

ROMAN CATHOLICISM

In the Light of Scripture

by

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CHAPTER SIXTEEN

THE ROSARY

THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CONCEPT OF PRAYER calls for endless repetition of a few set prayers and ascriptions of praise addressed partly to God, but more frequently to the Virgin Mary. The rosary is a combination of these short vocal prayers with meditation; that is, while the lips are murmuring the words, the mind is to be occupied with what are called the “mysteries,” which are the main events in the life of Christ and Virgin Mary. These are arranged in three groups:

1. The Joyful Mysteries. The Annunciation, the Visitation, the Nativity, the Presentation, and the Finding in the Temple.
2. The Sorrowful Mysteries. The Agony in the Garden, the Scourging, the Crowning with Thorns, the Carrying of the Cross, and the Crucifixion.
3. The Glorious Mysteries. The Resurrection, the Ascension, the Descent of the Holy Ghost, the Assumption of the Virgin Mary, and her Coronation.

The essential prayers to be recited are three: the Paternoster (Our Father), the Ave Maria (Hail Mary), and the Gloria. Crossing oneself on the forehead and breast, the creed is first recited, then one Paternoster, followed by ten Aves and the Gloria, to which if desired other set prayers can be added. To assist in counting these prayers a threaded string of beads is used (the beads as well as the prayers being called the rosary).

The Buddhists of the Far East, the Brahmans of India, the Lamas of Tibet, the old pagans of Rome, and the people of Ephesus in their worship of Diana (Acts 19: 28), all existing before the Roman Catholic Church came into existence, constantly used beads in reciting their many prayers, as do also the Moslems when repeating the name of Allah.

The rosary used by the ordinary Catholic lay worshiper consists of fifty small beads, divided into groups of ten, called “decades,” separated by five larger beads, called “paters,” because they are held between the fingers when the Paternoster is recited. Then the following ten small beads are taken into the fingers one by one while the ten Aves are repeated, after which the Gloria is repeated—all this while the mind is fixed upon the first Mystery, the Nativity. And so on, until the prayers for the whole of the fifteen Mysteries have been said, the total being 180, without any extras, taking between one and two hours to recite, which time can however be divided over several periods. Before the beads can be used, they must be blessed by the priest to make them holy. Though the beads may be used anywhere, the prayers have special efficacy when recited in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament.

The purpose of thus praying is of course the accumulation of merit in order to secure indulgences. *“It is well to make a general intention of gaining all the indulgences possible, each time one says the rosary”* (The Holy Rosary, p. 7, Catholic Truth Society). A list is given of six different indulgences available all the year round, and four other specially available during the month of October, while yet more can be secured by joining the Confraternity of the Holy Rosary.

The fallacies of merit, extra-merit, and indulgences have been dealt with in earlier chapters. Here it is only necessary to note that the telling of beads finds no place in the teaching either of our Lord or the apostles, and that the practice is in direct opposition to our Lord’s own command, so that to pray with the rosary is not only no merit, but is actually offensive to Him. He said:

When ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking. Be not ye therefore like unto them: for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him (Matthew 6:7, 8).

Needless to say, this admonition was not intended to hinder people from spending time in true prayer to God.

Jesus Himself went out into a mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God (Luke 6:12). When they express our heartfelt desire, we are not forbidden to repeat the same words, for our Lord did this in the Garden of Gethsemane (see Matthew 26:39, 42, 44). So did the Canaanitish woman (Matthew 15:21). And Solomon (I Kings 8:30, 34, 36, 39, 43, 45, 49). These were not **“vain repetitions.”**

To use beads to check off a fixed number of repetitions, however, is just mechanical, and misses entirely the true relationship of prayer, which is that of a subject before his king, a child before its father.

Repetitions made with a rosary could have no place in such relationship as we draw near to Him, as King of kings, and yet our Father in Christ Jesus. True prayer must be **“in the Spirit”** (Ephesians 6:18), not mechanical. Repeating set prayers with a rosary, moreover, induces an attitude of mind which regards a mere outside performance as all that is essential. When we present some request to a man, we do not make a specified number of repetitions, and at the same time check off the number with a rosary. How much less should we do this in prayer to God!

~ end of chapter 16 ~

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