

THE MYSTICISM OF THE ROSARY

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HERE is no doubt that of the many methods of prayer which the Church has placed in the hands of the faithful for their sanctification, the holy Rosary is among the surest and best. It is a well of grace whose source is the God-Man himself; not above even the least of his little ones drawing therefrom the sweet, fresh waters of everlasting life; inexhaustible to the most profound intellects, a *summa theologica* of the Catholic Faith. It is safe and sure because it is sound theology, and assures to prayer that objectivity which it should possess if it is to avoid the easy pitfalls of idle dreaming and speculation, and it fixes the gaze of the mind and the aspirations of the heart on the precious mysteries of our Lord's life, rather than a barren and too often harmful preoccupation with our own interior life, which is so characteristic of this age of amateur psycho-analysts and morbid introspection. Moreover the whole lovely drama which was enacted by Christ for our sanctification, whose motive is the fathomless abyss of love which the divine Lover feels for what is his own by every conceivable right and title, must not be merely considered as acts of the historical Christ of two thousand years ago, complete and finished, but, like the holy Mass, a drama which demands daily re-presentation, a sublime mystery which must be lived through again in each individual life, woven into the very texture of the mind. By watching him with the mind's eye we come to understand something of him, knowledge bursts into love and we desire to imitate him; gradually we put on the likeness of Christ, become conformed to him: he, growing in us, takes ever more and more possession of us, until it is no longer the 'I' but the 'Thou' ruling and directing, and the consecration which we made of ourselves in baptism, which we re-affirmed in the anointing of confirmation, bears blessed fruit in us. Transformed into him we radiate him; the clammy darkness of self-hood is driven back by the Light of the World, the terrible loneliness of the creature is replaced by the love and friendship of the Creator, from servants we become sons. In us he walks once more the high-ways and by-ways of the world, through us he permeates the structure and fabric of human life, as he must do until the end of time. Not only is this holiness, but it is Catholic Action as well. No shop, factory, school, no place where men work or live together must be without his presence burning through us Catholics who are his bearers, his ambassadors.

The primary problem of every age, of every individual and nation is not of doing but of being. If we will be other Christs in the measure and manner which he has designed for us from all eternity we may, very largely, leave the perils of doing in his hands, because by being like Christ we shall act like him, and in accordance with the will of the Father. God's work will then be done in God's way and in God's time, and it will endure because it is his. Contemplating the sacred humanity of our blessed Lord in the mysteries of the Rosary we should endeavour not to stop there, but in him and with him and through him enter into the spacious garden of his divinity resting for as long as we may in order that returning again from his holy garden to the noise and clamour of human things we shall be inwardly refreshed and strengthened, and better able to give others that peace which the world cannot give.

In order to experience the life of the blessed Trinity in the soul we need the knowledge of Christ in our mind, and the love of the Holy Spirit in our will to make this experience tangible and real. Into this life we were born at baptism, the dawning of the day whose noon-tide splendour will cause the very essence of our being to rejoice with an unimaginable and eternal beatitude. Outside Christ himself no one can teach our hearts and minds more surely, more sweetly, simply and perfectly than his holy Mother, through whom he willed to come to us, and was not sullied thereby, and by whom it is still his will to bestow upon us all the riches of his grace. With her impeccable flesh he clothed the blinding light of his divinity, tempering its brilliance to the frailty of eyes long accustomed to twilight and darkness, and the tenuous shapes of things half real. It is in her Immaculate Heart that the wonderful mystery of Christ was pondered and guarded, and it is she who, with gracious love, will instruct us therein. Through the whole symphonic tempo of the Rosary it is her name in the angelic salutation which threads in and out of the major movements. And so indeed it should be, for she is the symbol of the human soul, for what God worked in and through her he desires to work in and through every human soul. The human soul doing the will of God becomes the 'Mother' of God with a spiritual 'motherhood'; and she will form him in us as no other being under God can do.

We have mentioned the objectivity of the Rosary, the factual reality of the mysteries which we contemplate therein. But the Rosary also has a mysticism of its own; that is to say that in addition to the mental beholding of the great facts of the Redemption as they actually occurred there is also the mystical significance underlying them, which can be taken as a type or symbol of a truth

valid for the interior development of the spiritual life. Besides being historical events, they are component parts in the holy Mass of Christ's life, and have a reality and meaning in the order of the spirit; they are stages to which our own spiritual life must conform as the archetypal pattern upon which the interior life, indeed life itself, is designed, because the Love-Word, the God-man Jesus Christ, and everything he does are a living plan drawn by the blessed Trinity on the parchment of our human flesh. With God nothing is wasted, and nothing is without meaning, not even the brief life of a sparrow, or the ephemeral delicacy of the dew-hung web. It is his will which regulates the planets in the remote silence of interstellar space and clothes the grasses of the field with the tender loveliness of his own mind. These holy mysteries, truly so called, since only the wisdom and love of God knows the length and breadth and height and depth of them, are preceded, accompanied and terminated by the *Pater*, *Ave* and *Gloria*, each possessing a theological profundity all its own.

The *Pater*, which is the norm of all prayer, has the peculiar value of being taught us by our blessed Lord himself and expresses those sentiments which motivated his own holy soul, and which he desired so ardently should animate ours. The thoughtful recitation of this one prayer alone has raised souls to the heights of union with God. The *Ave* recalls incessantly the sinless state of our holy Mother, the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception, the blessedness of her divine Motherhood, and begs of her to intercede for us with her Son, with whom her soul is indissolubly knit. The *Gloria*, the lesser doxology, echoes the greater which was sung by the angelic hosts on the night of Christ's birth. It is a perfect expression of the adoration which the sacred humanity of the Word always rendered to his Father, of the lovely human worship which our Lady offered to God, and a perpetual reminder that the whole aim and purpose of our life is to adore and serve the blessed Trinity here below, in order to merit a share in their life hereafter.

The mysteries themselves are arranged in three series of five under the titles of joyful, sorrowful and glorious, and cover the main events in the birth, passion and resurrection of our Lord. It may be a help to recall that five is also the number of his adorable wounds in whose sweet depths we may recollect ourselves whilst considering him who bore them. In the joyful mysteries we may especially ask of God an increase of the theological virtue of that faith which so wonderfully illuminated our blessed Lady, and led the shepherds and the wise men to the poverty-stricken birth place of the world's Lord. We may also renew our devotion to the Father, the first Person of the holy Trinity, who so loved the world that

he sent his only begotten Son, as the plenary message of his love. St Paul speaking of this says: 'God having spoken of old to our forefathers through the prophets, by many degrees and in many ways, has at last in these days spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the world. He being the effulgence of God's glory and the very image of his substance, upholds the universe by God's powerful mandate.' (Heb. 1, 1-3.)

The sorrowful mysteries are especially appropriated to the second Person, the Word, who, 'though being equal with God . . . emptied himself, took the nature of a slave and was made like to men . . . he humbled himself, becoming obedient unto death—even the death of the Cross.' (Phil. 2, 7-8.) We may also ask for growth in the theological virtue of hope, for Christ the hope and expectation of the nations has come and in him we have forgiveness of sins and surety of eternal life. Finally, in the glorious mysteries, we can adore the work of the Holy Ghost and implore of him an ever deeper possession of the theological virtue of charity, as well as the perfect operation of his gifts in our soul. Created by the Father, redeemed by the Son, and sanctified by the Holy Ghost, the holy Rosary shows forth in a wonderful way the power and perfection of all three working as One.

God, speaking to us through Isaias (61, 10), says: 'I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, and my soul shall be joyful in my God: for he hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, and with the robe of justice he hath covered me, as the bridegroom decked with a crown, and as a bride adorned with her jewels', for the Christian soul should always be filled with joy, as St Paul teaches, and at no time more completely than when pondering over the mysteries of the Incarnation. Christ the Joy of God has come, the silent Word has taken a human mouth, and sings his eternal love song in the world that has waited so long for the sound of his voice. So often throughout the New Testament we hear him saying: Be of good heart: Fear not: Trust in me: My peace I give unto you: for the 'kingdom of God is . . . justice and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost'. (Rom. 14, 17.)

The first thing the mysteries of the Incarnation should teach us, then, is joy; a joy which springs from complete confidence in God our Father who loves us with an everlasting love, for, outside sin, neither life nor death, neither trials nor tribulations can pluck us from his hand. Moved by the joy which filled her soul our blessed Lady cried out: 'My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath exulted in God my Saviour . . . for to me the Almighty hath done wonders and holy is his name'. She too is holy, with the

holiness of a perfect human soul, the second Eve who being espoused by the Holy Spirit brought forth the thrice Holy of God. She is the type of every human soul who desires God and seeks to be his 'Mother'.

What spiritual truths does her simple life teach us? Surely that of detachment, recollection and love. She knew not man. When the great message came to her she was sitting quietly in her room; always she bided in the inner room of her soul, adoring the God to whom she had vowed herself by a vow of virginity. When God wedded her, our Mother in grace, he espoused every human soul who, until the end of time, shall give itself to him. No soul can desire God more than God yearns for that soul. If in detachment, recollection and love we wait for him and desire his coming, he will surely come. But he will not force open the door of our inner room if our will locks it against him. It is for us to leave that door wide open, to say our '*fiat mihi*' with the blessed Virgin, and to feel the 'power of the Highest' overshadowing us by grace, fertilising our soul to bring forth the sweet flower of Jesse. We see that in the Trinity it is the very strength and perfection of God's love which impelled him to create us, other beings who might share in that flashing torrent of life and love which is his essence and existence, and we see that Mary's love drove her over the long journey through barren hill country to visit her cousin St Elizabeth. The income we receive in prayer is only given that we may pay it back again to our neighbour in the golden coin of charity. How shall we love him we cannot see, if we do not love him we can? What is done to and for our brethren is done to and for God, a fact as certain as death. Love of God and charity to our neighbour bring about the birth of Christ in us, the baptismal seed grows and crowds out our selfish autonomous existence, which is one of the miseries of hell, and we are possessed by him. The Presentation in the Temple and the Finding of the Child there serve to underline this basic fact of life, that we belong to God as his peculiar possession, and that he is always to be found in the temple of the soul, if we seek him there like Mary and Simeon and Anna, and it is there he says, I 'will make them joyful in my house of prayer'. (Is. 56, 7.) No prayer could conclude and sum up what has been said on these first mysteries more perfectly than the collect for the second Mass of Christmas Day: 'Grant us, we beseech thee, Almighty God, that we who are bathed in the new light of thy Incarnate Word, may show forth in our works that which by faith burns in our minds'. For the Christian soul every day and hour is Christmas Day.

There must come a time when we feel that our love is crucified, when the soul is sorrowful unto death. Night enters the garden

of the soul and from the communion which we had previously with our Lord, we must go forth to suffering and death. Yet it is a baptism with which we must be baptised, even as he was. We must be willing to be spurned by the world and even good people, lashed by malicious tongues, mocked and set at nought, the mind crowned with pain and forgetfulness, and purified in blind faith. The purification of the soul demands that we pass by Gethsemane in some form or another, condemned by Pilate, the secular world, and go forth bearing our Cross; thus must we suffer in order to enter into glory. Here we have no abiding city, and the heavenly city and the heavenly birth require us to tread the Royal Highway of the Cross. If we are crucified with Christ we shall rise with him into the immortal glory of everlasting life, where tears and sorrow shall be no more. Endure with him but a little while and in the day of his own choosing we shall be with him in Paradise, even here on earth. The growth of divine light and love cannot be other than a Crucifixion for us because the life of the spirit is anathema to the natural life which seeks always the most immediate and easy satisfaction. So we must be willing, desirous, to drink the chalice of suffering, that the action of the Mass may be continued throughout our daily life and that we may grow to full stature in Christ. We must come to thirst for God and for souls with arms wide stretched to the whole world, excluding none, refusing nothing, willing to experience the '*Eloi, eloi, lama Sabachtani*' of complete desolation, in order to achieve the blessed confidence of the 'Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit'.

Look down, we beseech thee, O Lord, on this thy family for whom Jesus Christ our Lord did not hesitate to deliver himself into evil hands, and undergo the torment of the Cross.

After a severe winter nature seems hard and dead and cold. The ground is dun and brown, and the trees lift their bare cruciform arms to the dull and heavy sky. But winter gives way to spring and summer, and new life follows close upon death. Except the grain of wheat die there will be no harvest, no bread, no sacred host compounded of millions of grains which have died to arise anew as the glorified body of the Lord.

These last five mysteries are radiant with the light of the Holy Ghost, the joy of a burning pentecostal love which cried the good news in manifold tongues for all to hear and understand. Death is overcome, and the grave shown to be only a momentary resting place. For the mortal has put on immortality, and the corruptible incorruptibility, and we are transformed into him we love. We are risen from the body of this death, and spiritually ascended to the Father through his beloved Son in the power of the Holy Ghost.

We have completed that adoption of sons whereby we cry *Abba*, Father! Bearers of the spiritual and risen Lord, sealed and stamped with his holy indwelling, we may pour forth our own love upon all men pentecostal-wise. Life and death no longer hold any terrors for us who walk with the Lord of life and Victor of death through his world which he has made, into which he was born and which he has signed in every part with the pure love-sign of the cross. It is the knowledge of this truth which inspired St Peter to cry out: 'May the trial of your faith be found unto the praise and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ—whom not having seen you love: in whom also now, though you see him not you believe, and believing you shall rejoice with joy unspeakable and glorified'. Let our minds brood intently upon these fathomless mysteries gathering the life which they contain, that the will may transform it through the merits of the divine love.

So from the spring of the Incarnation through the autumn and bitter winter of the Passion we come to the eternal summer of Pentecost. 'The winter is now past, the rain is over and gone, the flowers have appeared in our land. Arise, make haste, my love, my dove, my beautiful one, and come!' So spoke the Spirit to the bride, and rising from her short sleep our blessed Lady entered into heaven and the joy of her Lord. Crowned by him with every grace and beauty she received the surpassing reward of her fidelity. Queen and Mother in the order of grace she dispenses to us the unsearchable riches of Christ, with the hand of a loving Mother. 'If anyone thirsts let him come to me and drink'—from the sweet well of the holy Rosary, 'and out of his heart shall flow rivers of living water'.

Praesta, quaesumus, Omnipotens Deus: ut claritatis tuae super nos splendor effulgeat; et lux tua corda eorum, qui per gratiam tuam, renati sunt, Sancti Spiritus illustratione confirmet. Amen.