

# THE ROSARY

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Voice of the Rosary Confraternity

# LIGHT & LIFE

FATHER REGINALD E. MARTIN, O.P., *DIRECTOR*

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## NEW SAINT OF THE ROSARY

On June 3, 2007, Pope Benedict XVI canonized a Maltese priest, Fr. George Preca, whose devotion to the Rosary is widely considered the foundation for the Luminous Mysteries of the Rosary introduced by Pope John Paul II in the 2002 encyclical letter, *Rosarium Virginis Mariae*, which the pontiff wrote to inaugurate a Year of the Rosary, and to celebrate the 25th anniversary of his pontificate.

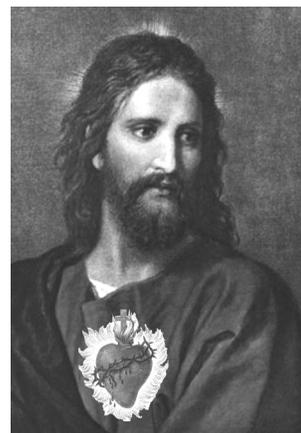
Fr. Preca was born in Malta, in 1880. Early in the 20th Century, as a young priest, he founded the Society of Christian Doctrine to train catechists. In 1957 the Society celebrated the 50th anniversary of its foundation, and many of Fr. Preca's supporters urged him to plan festivities to mark the event. Fr. Preca refused to support an elaborate celebration – *"it is enough,"* he said, *"to sing the Te Deum as a thanksgiving"* – but he wrote a number of short spiritual works, which he hoped would foster deeper intimacy with God among the Society's members.

Among these brief works were reflections on five events or aspects of Jesus' public ministry: his Baptism and subsequent temptation, the miracles that revealed Jesus as true God, the Sermon on the Mount, the Transfiguration, and the Last Supper. He presented these to his followers as five additional points of meditation when praying the Rosary. Each of these "mysteries" was to be accompanied by a brief, but suitable, time of reflection.

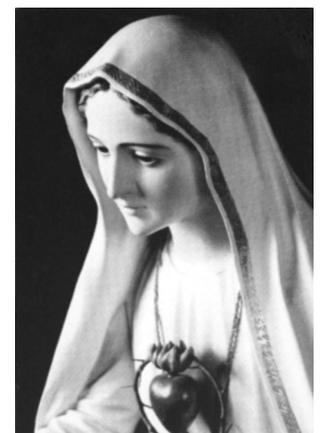
Although members of Fr. Preca's Society of Christian Doctrine surmise that Pope John Paul II initially learned of the future saint's devotion by means of the Internet or some other means of mass communication, we may never know the extent to which Fr. Preca's work influenced Pope John Paul as he wrote *Rosarium Virginis Mariae*. What is clear, however, is a deep correspondence between the language of the encyclical letter, and phrases crafted by Fr. Preca.

Fr. Preca died in 1962, so had no knowledge of what he may have helped inspire. However, one of his associates has said,

*Had Fr. Preca been around [in 2002], he would have rejoiced enormously. He would have made*



**THE SACRED HEART OF JESUS**



**THE IMMACULATE HEART OF MARY**

*the Pope's message his own, and would have encouraged us all to sing to Mary 'Rejoice, for I have found great favor with the Lord!' Fr. Preca would have emphatically passed on these pressing words of the Holy Father through the Rosary, 'Mary helps us to learn the secret of Christian joy, reminding us Christianity is, above all... good news – which has its center, indeed its very content, in the person of Christ.'*

## FR. DUFFNER CELEBRATES 93RD BIRTHDAY

Paul Duffner, O.P., long-time director of the Rosary Center, celebrated his 93rd birthday on April 14. Born in Jacksonville, Illinois, in 1915, the future Fr. Duffner studied at Routt High School in Jacksonville, IL and Quincy College in Quincy, IL. He excelled at sports, and showed early promise as an artist. A teacher encouraged him to explore the latter field, but young Paul was convinced God had other plans for him.

In addition to serving as the Dominicans' novice-master for 15 years, Fr. Duffner established the Rosary Center in 1945, and directed activities of the Rosary Center, including editing *"Light and Life"* for nearly two decades.

Fr. Duffner continues to spend his days at the Rosary Center, helping to fill the many orders the Center

*(continued on page 4)*

### THE ROSARY LIGHT & LIFE

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# THEOLOGY FOR THE LAITY

## THE OUR FATHER

By Father Reginald Martin, O.P.

### THE PERFECT PRAYER

In his account of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, St. Matthew records the fifty-four words that we call either "*The Our Father*" or "*The Lord's Prayer*" (Matt 6:9-13). Composed as it is of the Savior's own words, this prayer demands our attention, and sets the example for all other prayer.

St. Thomas Aquinas writes at some length on prayer in the *Summa Theologica*. When he considers the Lord's Prayer, he quotes St. Augustine, who remarks, "*if we pray rightly and fittingly, we can say nothing else but what is contained in this prayer of Our Lord*" (II-II, 83.9). St. Thomas teaches that our prayer can only express a desire for something good, and since the Our Father consists of Jesus' own words, we have Our Savior's own guarantee that we are seeking everything we may properly desire when we offer this prayer.

But St. Thomas says we should also look at the way the Our Father is structured. The order of the petitions gives us the order in which we ought to desire the good things that God offers us. The Lord's Prayer, thus, not only teaches us what to pray for, but teaches us the way we ought to ask for the things we desire.

Before we consider the words of The Our Father in some depth, let us first consider some general observations on prayer.

### THE ENDS AND MEANS OF PRAYER

When we pray we do not ask God to bend His will so that it corresponds to ours. Rather, we ask for a clearer understanding of His love, which gives us the confidence to approach Him in prayer, and which reveals His will for us. The first thing we must desire is God, so the Our Father begins by praising God's glory, and then asks that we may share it. As the prayer continues, we ask God to give us what we need to help us come to His everlasting life, and we ask Him to remove the obstacles that prevent us from devoting ourselves whole-heartedly to His will.

### THE FIVE CONDITIONS OF PRAYER:

#### CONFIDENCE

Scripture is filled with admonitions that encourage us to approach God with trust. "*Let us go with confidence to the throne of grace*" (Heb. 4:16), "*let him ask in faith, with no doubting*" (James 1:6), and when we say the words of the Our Father during the Mass, the celebrant invites us to "*pray with confidence.*"

The words of the Our Father are Jesus' own words, and we pray them because they are the words Jesus commanded us to use. Simply knowing that we are following Jesus' instructions should provide assurance that God will hear us. But the privilege of using Jesus' own words is an additional sign of His friendship. One of the Church's early theologians, St. Cyprian, remarked, "*to plead with the Lord in His own words betokens the prayer of an intimate and devoted friend.*"

### RECTITUDE AND ORDER

St. John Damascene, another of the Church's early theologians, taught, "*to pray is to ask fitting things of God.*" This may seem obvious, but we need only consider some of our requests to realize that praying rightly is a more challenging task than it appears. St. Paul noted the necessity of the Holy Spirit's assistance in our prayers, "*for we do not know how to pray as we ought*" (Rom 8:26), and St. James reminds us that we often pray for what we want, not necessarily what we need. "*You do not have because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions*" (James 4:2, 3).

To use Our Savior's words is to pray with the confidence that we are asking God for the gifts proper to His children. And because the Lord's Prayer asks first for God's will to be done, and only then for what will satisfy our physical needs, we have the additional confidence that we are praying in the manner Jesus desires when he commands, "*Seek first the kingdom of God and His justice, and all these things shall be added unto you*" (Matt. 6:33).

### DEVOTION

The dictionary defines devotion as "*religious ardor or zeal; ardent attachment or affection.*" This definition reminds us that our prayer should be characterized by depth rather than length. Jesus introduces the Lord's Prayer by warning His disciples not to "*heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do; for they think they will be heard for their many words*" (Matt. 6:7). St. Augustine repeats this admonition, "Beware of praying with many words: it is fervent attention that secures a hearing."

St. John Chrysostom makes a similar point. He notes that Scripture commands us to "*be constant in prayer*" (Rom 12:13), and makes a helpful distinction between the length of our prayer and the devotion with which we should pray.

*He seems to me to command...that neither should we make our prayers long; long, I mean, not in time, but in the number and length of the things mentioned... perseverance...in the same requests is our duty.*

St. Thomas asserts that devotion arises from charity, which is our friendship for God. God's love enables us to love Him in return, and then to love creation as God loves it. In the Lord's Prayer we express our love for God by calling Him "Father;" at the same time, we express our love for God's creation by asking Him to "forgive our trespasses," i.e., the offenses we have committed against others by not loving them as we should.

## **HUMILITY**

Jesus contrasted the example of the Pharisee's prayer to that of a sinner, and concluded his parable with the words, *"every one who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted"* (Luke 18:14). The sinner in this story won Jesus' praise for the simplicity of his prayer, *"God, be merciful to me, a sinner!"* In the Lord's Prayer we likewise express our utter dependence on God's mercy, and we do so in the simplest possible terms.

## **THE BENEFITS OF PRAYER: REMEDY FOR EVIL**

The Scripture contains many examples of prayer's ability to cleanse sinners from the punishment due their sinful actions. Perhaps the most compelling of these examples is that of the so-called "good" thief, who begs Jesus for mercy, and whom Jesus assures that he will share His life in heaven. But prayer is also a protection against falling into sin, as St. James counsels, when he writes, *"Is any one of you in trouble, let him pray"* (James 5:13).

## **THE OBJECT WE DESIRE**

The gospel is filled with assurances that our prayers will be answered. Jesus tells his disciples, *"whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you will receive it and you will"* (Mark 11:24). Experience, however, teaches that God does not always give us what we ask for. The reason, St. Thomas suggests, is that we do not ask for what is useful to our salvation, and St. Augustine reminds us that God may not grant a request *"so as to bestow something preferable."*

## **FRIENDSHIP WITH GOD**

The virtue of justice is the habit of giving each person what he deserves. Because God is infinitely greater than we are, we may not think of justice in our dealings with God. However, our acts of worship are nothing more than God deserves. Prayer is an expression of our willingness to offer God an acceptable gift; at the same time, prayer expresses our confidence, trust, and love. Therefore, prayer enables us to grow in the affection we show God, and equips us better to receive God's love in return.

## **OUR FATHER**

To call God "Father," as we do in the Lord's Prayer, expresses a relation between God and us. St. Augustine

wrote, *"...by that appellation...love is stirred up – for what ought to be dearer to sons than a father?"*

Moreover, we call God Father because He created us – and created us in a special way: in His image and likeness. This is a privilege not granted the rest of creation, and it admits us to an intimacy with God that He did not give His other creatures. We also call God "Father" because – like a human parent – He guides our actions. The rest of creation follows God's will without choice or thought; God allows us to choose to serve Him, in freedom.

Finally, we call God "Father" because He has made us His children. This may seem no more than common sense, but we must consider what it means to be God's child. A child is not simply a small person; as a legal entity, a child enjoys certain rights, including the right of inheritance. To call God "Father" acknowledges the greatness of God's love for us, and expresses the confidence that we are legitimate heirs to His kingdom, a privilege not granted to slaves, clients, or hired hands.

## **OUR FATHER**

Every word of our prayer is important, and St. John Chrysostom reminds us that *"by saying not 'my Father, which art in heaven, but 'our Father',"* the Lord's Prayer creates a bond among God's children, in which an individual *"nowhere [looks] to his own, but everywhere to his neighbor's good."* This point must not be underestimated: to offer the Lord's Prayer worthily we implicitly acknowledge both an equality among all people, and a willingness to be reconciled to our neighbor – even our enemies. Chrysostom writes,

*...by this He at once takes away hatred, and quells pride, and casts out envy, and brings in the mother of all good things, even charity, and exterminates the inequality of human things, and show how far the equality reaches between the king and the poor man...in those things which are greatest and most indispensable we are all of us fellows...For to all hath He given one nobility, having vouchsafed to be called the Father of all alike.*

We do not know how the words of the Lord's Prayer struck those who heard Jesus' great Sermon on the Mount, but we may imagine how startling the saints' reflections on Our Lord's words must have sounded to their contemporaries. St. Augustine warns,

*Here... is an admonition to the rich and those of noble birth...when they have become Christians they should not comport themselves proudly towards the poor...since together with them they call God "Our Father," – an expression which they cannot truly and piously use, unless they recognize that they themselves are brethren.*

Our world no longer admits the rigid class distinctions that characterized life in Augustine's or Chrysostom's day, but we do not have to look far to discern ethnic tensions in our society, or very real signs of inequality

and hostility among groups of individuals. St. Augustine reminds us that each of us stands equally poor and unworthy before God whom we call Our Father – “a relationship which can be brought about by no expenditure of ours, but solely by God’s goodwill.” Our radical equality before God challenges us to look beyond the differences that divide us, and to embrace one another in the common poverty of spirit that unites us before the immensity of God.

## OUR RIGHTS AND OBLIGATIONS

God gives us the privilege of addressing Him as “Father,” a title that expresses His concern, compassion, and love for us. We may profitably inquire what God asks in return from the individuals He has thus blessed.

## A FOURFOLD DEBT: HONOR

We are commanded to honor our human parents, and we must show our Father in heaven the same honor. This means giving God the praise due Him, and by living as beings created in His likeness. Our growth in virtue, our practice of the works of mercy, our growing closer to God in prayer are the common means by which we pay Our Father this honor He deserves.

## IMITATION AND OBEDIENCE

As children we were all taught, “beauty is as beauty does.” If we are created in God’s image, we not only look like God, we ought to act as He does. St. Paul urges the Ephesians, “be ye imitators of God as most dear children and walk in love” (Eph 5: 1).

Here we must remember that imitating God is an active process. Mercy is not simply sorrow for another, but sorrow coupled with some action to relieve another’s distress. God showed us the greatest mercy by taking on our human nature; we must employ this same human nature to establish – to whatever extent we can – God’s kingdom on earth. We achieve this goal as Jesus did, by being made, as Jesus was, “obedient to the Father unto death” (Phil. 2:8).

## PATIENCE

“My son, reject not the correction of the Lord...for whom the Lord loves, He chastens” (Prov. 3:11). God’s plans are often obscure, and we frequently chafe under the delay that accompanies God’s answer to our prayers. The final way we manifest the intimacy of our relation with God is to abandon our own notion of what we need and when we should expect it. To wait is never easy; to wait in hope is to experience complete trust in God’s Providential love. ■

## 93RD BIRTHDAY *(Continued from page 1)*

receives for books, CDs and other media. He has put the finishing touches on the second volume of “To Know Him,” an edited collection of the reflections he wrote for “Light and Life” while he directed the ministry of the Rosary Center. ■

## A PILGRIMAGE TO LOURDES

As this issue of “Light and Life” goes to press, Fr. Reginald Martin, director of the Rosary Center, is preparing to accompany a group of invalids to Lourdes, where they will take part in the site’s celebrations of the 150th anniversary of the Blessed Virgin’s apparition to St. Bernadette Soubirous.

Fr. Reginald says, “the pilgrimage is an annual effort, sponsored by the Knights of Malta, whose care for the ill goes back a thousand years. It is a great honor to be a part of this visit, especially with the devoted men and women of the Order of Malta, and particularly during this jubilee year.” He adds, “we remember the friends of the Rosary Center each day in our prayers; I want everyone to know I will remember them – especially those who are ill or homebound – with special prayers during the days I spend in Lourdes.”

## A NEW TITLE, AND SOME OLD FAVORITES

The Rosary Center is pleased to offer a new CD, “The Salvation of Non-Christians,” presented by Dominican, Fr. Bernhard Blankenhorn. As the title suggests, Fr. Blankenhorn considers a perennial – and perennially challenging – question for Christians: whether (and how) Christ’s promises extend to those who do not, or have not had an opportunity to, profess their faith in Him.

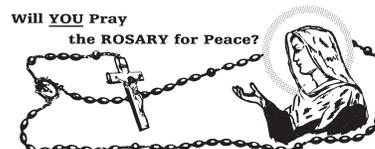
*Light of the Nations*, by Fr. Brian Mullady, continues to engage hearts and minds. Scott Hahn wrote of the book, “Fr. Mullady offers a readable and rock-solidly reliable treatment of what is surely the most important – and debated – subject in contemporary Catholic theology...the doctrine of the Church....”

*Lepanto*, with Explanatory Notes. This handsome book presents Chesterton’s great poem about the Church’s “last” Crusade, the 1571 sea battle that destroyed Turkish domination of the Mediterranean. Dale Alquist, President of the American Chesterton Society, provides a commentary on the poetic text.

*Mother Teresa: In the Shadow of Our Lady* explores the interior life of Blessed Teresa of Calcutta, a life inspired and guided by the example of the Mother of God. The author states, “Mother Teresa’s favorite and most frequent prayer as she practices union with Our Lady was, without doubt, the Rosary.”

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