

The significance of the deposition and burial of Christ is wholly inward. The heart of Mary in which he returns to rest is something anterior to all creation, a 'place' where no creature dwells: or if it is creature it is that purity of the created state which means nothing but God and is beyond the cosmic order. If the purity of Mary means nothing but God, in the last station there remains nothing but God of whose ineffable depth no true word can be spoken.

The journey thither from 'the head' represented by the praetorium to 'the heart' which is God's tomb—the only place, as Pascal said, in which Jesus Christ found rest—is the meditation of the stations, a meditation of which, objectively, the effect is to realize what is signified therein. And the meditation, together with the realization which is its deeper counterpart, takes place and is concluded wholly in Christ. It is the way from this saying of his, 'The Father is greater than I' to this other saying, 'I and the Father are one' followed to the end that 'They all may be one as thou Father in me and I in thee'.



PRAY THE ROSARY

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TIME and again we have been urged, as individuals, in our homes, in our schools, and everywhere, to say the Rosary. Surely we must now begin to put the stress on *praying* the Rosary. We are concerned about the very soul of this devotion, and so about the immensely more important part of any Rosary. As the soul is always more important than the body, so too meditation of the Rosary should always have priority over any merely material recitation of the beads. This should be obvious to all. Yet how often do we slip into careless ways of talking. It is very easy for a priest to tell you, 'for your penance, say a decade of the Rosary'. Or, perhaps, two friends may be passing a church, and one will say to the other: 'Let's drop in and say a Rosary. . .'

We need to start by correcting our ways of talking; no more 'saying the Rosary', but instead 'praying the Rosary' or 'meditating our Rosary'.

Now if we urge people to *pray* the Rosary we are, in effect, calling upon all, even the humblest and most simple and the most backward in the things of the spirit, calling upon all to pray and to meditate, and so to reach after sublimities in the things of God. Real inward prayer is asked of all. Yet such prayer is difficult; and many will be tempted to say: 'I cannot meditate'. And anyway it may be objected that inward prayer cannot be ordered of us, produced at will. You cannot *make* another person pray, for prayer is a raising of the mind and heart to God, precisely that mind and heart which is only known to God. Prayer is not something commanded, as we are sometimes commanded in matters of external compliance. No doubt, but then neither can a man be commanded to love. And yet love *is* commanded: 'You shall love your God with all your strength. . .' (Exodus 20, 2; Deut. 6, 5). St Thomas explains that faith is a necessary presupposition as regards the commandments. In other words, a command to love God above all else supposes that we have faith. So, too, a command to pray supposes that we have faith; and all the commandments suppose that we have faith, and so our minds open to that all-loving God who may ask of us what he wills.

Certain it is that an ever-growing and ever more enlightened faith is indispensable for anything like meditation of the Rosary. The greater the faith, the greater will be the chance of true mental prayer, as well as spiritual profit, indulgences, graces and favours.

It is because of some such intensity of faith that quite simple people can make great spiritual progress through the Rosary. Such great faith will compel one who prays the Rosary so to give himself 'to the end of prayer, namely to God, and to that for which he is praying . . . and simple folk can do this too; sometimes too, so intense is the application of their minds to God that they become oblivious of all else'. We like to think that in these words St Thomas is speaking of his own experience in prayer.

An intense faith of this sort cleaves to our living God who reveals himself in his mysteries. At every moment in the praying of the Rosary there is implied a deliberate attention to mysteries of faith. That deliberate attention results in meditation or that kind of reflection which is all a prayer.

The mysteries which we consider in the Rosary are wholly supernatural, and are principally focussed on that 'fullness of the times' when God, after long patience with the human race, at last spoke to us through his Son (Hebrews 1, 1). Let us dwell a moment on this 'fullness of the times'. The first word of God was creative: 'He spoke and they were made'. Subsequently God spoke again through his prophets; 'spoke' too in that he moulded and fashioned the whole course of sacred history and the fates of a Chosen People, who were to give to the world the Saviour of the world. Thus at the fullness of the times the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us, for us and for our salvation.

Now the truths which we consider in the mysteries of the Rosary are precisely those truths which relate to the fullness of the times. For that reason they are in a certain sense (while remaining mysteries) clearer to us. For they are truths about God who came near to us in the Person of our Saviour.

As we pray over and ponder such mysteries we must surely, bit by bit, imperceptibly yet certainly, be drawn to genuine contemplation of the mysteries.

Perhaps it is possible to suggest the general course of some such prayer. First comes a total acceptance, a certain whole and enriching grasp of the revealed truth which we are considering. This 'grasp' will be all the more effective if the gifts of understanding and wisdom are brought to bear on the truth considered. Understanding is particularly relevant when our whole intent, at the outset, is to peer into the mysteries of God and to see more profoundly into the meanings of Holy Scripture; wisdom in turn enables us in some sense to savour 'the things that are above', to draw benefit from an experience which is wholly born of supernatural love. As often as not it is then but a short step to a certain serene delight in the supreme truths. It is by some such process, with the progressive elimination of laboured reasonings, that meditation can pass into a really contemplative prayer.

There is no doubt that pondering and praying the mysteries of the Rosary, in this or kindred ways, may well lead to some of the highest states of prayer.

We have travelled far from the brute mechanism and routine of the Rosary materially recited, from the parrot-cry of 'say your Rosary' which we can hear all too often.

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Now let us turn to a second point: the meditation of the Rosary as a way of preaching, as a mode of teaching the truths of God. This teaching and preaching will of course be for ourselves as much as for others. This doctrinal function of the Rosary, as we may call it, is important historically. It seems certain that St Dominic thought of the Rosary as first of all a method of preaching, and then secondly, as a mode of prayer. Consideration of the mysteries in this case becomes a means of deeper understanding, a quest for what we can know at least in part. We all need to have that sort of faith which seeks understanding. There is a kind of yearning for some grasp of the mysteries of faith which corresponds in some sense to that yearning for Christian perfection which should be in the heart of every true believer. A desire to understand in some measure is not pretentious but legitimate: we are in fact in line with the suggestion of the Vatican Council, and 'seeking, through God's giving, some understanding of the mysteries' (*aliquam Deo dante mysteriorum intelligentiam*, Denz. 1796). The Rosary meditations are focussed on essentials in the history of our salvation, for we consider the Coming on earth, the suffering and then the triumph of our Lord. So it comes about that when praying the Rosary we turn over and over in our minds 'that which links the mysteries one to another as also to man's ultimate end'.

The Rosary should also foster in us good reactions, good Catholic instincts, in such wise that we can fully bring into play the 'analogy of faith' as it is called, whenever we relate truth with truth. Such reflection is made easy by the Rosary which allows much liberty and range in our reflections which should all transform themselves into genuine prayer. After long centuries of Catholic usage, the fifteen mysteries have come to stay in the Church's great body of prayer, and they cover a vast range of doctrine. We might often be tempted to say (as many do when they first perceive the rich content of the Church's liturgical books): This is too much! Perhaps it is. In practice, however, we know that it is sufficient for each mystery to have been called out, and for him who is praying the Rosary to have in some degree adverted to that announcing of the mystery. He will then as a child of God, led by the Spirit of God, fasten his mind and give the love of his heart to each or one only of the mysteries, or to one aspect only, or to the words of those greatest of prayers which

he is saying, or to the relations of the mystery proposed to other mysteries of faith, or its reference to our life, or to that of our Lord on earth, or to that of Christ continued, which is the Church . . . and so on to God himself.

A certain freedom in the range of possible meditation is surely something valuable which must be retained. It is not more legislation which is wanted, more rules and external methods of reciting the Rosary, but more freedom of spirit.

The spirit breathes where he wills, and you hear his voice: but you know not whence he comes or whither he goes (John 3, 8).

Let us content ourselves with the fifteen mysteries as now commonly proposed and received in the usage of the Church; these, in fact, constitute an abbreviated *Summa*. Taking these as a basis, let us strive to break through the veil which is upon our eyes and hearts so as to know and love the living God beyond all mystery: Truly thou art a hidden God, O God of Israel, our Saviour.

Finally, by all means let us look out for and value any possible means of furthering *meditation* on the Rosary mysteries. Modern and contemporary efforts in the Rosary apostolate seem to have been almost wholly concentrated on the material recitation of the Rosary; thus we know of sung Rosaries, or alternately sung and said, or broken up in various ways, or mimed or acted, or used to 'fill up' a Holy Hour. Rather let us stress the prayer, and mental prayer aspect of the Rosary, and look upon it as a powerful means of attaining union with God by knowledge and love. What a progress would have been made in the Kingdom of God if our Catholic people had come to realize that a 'perpetual Rosary' is not primarily an unbroken series, a twenty-four-hour day, of 'Our Father' and 'Hail Mary', but a constant attempt of devoted people here on earth to focus minds and wills on God, so that God is actually known and loved unceasingly in some favoured corners of the world.

Let us pray then with great freedom of spirit, content with what is laid down by the Church as regards indulgences and spiritual benefit, and all the while seek to pray better, to meditate more profoundly.

There are two main ways of proceeding in our meditations. The first is when the fifteen mysteries are related to some theme which is extrinsic to the Rosary itself. This method is well

exemplified in *Rosary Meditations* (Anon. T.O.S.D. Burns & Oates). There we are given models of meditations:

- (a) For peace. Each of the fifteen mysteries is related to the theme of peace.
- (b) For faith, hope, charity. The same is done with each of these theological virtues.
- (c) So too with the liturgical seasons, from Advent to Trinity Sunday, etc.
- (d) For a good death.

The other method is used when each mystery is considered *in itself* or intrinsically. We then have read or considered the biblical narrative very closely, and are striving to arrive at an ever more profound exegesis and savouring of the narrative. This 'way' is that of the true exegete or lover of the things of God who brings out of the treasury of the faith 'new things and old,' and, as a way, it is always fruitful in its results.

Still, whether we adopt the first or the second way, or yet another, God will perfect that work of grace which he himself has begun in us, and can fill us with a joy beyond all our deserts, for 'with joy you will draw waters from the Saviour's fountains'.



THE HOLY SOULS

DOMINIC SIRE, O.P.

WORSHIP is the outcome of living faith, the expression of a sincere conviction in some external and visible form. There is innate in every society and individual the urge to communicate and share conviction. Good naturally spreads itself in companionship. The Church is a society both human and divine; divine in its origin and support and human in its composition. It gives effect to this urge in two main streams, the liturgy and private devotion. As a society its worship is found in the liturgy, but the individual members of that society express themselves in a variety of private devotions. These two streams are nevertheless vitally connected. The liturgy of its very nature and because it is the official and common worship of the body politic remains somewhat static and is carefully prescribed and ruled by laws. It has even a common and universal language, at