



# LIGHT & LIFE

## VOICE OF THE ROSARY CENTER & CONFRATERNITY

Fr. Joseph Sergott, OP, Director    Nov-Dec 2017, Vol 70, No 6    Western Dominican Province

### WHY I LOOK TO THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY

by Fr. Joseph Sergott, O.P.

As a boy, who was born and raised Catholic, I was cognizant of the important role of the Blessed Virgin Mary in the Church. Truth be told though, it was only later in life that I realized the importance of her *to me* when I was in serious need. That was when I learned of her true value to the Church and to the world.

As young children, my six brothers and sisters and I were taught the rosary by our mother. I remember the times that she had us all kneeling down in the living room and praying the rosary together, with five of us each taking a turn on a decade. Many times it was a debacle as we made faces at each other, even hit each other playfully or made gestures to our dog and cats who wondered what we were doing.

Years later, when I was on my own and living thousands of miles away from home, I was in a quandary: I had the best job that a 21-year-old guy could get, working at Hughes Aircraft in Los Angeles and getting a full-time salary with the benefits that any head of a family would be grateful to earn; yet, I felt I belonged somewhere else and was meant to do something else. Then I recalled my days as a child when we prayed to the Virgin Mary for help and guidance. I decided to dust off my rosary and began to pray it again, asking the Blessed Virgin for direction. I also began to attend daily Mass for several days each week. Over a period of about 2 ½ years, the possibility of a vocation to the priesthood and to the Dominican Order seemed to spring out of nowhere. One thing led to the other, and now it has been 29 years since I entered the Dominican Order.

As the new director of the Dominican Rosary Center here in Portland, Oregon, I can recall my path throughout the years and where the Lord has led me. Sometimes this path has led me through precarious circumstances with hazardous cliffs on either side. It is in these times that I have clung to the Blessed Virgin and endured forward—albeit with trembling knees.



I remember years ago when my father was clinging to life and unbeknownst to me was only days away from death. As I sat at his bedside I felt helpless. He would drift off to sleep but then be awakened by anxiety. It was then that I began to pray for him, either that the Lord would heal him or take him home. Once when he awoke in a panicked state, I didn't know what to say, but as I was praying the rosary, I simply held it up, and he immediately grew calm as if to understand that he was in good hands. No words of consolation could calm him—but the rosary did.

Many years later as a priest, in the course of ministry, I found myself face-to-face with real evil. It was then that I was reminded of the power of the Blessed Virgin Mary over any kind of evil no matter how virulent. The Virgin Mary is no shrinking violet, and in the face of evil, I discovered that she has tremendous God-given power to thwart any malevolence. Now, no confrontation with evil commences without first seeking

her protection.

In November of 2016 I met with a new challenge as I suffered a massive, life-altering stroke, which was later determined to be the result of a heart defect. In the weeks that followed, I could do very little for myself. One day on the hospital ward, as I was going for a walk, I brought along my beads to pray the rosary—but to my horror I could not finish the Hail Mary because of the existing brain trauma from the stroke. My thoughts would get muddled half-way through the prayer. So then I simply entrusted myself to her care and asked her to accompany me. On each bead, I prayed "Hail Mary full of grace, please pray for me." And that was how I said the rosary in those first days of recovery.

Now, 11 months later, I am back to full-time ministry and ministering at the Rosary Center; however, no one has to remind me of the value of the rosary or of the efficacy of the prayers of the Virgin Mary who I *know* will accompany us whenever we summon her.

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# THEOLOGY FOR THE LAITY

## Signs of the Church: The Church is Catholic

By Fr. Reginald Martin, O.P.

### THE TEACHING CHURCH

At the turn of the last century, a member of the English Dominican Province published an insightful volume he named *Meditations for Layfolk*. In one of these reflections he observes,

The Church that Christ came to found was to teach truth. By that single sentence alone can be proved all the prerogatives that Catholics claim for their Church, for to teach truth in matters of such moment requires the gift of inerrancy, *i.e.*, the gift of teaching without error the truths that are necessary for salvation; the gift of indefectibility, *i.e.*, the gift of teaching without ceasing till the end of all the World. (Bede Jarrett, O.P., *Meditations for Layfolk*, (1915), "The Catholicity of the Church")

### TEACHER TO THE WORLD

To these qualities, our author also adds the Church's responsibility to bring the Good News to the entire world. The dictionary defines "catholic" as "Universal or general; affecting mankind as a whole, or affecting what is universal in human interest." Another author reflects this, observing: "Besides being One and Holy... [the Church] is also, we say, Catholic, that is, universal, adapted to the whole of humanity, and therefore free in every domain from everything that limits or restrains its actions, from all that implies particularism."

### THE RECONCILING CHURCH

This over-arching appeal and responsibility is reflected in the teaching of the Second Vatican Council, which noted that, in the beginning, God created one human family. Sin drove us apart, but the Church never ceases to call us together again, in Christ. Pentecost, with its miracle of tongues that allowed individuals from all nations to comprehend the apostles' preaching, is a sign of that unity, the foundation upon which we place our hope for the triumph of one Church.

### THE APOSTOLIC CHURCH

In our last reflection we observed that apostolic succession is far more than a mere history lesson – and far more rewarding to study. Apostolic succession is the Church's continuing to maintain, throughout its history, the beliefs professed by the Apostles. We shall consider the apostolic nature of the Church in our next reflection, but for now we may rely on the *Catechism*, which quotes the Vatican II document, *Lumen Gentium*, when it teaches

"Just as the office which the Lord confided to Peter alone, as first of the apostles, destined to be transmitted to his successors, is a permanent one, so also endures the office, which the apostles received, of shepherding the Church, a charge destined to be exercised without interruption by the sacred order of bishops." (CCC, #862)

The Vatican document points out that Rome rightfully lays claim to the allegiance of every local church. "...with this Church, by reason of its pre-eminence, the whole Church, that is the faithful everywhere, must necessarily be in accord." (CCC, 834) However, the Roman Pontiff "presides in charity," (*Ibid.*) and his care for local churches must reflect the concern loving Jesus ordered Peter to demonstrate, when he bade him "feed my sheep."

### AUTHORITY IN THE CHURCH

Authority is an important factor in the life of Catholic Christians. Church leaders establish liturgical and other norms to protect the unity of the Church's members. Pope Paul VI remarked the Church's willingness to embrace the languages – and many of the customs – of the cultures it works among, but at the heart of this outreach is the Church's unchanging desire to draw all people to the love of Christ.

"Let us be very careful not to conceive of the universal Church as the...more or less anomalous federation of different particular churches. In the mind of the Lord the Church is universal by vocation and mission, but when she puts down her roots in a variety of cultural, social, and human terrains, she takes on different external expressions and appearances... [that] unified in a common effort, shows all the more resplendently, the catholicity of the undivided church." (CCC, #835)

### THE NECESSITY OF SURRENDER

Members of the Church must identify themselves by their willingness to profess what the Church teaches, but expressing this belief can assume many forms. Therefore, we can have no clear idea of what the future Church will look like. However, we may turn to the Church of the past, to understand how the future Church should establish itself.

The early Church was largely composed of Jewish converts to Christianity. As the Christian message attracted non-Jewish converts, the community was divided over questions regarding observance of the Mosaic Law, particularly the necessity of circumcision. In Chapter 15 of the *Acts of the Apostles* we read that the religious leaders of the day gathered in Jerusalem to debate these matters.

This early gathering set the standard for all future Church Councils. What matters, they have stressed, is the universal character of the Church's message; what should be abandoned are issues that underlie, and may even define, national communities.

Unfortunately, this is easier to say than to practice, so the Church finds herself faced with the sad reality of numerous communities that profess all, or nearly all, of the Roman Church's beliefs, but do not embrace the entire discipline of our faith. Chief among these are the Orthodox Christian communions, which our *Catechism* (quoting Pope Paul VI) describes thus

“The Church knows that she is joined in many ways to the baptized who are honored by the name of Christian, but do not profess the Catholic faith in its entirety or have not preserved unity... under the successor of Peter”...with the *Orthodox Churches*, this communion is so profound “that it lacks little to attain the fullness that would permit a common celebration of the Lord’s Eucharist.” (CCC, #838)

## THE CHURCH AND THE JEWISH PEOPLE

The question of the Church’s relations with non-Christians is more complex. On Good Friday, we acknowledge the Jewish people, “to whom the Lord our God spoke first,” and we ask God, “that the people you first made your own may attain the fullness of redemption.” Our Jewish neighbors anticipated our faith in God’s revelation; with them, we look forward to the coming of the Messiah – we to his return, in glory; they to his appearance as a fulfillment of all the promises of the Old Testament.

## OUR RELATIONS WITH MUSLIMS

As we meditate the horrors wrought throughout today’s world by the forces of radical Islam, the Church’s relations with her Muslim brethren suggests that any mutual embrace may be quite elusive. However, *Lumen Gentium* reminds us, “The plan of salvation also includes those who acknowledge the Creator, in the first place among whom are the Muslims, these profess to hold the faith of Abraham, and together with us, they adore the one, merciful God, mankind’s judge of the last day.” (CCC, #841)

## OUR RELATIONS WITH OTHER NON-CHRISTIANS

The Church strives always to reach out to people of faith, even to those who do not believe in Jesus, or in God. On Good Friday, the faithful pray God’s Spirit will enlighten those who do not acknowledge Jesus, so they “may enter on the way of salvation.” We pray, too, for those who do not believe in God, begging that “following what is right in sincerity of heart, they may find the way to God himself.”

These prayers are sincere, but we must not be misled by their gentle language. Our *Catechism* is unyielding when it states, “The Church is the place where humanity must rediscover its unity and salvation. The Church is ‘The world reconciled’.” (CCC, #845) Thus, from ancient times, the Church has maintained, “Outside the Church there is no salvation.”

## NO SALVATION OUTSIDE THE CHURCH

This affirmation has caused immense ill-feeling, but it states no more than the truth. Our *Catechism* teaches, “it means that all salvation comes from Christ...through the Church which is his Body.” Jesus sent his disciples to preach and baptize. If individuals acknowledge, but refuse to embrace, the salvation Jesus offers through this sacramental union – or, should they abandon it once they have embraced it – they must face the consequences. However, the threatened punishment does not apply to those who, through no fault of their own, have no knowledge of Jesus and his Church.

*Continued on page 4*

# What would the Blessed Virgin say... about PRAYER

by Fr. Joseph Sergott, OP

It seems to me that the Blessed Virgin would know a thing or two about prayer. No doubt she recalled the words of Jesus when he taught his disciples, “When you pray, go to your inner room, close the door, and pray to your Father in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will repay you.” (Mt 6:6)

Many people don’t know how to pray to God (Cf. Rom 8:26) and so they pray only Our Father’s and Hail Mary’s. But I assure you that the Lord hears your prayers in any stumbling attempt and through any sincere effort you make to reach him. He hears the simple prayers of a child at the bedside, the feeble prayers of the dying and everything in between. St Thérèse said, “For me, prayer is a surge of the heart; it is a simple look turned toward heaven, it is a cry of recognition and of love, embracing both trial and joy.” (*Manuscripts autobiographiques*, C 25r)

The imagery of Psalm 1 comes to mind when I visualize the Virgin Mary in prayer: “[She] delights in the law of the Lord and meditates on his law day and night. [She] is like a tree planted near running water, that yields its fruit in due season, and whose leaves never fade.”

Praying to God means communicating with him through our own thoughts or words. There are many kinds of prayer. For those who don’t know where to begin, perhaps a “holy hour” is the best way. (You can do it!)

Commence with offering **thanksgiving** to God by recalling the blessings you have received (5 minutes). Include **intercessory prayer**, by praying for the Church, the world, your own country, and for those in need (10 minutes). **Lectio Divina** is where you read the Sacred Scriptures; stop and meditate on them, and then make related petitions to God (20 minutes). **Contemplative prayer** is where you quiet yourself—even empty yourself—with the objective of allowing Jesus to fill you with his love; this is best done when sitting before the Lord in **adoration** of the Blessed Sacrament (like the tree planted near flowing streams) (15 minutes). Finally, finish with **praise** of God—perhaps the one style of prayer the devil hates the most—and not one to be neglected. You can praise God by praying the psalms or by way of **litany** by praising his name while acknowledging his various attributes (10 minutes). And of course, earlier or later in the day, pray the **rosary** which contains all of the above-mentioned elements.

Imagine the impact on your life if you spent one hour each day in conscious prayer with the Lord. If so, you might echo the words, “My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my savior.”

## THE TRIUMPH OF GOD'S LOVE

What is the fate, then, of those who have not heard the gospel message? God is just, so He will not condemn individuals for their ignorance. Striving to lead a moral life will always draw us closer to God, and we have no idea how God may speak to those seeking perfection in ways unknown to us. That some in our midst may not know God or the paths that lead to Him and His Kingdom should remind us of the Church's – and our own – missionary vocation.

In our previous reflection, we stressed the relation between the Church's holiness and the holiness of the Trinity. Here we might profitably consider Jesus' farewell words to his disciples, "Go therefore, and make disciples of all nations..." Our faith teaches that gifts are never given simply to enrich the one who receives them, but, rather, are given for the benefit of the whole Church community. Our Baptism, then, is a gift to be shared with all God's people; our life in the Trinity makes each of us a missionary.

## TRANSFORMATION OF—AND INTO—MISSIONARIES

When we consider those with whom God expects us to share the gospel, we realize immediately that we – perhaps more than our listeners – are those who will be changed by our missionary endeavors. If we take our task seriously, we will quickly appreciate the value of patience, as well as respect for those whose beliefs differ from ours. Fr. Jarrett is very eloquent when he says

The Church is Catholic. To that Church I myself belong...But apart from these fixed truths, there are paths and bypaths which each can follow for himself...Let me, then, be wide-minded enough not to question or be scandalized in my brother. His conscience is lit up by the glory of God, and that should be enough for me.

## MARY AND THE ROSARY

When we consider the liturgical feasts we celebrate in autumn, the number that commemorate Christians' victories over their Muslim foes are quite numerous. These include the Holy Name of Mary on September 12, the Holy Rosary on October 7, John of Capistrano on October 23. The Feast of the Holy Rosary is dear to your Dominican friends because a Dominican Pope, Pius V, helped organize the multi-national navy that won the Battle of Lepanto, a victory he attributed to praying the Rosary.

We might be tempted to conclude that praying the Rosary will guarantee a result similar to the victory Christians enjoyed against the Turks 446 years ago, but that is probably not the point of our celebration. The Mysteries of the Rosary remind us of the Incarnation. And by calling us to identify ourselves with Mary, the Rosary reminds us more clearly than any prayer other than the Eucharist, the God in whom we trust has loved us enough to take on our flesh, to be a sign of His everlasting and loving presence in our midst. ■

## Blessings & Petitions Corner

In this column of *Light & Life* we are adding the *Blessings & Petitions Corner* for Confraternity members to share with us either how God has blessed them through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary, or to request prayers from Confraternity members for a pressing need.

All submissions need to be brief and succinct because of limited space. Everything that is submitted for the Corner will be considered public domain.

*After two years of a very rocky start to our marriage, we began the DAILY family rosary - a practice that we have continued to this day. Against all odds, our marriage has not only survived, but thrived. Truly, Our Lady of the Rosary has helped our family weather many a storm during the past 39 years, and we love her (and her rosary) dearly!*

*Pam and Dave, Anchorage, AK*

*Please pray for the repose of the souls of those who have died in the fires in California, Oregon and Washington, and for their family and friends who mourn their loss. Pray also for those who lost their homes and belongings in these fires.*

*Fr. Joseph, OP, Portland, OR*

## CHRISTMAS SUGGESTIONS

With the arrival of Advent we look forward to Christmas, when we celebrate God's great gift to us in the Incarnation of His Son. Our Christmas presents should remind us of this immense blessing, so if you are seeking appropriate Christmas gifts, let us suggest the following. Available at [store.rosary-center.org](http://store.rosary-center.org) or use order form enclosed.



**SCRIPTURALLY BASED ROSARY.** Fr. Dismas Sayre, OP, recently revised this much sought after booklet. Each Hail Mary carries a brief Scriptural passage or idea for meditation.

**A CHRISTMAS STORY WITH ST. JOSEPH.** In this delightful children's book, the Christmas story is told from St. Joseph's perspective and beautifully illustrated. Children will grow in their love for St. Joseph as they read about the Nativity through his eyes. For ages 4 to 8.

**CHRISTMAS MOUSE.** The story relates the adventures of a little mouse who is being chased by a cat. Finally he finds himself in a stable, and Jesus has just been born.

**LITTLE STAR,** by Anthony DeStefano and illustrated by Mark Elliot, is certain to become a Christmas classic. This delightful tale connects the star atop the Christmas tree to the true meaning of Christmas – the birth of Jesus.

**THE ROSARY A Coloring Book for Prayer and Contemplation** for meditating on the mysteries of the Rosary and **MOTHER MARY COLORING BOOK.** These two titles are Catholic contributions to the new wave of coloring books for grown-ups.

**CHAMPIONS OF THE ROSARY.** Fr. Donald Calloway's book explores the history of the Rosary and its "champions" who have promoted it over the centuries. Fr. Reginald Martin observed, "*Champions of the Rosary* is remarkably accessible, and the content in these pages will help all of us become champions of the rosary."