



DIOCESE OF ROCKVILLE CENTRE
OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

October 7, 2020 - Our Lady of the Rosary

Dear Brother Priests:

At the end of August, I offered the House Retreat at St. Joseph's Seminary. My talks focused on prayer in priestly life. *Lectio divina*, liturgical prayer, the daily Rosary, and mental prayer were highlighted, as was the relationship between prayer and evangelization.

As I prepared, delivered, and then reflected on the seven conferences I presented and the four homilies I preached, I realized the most effective counsel I gave the seminarians came from those times during my life as a priest and bishop when I have struggled in prayer and gained insight through perseverance.

This was true when I spoke of the Rosary. I periodically fall into superficial Rosary ruts. These are phases when I “say” the Rosary perfunctorily. I go through the motions - racing from mystery to mystery - in an effort to reach the finish line as quickly as possible. With a breakneck pace and unbridled distractions along the way, such minutes with Our Lady are not ones of deep contemplation.

Speaking to seminarians about the Rosary helped me again come to grips with such ruts in my prayer life and invited me to rediscover the beauty of this prayer. Since the retreat, I have spent more time with the Rosary, reflecting on it further, and on this Feast of Our Lady of the Rosary, I want to share a few reflections with you. Hopefully, in my living a bit of the Pauline “when I am weak, then I am strong” logic of 2 Corinthians 12:10, we can together appreciate anew this gift, the Rosary.

The Daily Rosary, Marian Devotion and Evangelizing Pastoral Ministry of the Catholic Priest

In his book *The World's First Love*, Venerable Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen draws on the insights and intuitions of Nathaniel Hawthorne (1804-1864), a pivotal figure in the history of American literature. Hawthorne was not Catholic, but looking in from the outside, he appreciated the Church's Marian devotion and doctrine. He wrote: “I have always envied the Catholics that sweet, sacred, Virgin Mother who stands between them and the Deity, intercepting somewhat his awful

splendor, but permitting his love to stream on the worshiper more intelligibly to human comprehension through the medium of a woman's tenderness.”¹

Little did Nathaniel Hawthorne know his profound appreciation of Marian devotion from outside the Catholic Church would one day be experienced by his daughter, Servant of God Sr. Rose Hawthorne (1851-1926), from inside the Catholic Church. Sr. Rose was the foundress of the Dominican Sisters of Hawthorne and devoted to Good Samaritan-service of those suffering with cancer.

What a truth this story relates! God’s providential designs are so often expressed and accomplished through the intercession and love of Our Lady. A priest’s own vocation story, his pastoral charity, and his experiences of parish evangelization make this clear: Our Lady is always present.

The Blessed Virgin Mary is involved in the life of every believer, and she is close to every priest. When we pray a daily Rosary, we draw near to her who points always to her Son. In the Rosary, we go to Jesus through Mary. It is indispensable, especially for priests.

The daily rhythm of the Rosary is essential to the daily rhythm of the priest’s life. When he is faithful to the Rosary, Mary teaches him the power of silence and expands within him the capacity for contemplative concentration in all aspects of his prayer life. The Rosary is also an essential spiritual weapon for the priest living faithfully the spirit of priestly poverty, chastity and obedience. It safeguards him. As a powerful prayer for peace, the Rosary helps the priest intercede for interior peace, peace within families, peace in the Church we love, peace in our cities² and peace in the world.

When he prays the Rosary, a priest encounters the Lord who called him to share in His priesthood. In his 2002 Apostolic Letter *Rosarium Virginis Mariae*, Pope Saint John Paul II described the power of the Rosary in the lives of the saints and in the history of the Church.³ He emphasized the Rosary as both a biblical and contemplative prayer, and by adding the Luminous mysteries, he made this prayer a true “compendium of the Gospel” that leads us deeper into the mystery of Christ. The Joyful, Sorrowful, Glorious and Luminous mysteries, with the exception of a few, are taken directly from the Gospels, so praying the Rosary deepens our bond with the Lord. By picking up our rosary and thumbing the beads, we meet Him in the midst of our day, and we meet Him with Our Lady.

¹ Venerable Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen, *The World’s First Love: Mary, Mother of God* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1996) 230. I discovered this quote in the July 2019 edition of the *Magnificat*.

² See Pope Francis’ 2013 Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelium Gaudium*, 71-75. This section is entitled, “Challenges from Urban Cultures.”

³ See the Vatican website.

Mary's presence in the mysteries models for us a Marian approach to *lectio divina* or meditation on the Scriptures.⁴ The contemplative and peaceful rhythm of the Hail Mary, prayed while meditating on a gospel mystery, helps us enter the mysteries with Mary as our guide. With Mary by our side, the mysteries teach us about our priestly life.

The Catholic Priest and the Joyful Mysteries

The rhythm of the Joyful mysteries enriches and directs the priest's life. In the Annunciation, Mary teaches him how a consistent and deep yes to God's will is nourished in silence. In the Visitation, she accompanies him in all his pastoral visitations to the sick, the elderly, the poor, the suffering and families. In the Nativity, she teaches him priestly simplicity and poverty and a Christocentric spirit of wonder and adoration. In the Presentation, she cultivates a reverence for the elderly and the radiant presence of her Son in those who suffer with Alzheimer's and dementia. She reminds him that a virtuous and holy priestly life will lead him to the Cross and often to being "a sign of contradiction." In the Finding of the Child Jesus at the Temple, she will impress on him the urgency to find Jesus in all that he does.

The Catholic Priest and the Luminous Mysteries

The rhythm of the Luminous mysteries enriches and directs the priest's life. In the Baptism of the Lord, Our Lady teaches her priest sons to die to sin and rise in grace. She teaches them to be faithful to their own baptismal call to holiness and mission and the baptismal rhythm of their experience of the Paschal Mystery in their priestly ministry and throughout their lives. In the Wedding Feast of Cana, she teaches them to serve marriages and families and to be courageous in proclaiming the informed and prayerful assent due the Church's objectively true moral teaching in regard to marriage and family life. In the Call to Conversion and the Proclamation of the Kingdom of God, she teaches priests to be completely open to conversion in their own life as the best way to encourage the conversions of those they serve. In the Transfiguration, she teaches them to allow their minds, hearts, souls and priestly ontological identities to be transfigured with every dimension of the Splendor of Catholic Truth. In the Institution of the Eucharist, she asks them to "rekindle Eucharistic amazement" in their lives and in parish life realizing with Pope Benedict XVI that every effective moment of Church reform and evangelization in history involves a rediscovery of the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist.

The Catholic Priest and the Sorrowful Mysteries

The rhythm of the Sorrowful mysteries, complimented by the Stations of the Cross, enriches and directs the priest's life. In the Agony in the Garden, Our Lady comes to her priest sons in their existential moments of loneliness and times when they are misunderstood or treated poorly or ignored. In the Scourging at the Pillar, she helps priests to accept the different forms and stripes of humiliation that inevitably come to them and she teaches them how to deepen priestly humility, expel pettiness and return blessings for insults with peaceful magnanimity and humility. In the Crowning of Thorns, she teaches priests how to handle and process all forms of mental suffering

⁴ See Pope Benedict XVI's 2010 Apostolic Exhortation *Verbum Domini*, 27-28.

from temptations to the tendency to brood and obsess over problems, vexations and humiliations. She helps them to practice the presence of God and to adore, praise and thank him precisely when they are tempted to waste valuable time on negative ruminations. In the Carrying of the Cross, Our Lady teaches priests to carry the daily Crosses that grind at the charitable patience of priests - and not only to endure them but profit from them. She teaches them to be a priestly Simon of Cyrene always ready to assist parishioners to carry the Crosses of life. She also helps them to be open to the Simon of Cyrenes that help them to carry the Crosses of their priesthood whether those Simons are spiritual directors, brother priests or solid, mature and wise friends. In the Crucifixion, she teaches priests to preach and live Christ crucified to Behold their Mother. She teaches them the contemplative concentration and understanding of the Sacrifice of Calvary renewed at each Mass that she models at the Foot of the Cross.

The Catholic Priest and the Glorious Mysteries

The rhythm of the Glorious mysteries enrich and direct the priest's life. In the Resurrection, Our Lady teaches her priest sons to embrace the power of the Risen Christ and to let the light that streams through His glorified wounds heal their wounds and in so doing help them to touch and heal the wounds of the sick, sinful and suffering humanity they serve. In the Ascension, she teaches priests to have a burning desire for Eternal Life and Heaven and to be instruments of cultivating in the people they serve this same burning desire which casts heavenly light on every decision, problem and practical question they face in life. In the Mystery of Pentecost, she shows them how to live the gifts and fruits of the Holy Spirit and how to trust the presence of the Holy Spirit in the Word of God, the Sacraments and their discernments and efforts on how best to evangelize the particular parishioners entrusted to their care. She teaches them the awe of the communion of the Trinity, expressed in the outpouring of the Spirit through tongue and flame resulting in a Church in communion served by the priest, "the man of communion." In the Assumption, she teaches them how to cultivate a love for her, to appreciate her presence in the Scriptures, the lives of saints and the miraculous Marian apparitions that are part of world history. In the Coronation of Our Lady, Queen of Heaven and Earth, she teaches them how she is the Queen of the Clergy and their Priesthood and the Queen of Evangelization assisting them to be creative and to meet the actual needs of the parishioners they serve.

The Catholic Priest as an Apostle of the Rosary

Priests are enriched by praying the Rosary, and like every Catholic, they must be Apostles of the Rosary. In a particular way, the priest must emphasize the power of the Rosary to bring peace, harmony and unity within marriages and families.

In the Epiclesis at Mass, the priest calls down the power of the Holy Spirit upon the gifts of bread and wine and upon all the families he serves in his parish and mystically on all families throughout the world. When the priest advocates for the Rosary to be prayed by families, he builds upon this moment. He seeks to unleash the Holy Spirit in marriages and families precisely by encouraging recitation of the Rosary.

How life-changing the Rosary can be for a home! Husbands and wives experience hurts, conflict, differences of temperament or personality, disagreements about duties and tasks, hurtful words that wound, misunderstandings, pride and self-will, and temptations to infidelity (how many times do we hear of emotional marital infidelity in social media?). The Rosary brings light and grace into these areas of darkness.

The contemplative rhythm of the Rosary (or just a decade prayed together daily) can gradually help couples begin to change negative and abrasive relational patterns into a new rhythm of intimacy, gentleness, humility, forgiveness and a refined fidelity. These movements of grace have a profound impact on their children and extended family and their daily parenting.

The spirit of prayer behind the Rosary points out that marriages are deepened and strengthened in unity, fidelity and indissolubility when a couple focuses on the love and will of God together. It is also a powerful prayer for harmonious relationships and healing between parents and their sons and daughters.

The priest has a critical role in his pastoral charity to families in being an Apostle of the Rosary.

Mary, Queen of the Rosary and Queen of the Clergy, pray for us!

Fraternally in Christ,

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