

A ROSARY BY ANY OTHER NAME

A MEDITATION BY REV. M.J. FRINGS

"I was exalted as a rose plant in Jericho."

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MY DEAR BRETHREN, when Pope Pius IX, on May 23, 1877, gave audience to a number of pious pilgrims he said to them: "Have courage, my dear children! I exhort you to fight against the persecution of the Church and against anarchy, not with the sword, but with the rosary, with prayer and good example." This Pope, who with great wisdom and strong hand has guided for thirty-two years the bark of Peter, which in many violent storms had been rocked to and fro, he who well knew the great dangers of our times, regarded the rosary as a conquering weapon.

What great confidence his successor, Pope Leo XIII, placed in the veneration and invocation of the Blessed Virgin Mary by means of the rosary! He exhorted all Christianity to pray the rosary daily during the month of October, in order to obtain assistance in these distressing times. In his brief on this occasion Leo XIII says: It has been a favorite and prevalent custom of Catholics, in times of need and danger, to take refuge in Mary, and to seek consolation from her motherly concern."

History, early and recent, relates how public and private devotion to the Mother of God was held in times of calamity and distress, and how these prayers were heard, and help was granted. Thus originated the exalted titles which Catholics give to the Blessed Virgin, such as Help of Christians, and Refuge of Sinners.

To these titles was added another when, on December 10, 1883, Leo XIII directed that the title "Queen of the Rosary" be added to the Litany of the Blessed Virgin. The name Rosary is significant. It is a symbol of Mary, also of devotion to her. We will endeavor to make this clear.

The realm of nature is the symbol of the realm of grace, as the realm of grace is a symbol of the realm of glory. It was God's intention to let His earthly creation be a reflection of the divine perfections, of the supernatural, of divinity, so that man might perceive the supernatural through created things, and thus more readily understand it. "For the invisible things of Him, from the creation of the world, are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made" (Rom. i, 20).

Our first parents obtained a clear conception of the supernatural through the natural things of this life. Nature was to them an open book, in which they could read the divine perfections. Through sin the understanding of man was dimmed and he failed in the interpretation of nature. Instead of being led to God through it, he allowed himself to become estranged, and from a master became the slave of nature.

Then Christ came and redeemed the world from the slavery of sin and again granted to man the clear conception of the true God, as also the right understanding of nature. This is verified in the saints and we have a beautiful example in Saint Francis of Assisi. About his interpretation and meditation of nature Saint Bonaventure says: "He considered all things created as original from God, and saw in each creature the Creator and Preserver."

Everything in nature was to him a symbol of spiritual life. He took delight especially in flowers, because they reminded him of the flower from the root of Jesse, which refreshes and gladdens the whole world.

See, my dear brethren, this is the correct, the Christian way of contemplating nature. The spiritual world is reflected in the visible.

And Jesus being the King and Mary the Queen in the realm of grace and glory, nature contains symbols that refer to Jesus and Mary. All thing of this creation: from the flowers of the valley to the brilliant stars that illumine the night, all things in nature are symbols of the glorious Mother of God. Among many such symbols used in Holy Scripture, we find Mary called the mystical rose. The Church therefore regards the rose as a symbol of Mary. Let us see in what the likeness consists.

If on a summer's day we enter a garden, where various flowers through their form, color, and sweet odor delight and refresh us, our eye is chiefly attracted by the rose. We are especially well pleased with it. The rose is the queen of flowers in form, color, and fragrant odor, because of its beauty.

Let us turn now our gaze to the spiritual garden, the Church of Christ. The various flowers there are the faithful, adorned with piety and virtue, and spreading the fragrance of saintliness with which God is pleased. In the Canticle of Canticles the Lamb of God is pictured as feeding among the lilies. A beautiful thought! It tells us how the Lamb of God, our divine Savior, is fond of the flowers of God, the God-loving souls, as is the lamb of the lilies.

And in this garden of God, the Holy Church, Mary is the rose, the pride of the garden, the queen of the flowers. The rose is therefore the most beautiful symbol of Mary, of all saints the queen, exalted above all saints in sublimity, beauty, gentleness, and sweetness. Therefore, because Mary is among the saints what the rose is among the flowers, she is called “the Mystical Rose.” And the name Rosary is to remind us of this.

The rose, furthermore, signifies the virtuous life of Mary the virgin. The rosebud is a beautiful symbol of virginity. It is hidden as under a veil. Lovely is the Christian virgin, hidden in the garb of innocence like a rosebud. Mary is the Virgin of Virgins, and can above all be compared to the fair and undefiled rosebud.

The open, blooming rose is an emblem of pure motherhood. Like the opened radiant rose, the Christian mother is the full vigor of life; her heart is open with true love for her husband and children; and she unfolds her soul to heaven, so that through prayer she may receive the needed assistance for herself and hers. Through her good example in Christian virtues she spreads around her the fragrance of a God-pleasing life, and encourages those who associate with her to imitate her virtues.

Mary is the Immaculate Virgin and Mother, Mother of God, and of all mankind. She is the most noble and perfect of all mothers. Like a magnificent rose she shines in the splendor of her virtues, and is the perfect example

for all mothers. Because her heart is fired with love for God and man, she is, as Saint Jordanus says, likened to the flaming red rose.

There is no rose but it has thorns. The thorns are a figure of suffering, of sorrow, of temptations. Saint Brigid relates in her revelations how she at one time was downcast because the enemies of Christ were so powerful, and how she was consoled by the Mother of God herself, who told her to remember the rose among the thorns. “The rose,” so said Mary, “gives a fragrant odor; it is beautiful to the sight, and tender to the touch, and yet it grows among thorns, inimical to beauty and tenderness. So may also those who are mild, patient, beautiful in virtue, be put to a test among adversaries. And as the thorn, on the other hand, guards, so do wicked surroundings protect the just against sin by demonstrating to them the destructiveness of sin.”

The life of Mary was interwoven with many sorrows, and she is justly called “a rose among thorns.” Saint Brigid says: “The Virgin may suitably be called a blooming rose. Just as the gentle rose is placed among thorns, so this gentle Virgin was surrounded by sorrow.”

The rose obtains its life through the stem, to which it is closely united. A rose broken from the stem will soon wither. So Mary received all her graces from Jesus, with whom she was united through the liveliest faith and ardent love. She is in truth a spiritual, a Mystical Rose.

The name Rosary, therefore, is well suited to this devotion. For it is a wreath of spiritual roses, as it were, which we place at the feet of Mary in order to show our love and veneration. And Mary finds delight in this devotion, for it reminds her of all the good God did for her, and for which all nations pronounce her blessed.

Oh, let us then resolve to wind this wreath frequently, to lay it often at the feet of the noble, the gracious Queen of the Rosary!

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