been the inspiration (and, for us, the explanation), which moved Pope John Paul to improve this beautiful and very ancient devotion of the Rosary. If the Ro-

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<sup>3</sup> Pope John Paul II in the Encyclical, *The Church lives the Eucharist*, says in paragraph 6: “It is this joy in the Eucharist that I want to arouse with this Encyclical Letter, which is a sequel to the bequest which I wanted to give to the Church with the Apostolic Letter, *Novo Millennium Ineunte* and its Marian sequel, *Rosarium Virginis Mariae*. To contemplate the face of Christ and to contemplate it with Mary is the ‘programme’, which I proposed to the Church at the dawn of the Third Millennium, inviting her to launch out into the sea of history, throwing herself enthusiastically into the new evangelization. To contemplate Christ implies knowing where He makes Himself manifest, in His diverse presences, but, above all, in the living Sacrament of His Body and Blood. The Church lives by the Eucharistic Jesus; by Him she is nourished; by Him she is enlightened. The Eucharist is a mystery of faith and, at the same time, a “mystery of light”. Whenever the Church celebrates this mystery, the faithful can, in a certain way, re-live the experience of the two disciples of Emmaus. “Their eyes were opened and they recognized Him” (Lk 24:31).

sary is a compendium of the Gospel, directed toward the contemplation of the Face of Christ, with the eyes of Mary, through the repetition of the Hail Mary and Holy Mary, it is important that, contemplating these mysteries, we may be able to reflect also on the tremendously important events of the public life of Jesus which, in the traditional Rosary were not mentioned directly. It is these five Mysteries of Light, which most reflect the public life of Jesus, from the Baptism in the Jordan to the Institution of the Eucharist. These Mysteries of Light (the others were the Joyful, Sorrowful and Glorious Mysteries) draw our attention to this aspect of light, of luminosity because Jesus Himself said, “While I am in the world, I am the Light of the world” (John 9:5).

These are the five new mysteries that the Holy Father has given us in his Encyclical letter *Rosarium Virginis Mariae*. In paragraph 21 he tells us in the text itself. “Moving on from the Infancy and the Hidden Life in Nazareth to the public life of Jesus, our contemplation brings us to those mysteries which may be called in a special way ‘mysteries of light’. Certainly, the whole mystery of Christ is a mystery of light. He is the light of the world (John 8:12). Yet this truth emerges in a special way during the years of His public life when He proclaims the Gospel of the Kingdom. In proposing to the Christian community five significant moments – “luminous mysteries” – during this phase of Christ’s life I think that the following can be fittingly singled out: 1) His Baptism in the Jordan; 2) His self-manifestation at the wedding of Cana; 3) His proclamation of the Kingdom of God, with His call to conversion; 4) His Transfiguration and, finally, His institution of the Eucharist as the sacramental expression of the Paschal Mystery.”

“Each of these mysteries,” the Holy Father continues, “is a revelation of the Kingdom now present in the very Person of Jesus. The Baptism in the Jordan is, first of all a mystery of light. Here as Christ descends into the waters, the innocent one who became sin for our sake, (2 Cor 5:21) the heavens open wide and the voice of the Father declares Him the be-



loved Son (cf Mt 3:17) while the Spirit descends on Him to invest Him with the mission which He is to carry out. Another mystery of light is the first of the signs, given at Cana (cf John 2:1-12), where Christ changes the water into wine and opens the heart of the disciples to faith, thanks to the intervention of Mary, the first among believers. Another mystery of light is the preaching by which Jesus proclaims the coming of the kingdom of God, calls to conversion (cf Mk 1:15) and forgives the sins of all who draw near to Him in humble trust (cf Mk 2:3-13; Lk 7:47-48); the inauguration of that ministry of mercy which He continues to exercise until the end of the world, particularly through the sacrament of reconciliation which He has entrusted to His Church (cf John 20:22-23). The mystery of light par excellence, is the Transfiguration, traditionally believed to have taken place on Mount Tabor. The glory of the Godhead shines forth from the Face of Christ, as the Father commands the astonished Apostles to "listen to Him" (cf Lk 9:35 and parallels) and to prepare to experience with Him the agony of the Passion, so as to come with Him to the joy of the Resurrection and a life transfigured by the Holy Spirit. A final mystery of light is the institution of the Eucharist in which Christ offers His Body and Blood as food under the signs of bread and wine and testifies "to the end" His love of humanity (John 13:1), for whose salvation He will offer Himself in sacrifice."

We see very clearly that what John Paul II has done is not to create a new devotion, a new Rosary of Mary; what he has done is to complete and to perfect this devotion in which Christ's life is much more complete and He is presented to us in His public life. Through these five outstanding moments of his public life, the Christological tradition which the Dominican, Alan de la Roche, had already given us, is once more recovered.

### **III - The Rosary and World Peace With a Brief Reference to Fatima**

It was Pope John Paul II himself who, at the Angelus on 29<sup>th</sup> September, said, "I want to recommend the prayer of the Rosary to everyone, to families and to Christian communities. I wish once again to entrust the great cause of peace to the praying of the Rosary. We are facing an international situation, that is full of tensions, at times threatening to explode. In some parts of the world, where the confrontation is harsher, – I think in particular of the tormented land of Christ – we can realize that, even though they are necessary, political efforts are worth little if one remains exacerbated in his mind and no one cares to demonstrate a new disposition of heart in the hope of reviving the struggle and effort of dialogue. Who but God can infuse such sentiments? It is more necessary than ever that from every part of the earth prayer for peace be made to Him. Precisely in this perspective, the Rosary turns out to be the form of prayer most needed. It builds peace because, while it appeals to the grace of God, it sows in the one praying it the seed of good from which we can expect the fruit of justice and solidarity for personal and community life." And he concludes by saying, "I am thinking of nations and also of families. How much peace would flow into family relationships if the family would begin again to pray the Holy Rosary?"

These words of Pope John Paul II remind me of the Message of Fatima to the three Little Shepherds in the year 1917. And they call to mind a fact of great significance to me. Among the precious stones, which adorn the crown of Our Lady of Fatima there is an inlaid bullet. In general, people do not know either the origin of the bullet or the reason why it is in the crown of the Virgin of Fatima. On the 13<sup>th</sup> May, 1982, John Paul II was in Fatima, exactly a year after the terrible attempt on his life by Ali Akba in St. Peter's Square.

On that very day, in 1982, the Pope said in Fatima: *"I am indebted to Our Lady of Fatima. How can I forget that I was saved in the attempt on my life, which took place at the same hour, on the same day as the first apparition of Our Lady of Fatima on the 13th May? In everything that happened I felt the extraordinary protection of the Mother of Christ and on this first anniversary, I came to Fatima to thank her."*

The bullet in the precious crown on the statue of Our Lady of Fatima was presented to the Sanctuary by Pope John Paul II after the attempt on his life. It is there by the express wish of the Holy Father who, in this way, wanted to give thanks and leave a continual sign of his gratitude to the Most Holy Virgin under the title of Our Lady of Fatima.

We all know now that there is a reference to this attempt on the Holy Father's life in the famous Third Secret of Fatima. It describes a vision, which, like all prophetic statements, predicts the future though in a rather mysterious manner, and, seems to foretell the attempt on Pope John Paul's life.

Who, then, is this *Our Lady of Fatima* to whom the Pope sent the bullet used in the attempt on his life, and what does she want?

The only source we have for knowing the truth about the apparitions of Our Lady of Fatima is the Memoirs of Sister Lucia, the only survivor, who has left us her written testimony. We know that the other two seers, Francisco and Jacinta, already beatified, died very young and left nothing written. Sister Lucia herself always wrote in obedience to her Superiors: Bishops and confessors. In the second Memoir, describing the first apparition on 13<sup>th</sup> May, Our Lady said to the shepherds, *"Pray the Rosary every day in order to obtain peace for the world and an end to the war."* And in the second apparition of 13<sup>th</sup> June, 1917, Lucia asks the Virgin, *"What do you want?"* *"I wish you to come here on the 13<sup>th</sup> of next month, to pray the Rosary every day and to learn to read.. Later I will tell you what I want."* The third apparition is de-

scribed by Lucia thus, *"While we were saying the Rosary, we saw the usual flash of lightning and soon afterwards we saw Our Lady. "What do you want of me," Lucia asked. "I want you to come here on the 13<sup>th</sup> of next month, to continue to pray the Rosary in honour of Our Lady of the Rosary in order to obtain peace for the world and the end of the war because only she can help you."*

In the fourth apparition she said: *"I want you to come again to the Cova da Iria on the 13<sup>th</sup> and to continue to pray the Rosary every day. In the last month there will be a miracle so that all may believe."* Describing the fifth apparition, Lucia says, *"At last we arrived at the Cova da Iria, near the holm oak tree and we began to pray the Rosary with the people. Shortly afterwards we saw the flash of lightning and then Our Lady appeared above the oak tree and said: "Continue to pray the Rosary every day to obtain the end of the war".* In the sixth and last apparition Lucia says, *"When we arrived at the Cova da Iria, near the oak tree, moved by an interior impulse, I asked the people to close their umbrellas in order to pray the Rosary. A short time afterwards we saw the flash of lightning and then Our Lady appeared above the holm oak tree. "What do you want of me?" "I want to tell you that a chapel is to be built here in my honour. I am the Lady of the Rosary. Continue always to pray the Rosary every day. The war is going to end and the soldiers will soon return to their homes."*

We see how Our Lady in the six apparitions to the Little Shepherds of Fatima earnestly recommends to them the prayer of the Rosary and how, in three of the apparitions, she connects this prayer with obtaining peace in the world because only that can bring it about (third apparition). In the fifth apparition she said: *"Continue praying the Rosary in order to obtain the end of the war."* And in the sixth and last Apparition: *"Continue always to pray the Rosary every day. The war is going to end and the soldiers will soon return to their homes."*

From this exposition about the message of Fatima in

the year 1917, we see the insistence of Mary on the prayer of the Holy Rosary and the connection that she makes between this practice and peace and the end of the war. But, in our days, can we make such a claim? Do the changes in culture and sensibility and the directives of Vatican II permit us to speak in these terms? I would say that, at the moment, there are three different opinions about the prayer of the Rosary, distinct and, to a certain degree, contrary to one another.

One of these rejects its effectiveness and validity as a way of prayer unsuited to modern sensibility. Another invokes the great Rosary gatherings in places like Lourdes, Fatima, Pompei etc and others less spectacular, defends at all costs the devotion of the Rosary for today and rejects any criticism whatever. The third view is held by those, who defend the Rosary because they have experienced its efficacy in their own lives, and I belong to this third group.

What, at times, we must regret is the scanty knowledge of the historical incidence of the Rosary in the life of the Church and of its theological richness. For a long time, the prayer of the Rosary sustained the faith of whole peoples.<sup>4</sup> Today, and more so after the Encyclical Letter of Pope John Paul II, we can count on many more teachings and directives on the devotion of the Holy Rosary, to such a point that one asks oneself if not everything has already been said.

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<sup>4</sup> In a magazine published by the Portuguese Dominican Fathers, *Rosario de Maria*, in the issue for February 2003, pages 62-63, *the Bishop of Siberia – Russia, Monsignor Jerzy Mazur, S.D., tells us that the Faith was preserved in his diocese in spite of Bolshevism and the cruel persecution of Stalin. “After the October Revolution the priests were expelled or killed and the churches were closed. In Stalin’s time there were no missionaries and it was the grandparents who kept the Faith alive by means of the recitation of the Rosary. We can say,” he continues, “that the Rosary was the catechism in times of persecution, and this is the prayer that Our Lady asked for in Fatima.”*

## **IV - The Prayer of the Rosary is a Reality in the Catholic Church Today**

I am going to ignore the negative view of those who consider the Rosary an obsolete devotion, not in tune with modern sensibility, because they simply make unjustified affirmations without any convincing proofs whatever. Neither are we interested in the defeatist attitude of those who think the Rosary is a fruitless devotion, lacking in substance and in theology, an outdated popular devotion about which one can joke but never take seriously, much less practice. A comfortable position for those who are ignorant about what it really is; and, above all, what it can be. It is matter for concern that there are many people who because of work, fatigue or lack of good will, do not take advantage of the spiritual content of the prayer of the Rosary.

So as not to go too far back in time, I am going to start with Pius XII, the Pope of the great war, whose efforts for world peace have been so much discussed in certain circles and which, today, are fully vindicated by documents recently made available to scholars from the Vatican Archives. This Pope laboured hard and by appearances, accomplished little. There are those, however, who are convinced, with good reason, that if Rome was not bombed, it was because of his great efforts.

Pope Pacelli, obsessed with peace, hurt by so many betrayals and calumnies, fixed his gaze on the motto on his pontifical coat of arms, which presented peace as the fruit of justice. He was forced to be a suffering witness, from his Apostolic See, of a world war, which finally ended with the atomic bomb.

In his struggle for peace in the world, he always kept in mind the great power of the Rosary as the best means to obtain the help of the Queen of Peace not only because of the strength of its impetratory power but also because of the rich-

ness of its content. It is to Pope Pius XII that we owe the inspiring idea of presenting the Rosary as a *compendium of the whole Gospel (totius Evangelii breviarium)*. The Rosary is an unbreakable promise of heavenly help, which gives us hope and confidence of better times.

And in the pontifical document, *Ingruentium malorum* (1951), the Pope returns to one of the themes nearest to his heart, that of the Christian family. He is pleased to insist on the importance of the Rosary as the prayer of the family, "*supplicatio domestica*". And he is surely not mistaken in thinking about the undeniable difficulties, which the Christian family faces in order to be true to its mission. He does not hesitate to say: "*We declare that the prayer of the Holy Rosary in the Family is the best means to reach such a difficult goal.*" Not in vain is it considered as "*an excellent school of life and Christian virtues*", because the origin of the Rosary is "*more celestial than human.*"

Blessed John XXIII in his *Grata Recordatio* of 1959, recalled the work of the great Pope Leo XIII on the Rosary which had so impressed the former Patriarch of Venice: eleven encyclicals which constitute an imperishable monument to the Rosary of Mary, enriching the celebration of the month of October for many years. Pope John XXIII did not hesitate to describe them as "*varied in their content, rich in wisdom, vibrant with fresh inspiration and directly relevant to the practice of the Christian life.*" It is true that Pope Leo XIII wrote a long time ago, but John XXIII described these encyclicals as of perennial importance, discovering in them new meanings which he summed up in these memorable words, "*May those who guide the destinies of nations, whether great or small, whose rights and spiritual riches should be scrupulously preserved, understand how invaluable is their great task at the present time.*"

Pope John XXIII himself, on 29<sup>th</sup> September 1961, was very happy to emphasize the profound content of the Rosary in its three-fold aspect of mystery, reflection and intention, and its connection with everything that involves the desire for

peace. And he confesses without hesitation that the luminous teachings of Pope Leo XIII on the Holy Rosary had a lasting influence on his life, of which this Marian devotion always formed a part.

The historical figure of Paul VI is of special interest because, apart from his own personality, enriched by his knowledge and experience as well as the authority, which is his as Roman Pontiff, he is the great interpreter and best-qualified expert on Vatican II. An exceptional witness of the developments in the great Conciliar Assembly, gifted with a very special charism, he was able to interpret the rich and profound teaching of its Magisterium. On the present subject on the relevance and importance of the prayer of the Rosary and its profound content, he left us two special documents of particular importance – the encyclical Letter, *Christi Matri Rosarii* (1966) and the Apostolic Exhortation, *Marialis Cultus* (1974).

In the first, in the face of the alarming prospect of a nuclear war of unforeseeable and tremendous consequences, the impetratory power of the Rosary makes it "*A way of prayer very well suited to the feelings of the people, very pleasing to the Mother of the Lord and efficacious in obtaining gifts from Heaven. Vatican II recommended this prayer to all the children of the Church in a very clear manner although without explicitly mentioning the Rosary, saying that we must give great importance to those methods and exercises of devotion to Mary, which the Church's Magisterium has recommended down through the centuries.*"

When, eight years later, Paul VI published his Apostolic Exhortation *Marialis Cultus* in order to clarify the perceptions of the Church and point out how divine worship could be more perfectly carried out, he could not leave out the implications of Marian devotion. This obliged him to examine carefully the possibilities implied in the renewal of the devotion of the Holy Rosary. After mentioning, as Pope, his various personal references to the Rosary and relying on those of his predecessors, who had already made it the object of their watchful attention



and particular solicitude because they had recognized the possibility of the Rosary becoming a contemplative prayer of praise and petition, he, at the same time, analyses the richness of the content thus “*uncovering the original inspiration and driving force behind it and its essential structure*” (MC 42-45).

Starting from the essential elements and the mutual relationship, which exists between them, Paul VI emphasizes the evangelical nature of the Rosary because he has no hesitation about describing it as a Gospel prayer. The fact of presenting in an harmonious sequence the principal events in the salvation accomplished by Christ reminds him of the original idea of the early Christian catechesis of clearly Pauline inspiration (Phil 2,6-11) centred on the expressive trilogy of humiliation, death and exaltation.<sup>5</sup> The inspiration of Pope John Paul II completes this with the mysteries, which summarize the public life of Jesus.

At the same time he also insists on the contemplative dimension of the Holy Rosary as something fundamental. Without this, it would be a body without a soul. Hence is derived the inherent possibility of relating it to the Sacred Liturgy. It would not be out of order to recall the age long concept of the Rosary as Mary’s Psalter, which can be augmented with the strength of the Litany and even more by a careful application of texts from Holy Scripture, according to time and circumstances.

John Paul II could not fail to mention the fruitful theme

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<sup>5</sup> The Valencian Dominican, Father Terencio Maria Huguet, who was born in Burriana-Castellon on 5<sup>th</sup> November 1907 and died on 6<sup>th</sup> July 1987, was a great missionary in Alta Verapaz, Guatemala. After a life dedicated to study, formation work and administration, he was assigned at his own request to the missions in Alta Verapaz, Guatemala, at 51 years of age. He found there a very scattered population with very poor means of communication. He had to work through catechists because he never mastered the Ketchi language, and the method he used to educate them was the Rosary and its mysteries. By this method he reaped an abundant harvest.

of the Family Rosary, since family prayer is something, which enriches the whole theological concept of family.

John Paul II himself, when beatifying Bartolo Longo, commented: “*Bartolo Longo, Dominican Tertiary and Founder of the Religious Institute, Daughters of the Holy Rosary of Pompeii, can truly be described as “Our Lady’s Man”; for love of Mary he became a writer, apostle of the Gospel, founder of a famous sanctuary, in spite of many difficulties and adversities; for love of Mary also, he opened charitable institutions, became a beggar for the children of the poor, transformed Pompeii into a stronghold of human and Christian kindness; for love of Mary he endured in silence tribulations and calumnies.*” And the Holy Father concluded: “*With the Rosary, Blessed Bartolo also says to us, Christians of the 20<sup>th</sup> century: ‘Renew your confidence in the Most Holy Virgin of the Rosary’.*”

We will end by answering the two questions we posed at the beginning: *Has John Paul II created a new Rosary of Mary by adding the five Mysteries of Light?*

Let us consider John Paul II, without forgetting in loving remembrance, John Paul I. On many occasions John Paul II has spoken of the Rosary as his favorite prayer; he confesses unashamedly that while he was speaking at the United Nations, he had the Rosary in his hand all the time. It is, thus, no wonder that in his numerous discourses there are many enthusiastic references to the Rosary. His proverbial love of Our Lady leads him to that and much more. He declared once, “*It can be said that the Rosary is, in a certain way, a prayer-commentary on the last chapter of the Constitution Lumen Gentium of Vatican II, the chapter which describes the admirable presence of the Mother of God in the mystery of Christ and of the Church, because the joyful and sorrowful mysteries (of the Rosary) join us in a living union with Jesus through the mediation – we might say – of the Heart of His Mother.*”

The vigorous mind of the Pope penetrates, at the same time, the powerful, anthropological dimension of the Rosary. “*Our hearts can encompass in these decades of the Rosary all*



*the events, which make up the life of the individual person, the family, the nation, the Church and all humanity, our own personal trials, those of others and, in particular, those who are closest to us, all that we carry in the depths of our hearts. Thus, the simple prayer of the Rosary marks the rhythm of human life.”*

As we have insistently repeated, John Paul II, following the example of Paul VI, wanted to centre the devotion of the Rosary on the orientation of Vatican II in which Mary, without ceasing to be important in the mystery of salvation, is recognized as the first of the redeemed. So, I would say that this devotion more than Marian, is Christocentric: contemplating Jesus with the eyes of Mary, His Mother, wherein lies Mary's greatness.

We saw also, how throughout all of tradition, especially from the time of the Dominican Alan de la Roche, the Rosary is contemplation of the life of Christ and so it is fitting that it should also include the five Mysteries of Light, which summarize and synthesize the three years of Jesus' public life.

As for my second question: *Is the prayer of the Rosary relevant in the Catholic Church today?* I believe it has been answered already in this reflection of mine. It was Paul VI who said that the Rosary is a form of prayer very much in accordance with the feelings of God's people, very pleasing to the Mother of God and very efficacious in obtaining graces from Heaven. John Paul II has said so again and again, Pope Pius V had already told us so and the history of the Church ratifies it.

I think we can assert that the prayer of the Rosary is an actual reality in the Church. I would dare to say that we have to experience this devotion, we have to practise it and, having done all this, no one can tell us that it is neither relevant nor pertinent. It is like the one who has experienced love, and the theorists tell him that it doesn't exist.

