

## **The Rosary & Hail Mary**

The word rosary comes from Latin and means a garland of roses, the rose being one of the flowers used to symbolize the Virgin Mary. If you were to ask what object is most emblematic of Catholics, people would probably say, "The rosary, of course." We're familiar with the images: the silently moving lips of the old woman fingering her beads; the oversized rosary hanging from the waist of the wimpled nun; more recently, the merely decorative rosary hanging from the rearview mirror.

After Vatican II the rosary fell into relative disuse. The same is true for Marian devotions as a whole. But in recent years the rosary has made a comeback, and not just among Catholics. Many Protestants now say the rosary, recognizing it as a truly biblical form of prayer—after all, the prayers that comprise it come mainly from the Bible.

The rosary is a devotion in honor of the Virgin Mary. It consists of a set number of specific prayers. First are the introductory prayers: one Apostles' Creed (Credo), one Our Father (the Pater Noster or the Lord's Prayer), three Hail Mary's (Ave's), one Glory Be (Gloria Patri).

Then a decade of Hail Mary's while contemplating the mysteries of the faith assigned to each Mystery, namely, The Joyful, The Sorrowful, The Luminous, The Gloriest.

### **The Lord's Prayer**

The next prayer in the rosary—Our Father or the Pater Noster (from its opening words in Latin), also known as the Lord's Prayer—is even more acceptable to Protestants because Jesus himself taught it to his disciples.

It is given in the Bible in two slightly different versions (Matt. 6:9-13; Luke 11:2-4). The one given in Matthew is the one we say. (We won't reproduce it here. All Christians should have it memorized.)

### **The Hail Mary**

The next prayer in the rosary, and the prayer which is really at the center of the devotion, is the Hail Mary. Since the Hail Mary is a prayer to Mary, many Protestants assume it's unbiblical. Quite the contrary, actually. Let's look at it.

The prayer begins, "Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee." This is nothing other than the greeting the angel Gabriel gave Mary in Luke 1:28 (Confraternity Version). The next part reads this way:

"Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus." This was exactly what Mary's cousin Elizabeth said to her in Luke 1:42. The only thing that has been added to these two verses are the names "Jesus" and "Mary," to make clear who is being referred to. So the first part of the Hail Mary is entirely biblical.

### **Second Half of Hail Mary**

The second part of the Hail Mary is not taken straight from Scripture, but it is entirely biblical in the thoughts it expresses. It reads:

"Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death. Amen."

Let's look at the first words. Some Protestants do object to saying "Holy Mary" because they claim Mary was a sinner like the rest of us. But Mary was a Christian (the first Christian, actually, the first to accept Jesus; cf. Luke 1:45), and the Bible describes Christians in general as holy. In fact, they are called saints, which means "holy ones" (Eph. 1:1, Phil. 1:1, Col. 1:2). Furthermore, as the mother of Jesus Christ, the Incarnate Second Person of the Blessed Trinity, Mary was certainly a very holy woman.

Some Protestants object to the title "Mother of God," but suffice it to say that the title doesn't mean Mary is older than God; it means the person who was born of her was a divine person, not a human person. (Jesus is one person, the divine, but has two natures, the divine and the human; it is incorrect to say he is a human person.) The denial that Mary had God in her womb is a heresy known as Nestorianism (which claims that Jesus was two persons, one divine and one human), which has been condemned since the early 400s and which the Reformers and Protestant Bible scholars have always rejected.

### **History of Second half:**

The second half of the modern prayer: "Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death" was added in the 15th Century. Nobody knows where it originated, but it spread among the faithful and was never opposed among the hierarchy - eventually, it became expected, and then it gradually became official. It seems to have been a development resulting from one of the many things from the Council of Trent, 1545-1563 So by the time of Martin Luther, the Hail Mary prayer as we know it today was complete.

More complete History of the Hail Mary can be found @ <http://www.st-mary.info/hail-mary.php>  
Another Mediator?

### **Another Mediator?**

The most problematic line for non-Catholics is usually the last: "pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death." Many non-Catholics think such a request denies the teaching of 1 Timothy 2:5: "For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus." But in the preceding four verses (1 Tim. 2:1-4), Paul instructs Christians to pray for each other, meaning it cannot interfere with Christ's mediatorship: "I urge that prayers, supplications, petitions, and thanksgivings be made for everyone. . . . This is good, and pleasing to God our Savior."

We know this exhortation to pray for others applies to the saints in heaven who, as Revelation 5:8 reveals, intercede for us by offering our prayers to God: "The twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each holding a harp, and with golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints."

### **The Glory Be**

The fourth prayer found in the rosary is the Glory Be, sometimes called the Gloria or Gloria Patri. The last two names are taken from the opening words of the Latin version of the prayer, which in English reads:

"Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit. As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen." The Gloria is a brief hymn of praise in which all Christians can join. It has been used since the fourth century (though its present form is from the seventh) and traditionally has been recited at the end of each Psalm in the Divine Office.

### **Meditation the Key**

First we must understand that they are meditations. When Catholics recite the twelve prayers that form a decade of the rosary, they meditate on the mystery associated with that decade. If they merely recite the prayers, whether vocally or silently, they're missing the essence of the rosary. It isn't just a recitation of prayers, but a meditation on the grace of God. Critics, not knowing about the meditation part, imagine the rosary must be boring, uselessly repetitious, meaningless, and their criticism carries weight if you reduce the rosary to a formula. Christ forbade meaningless repetition (Matt. 6:7), but the Bible itself prescribes some prayers that involve repetition. Look at Psalms 136, which is a litany (a prayer with a recurring refrain) meant to be sung in the Jewish Temple. In the psalm the refrain is "His mercy endures forever." Sometimes in Psalms 136 the refrain starts before a sentence is finished, meaning it is more repetitious than the rosary, though this prayer was written directly under the inspiration of God.

It is the meditation on the mysteries that gives the rosary its staying power. The Joyful Mysteries are these: the Annunciation (Luke 1:26-38), the Visitation (Luke 1:40-56), the Nativity (Luke 2:6-20), the Presentation of Jesus in the Temple (Luke 2:21-39), and the Finding of the child Jesus in the Temple (Luke 2:41-51).

Then come the Sorrowful Mysteries: the Agony in the Garden (Matt. 26:36-46), the Scourging (Matt. 27:26), the Crowning with Thorns (Matt. 27:29), the Carrying of the Cross (John 19:17), and the Crucifixion (Luke 23:33-46).

The final Mysteries are the Glorious: the Resurrection (Luke 24:1-12), the Ascension (Luke 24:50-51), the Descent of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:1-4), the Assumption of Mary into heaven (Rev. 12), and her Coronation (cf. Rev. 12:1).

With the exception of the last two, each mystery is explicitly scriptural. True, the Assumption and Coronation of Mary are not explicitly stated in the Bible, but they are not contrary to it, so there is no reason to reject them out of hand. Given the scriptural basis of most of the mysteries, it's little wonder that many Protestants, once they understand the meditations that are the essence of the rosary, happily take it up as a devotion. We've looked at the prayers found in the rosary and the mysteries around which it is formed. Now let's see how it was formed historically.

The Luminous Mysteries were added by Pope John Paul II and are very recent in relationship to history of the Rosary. They were introduced in October 2002 in his letter, *Rosarium Virginis Mariae*.

Five mysteries, the Mysteries of Light (or the Luminous Mysteries), were added to the Rosary. They focus on the public ministry of Jesus Christ. They are:

### **The Baptism in the Jordan**

"Here, as Christ descends into the waters, the innocent one who became 'sin' for our sake (cf. 2Cor 5:21), the heavens open wide and the voice of the Father declares him the beloved Son (cf. Mt 3:17 and parallels), while the Spirit descends on him to invest him with the mission which he is to carry out."

### **The Wedding at Cana**

"The first of the signs, given at Cana (cf. Jn 2:1- 12), when Christ changes water into wine and opens the hearts of the disciples to faith, thanks to the intervention of Mary, the first among believers."

### **The Proclamation of the Kingdom**

"The preaching by which Jesus proclaims the coming of the Kingdom of God, calls to conversion (cf. Mk 1:15) and forgives the sins of all who draw near to him in humble trust (cf. Mk 2:3-13; Lk 7:47- 48): the inauguration of that ministry of mercy which he continues to exercise until the end of the world, particularly through the Sacrament of Reconciliation which he has entrusted to his Church (cf. Jn 20:22-23)."

### **The Transfiguration**

"The mystery of light par excellence is the Transfiguration, traditionally believed to have taken place on Mount Tabor. The glory of the Godhead shines forth from the face of Christ as the Father commands the astonished Apostles to 'listen to him' (cf. Lk 9:35 and parallels) and to prepare to experience with him the agony of the Passion, so as to come with him to the joy of the Resurrection and a life transfigured by the Holy Spirit."

(Luminous info from: <http://www.catholicity.com/prayer/luminous.html>)

The Secret of Paternoster Row

### **The Institution of the Eucharist**

"Christ offers his body and blood as food under the signs of bread and wine, and testifies 'to the end' his love for humanity (Jn 13:1), for whose salvation he will offer himself in sacrifice."

### **Insight**

It's commonly said that St. Dominic, the founder of the Order of Preachers (the Dominicans), instituted the rosary. Not so. Certain parts of the rosary predated Dominic; others arose only after his death.

Centuries before Dominic, monks had begun to recite all 150 psalms on a regular basis. As time went on, it was felt that the lay brothers, known as the *conversi*, should have some form of prayer of their own. They were distinct from the choir monks, and a chief distinction was that they were illiterate. Since they couldn't read the psalms, they couldn't recite them with the monks. They needed an easily remembered prayer.

The prayer first chosen was the Our Father, and, depending on circumstances, it was said either fifty or a hundred times. These *conversi* used rosaries to keep count, and the rosaries were known then as Paternosters ("Our Fathers").

In England there arose a craftsmen's guild of some importance, the members of which made these rosaries. In London you can find a street, named Paternoster Row, which preserves the memory of the area where these craftsmen worked.

The rosaries that originally were used to count Our Fathers came to be used, during the twelfth century, to count Hail Marys—or, more properly, the first half of what we now call the Hail Mary. (The second half was added some time later.)

Both Catholics and non-Catholics, as they learn more about the rosary and make more frequent use of it, come to see how its meditations bring to mind the sweet fragrance not only of the Mother of God, but of Christ himself.

NIHIL OBSTAT: I have concluded that the materials presented in this work are free of doctrinal or moral errors.  
Bernadeane Carr, STL, Censor Librorum, August 10, 2004

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+Robert H. Brom, Bishop of San Diego, August 10, 2004  
(Info from: <http://www.catholic.com/tracts/the-rosary>)