

THE SHEPHERD'S VOICE

Short reflections, eternal truths



THE ROSARY

An Invitation to Prayer
Rooted in the Mystery
of the Incarnation

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The Rosary: Encountering God Through Matter An Invitation to Prayer Rooted in the Mystery of the Incarnation

Introduction

The rosary is one of the Church's most beloved treasures. For some, it's a lifelong companion - fingers moving instinctively from bead to bead. For others, it remains a curiosity, admired but never quite embraced.

Wherever you find yourself, this reflection is an invitation: to see the rosary not just as a devotion, but as a living sign of the Incarnation - God's astonishing choice to become flesh for us.

Across centuries and continents, the rosary has endured. It continues to offer comfort, strength, and grace to countless Christians. But why? What lies at the heart of this simple string of beads? Let us explore together.

God Made Flesh: The Incarnational Principle

At the heart of Christianity is a breathtaking truth:

"The Word became flesh and dwelt among us." (John 1:14)

The Incarnation means that God, eternal and invisible, chose to enter our world in a concrete, physical way. Through Mary's humble "yes," the Son of God took on our humanity, not as an idea, but in flesh and blood.

God communicates not only in words, but through touch, sight, sound, and matter. He uses the ordinary to reveal the extraordinary.

This incarnational principle lies at the heart of the rosary. It is not just a mental prayer - it is something we hold. Each bead, each gentle touch, reminds us that God meets us where we are: body and soul. Like holy

water, blessed medals, and the sacraments, the rosary is a *sacramental* - a physical sign pointing to a spiritual reality. When we are anxious or distracted, the very act of holding the rosary can anchor our hearts and draw us into God's presence.

A History Woven in Prayer

Prayer beads are not unique to Christianity. Muslims use the *misbaha*, Buddhists the *mala*, and early Christian monks used pebbles or knotted cords to count their prayers - often the Psalms.

As literacy was limited, simpler prayers like the "Our Father" and "Hail Mary" began to replace the Psalms, counted on strings of beads. In this way, God was gently preparing His people for the rosary - through the humble rhythm of repeated prayer.

St Dominic and the Rosary's Mission

Tradition tells us that the rosary was entrusted to St Dominic in the 13th century, during a time of great spiritual crisis. The Church faced the Albigensian heresy, which denied the goodness of the material world and undermined the Incarnation itself.

In response, St Dominic received a vision of the Blessed Virgin Mary, urging him to use the rosary as a spiritual weapon. Since 1495, papal documents have affirmed Dominic's role in its origin, grounding the rosary in a specific moment of grace and need.

The rosary became not only a crown of roses offered to Mary, but a means of overcoming evil, vice, and destructive ideologies. It was - and remains -

a weapon in the spiritual battle. In this struggle, not having a weapon is not an option.

The rosary, with its focus on the mysteries of Christ's life, death, and resurrection, was a powerful answer to those who denied the goodness of creation and the Incarnation. The Dominican Order would go on to spread this prayer, shaping the Church's spiritual landscape for centuries.

The Hail Mary: A Prayer That Grew

The Hail Mary is one of the most cherished prayers in Christian devotion, yet its form as we know it today emerged gradually across centuries. Its origins are firmly rooted in the words of Scripture, with the first half composed of two angelic and biblical greetings. The opening phrase - "Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with thee" - echoes the words of the Angel Gabriel at the Annunciation, recorded in Luke 1:28. This greeting, brimming with awe and reverence, acknowledges Mary's unique role in salvation history. The next line - "Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb" - is Elizabeth's joyful exclamation during the Visitation, found in Luke 1:42. In these two scriptural verses, Christians have long recognised Mary's singular blessedness and her intimate connection to the mystery of Christ.

For many centuries, these biblical salutations formed the whole of the Hail Mary. Early Christians, particularly in the East, would meditate on these verses as part of their personal and communal prayer. In the West, the prayer became a staple for those praying the rosary, spoken repeatedly as they moved from bead to bead. It was only during the Middle Ages that the prayer began to assume its fuller, intercessory form. The second part -

“Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death” - arose from the heartfelt petitions of ordinary believers. This addition reflected the growing devotion to Mary as both Mother of God (Theotokos) and as a compassionate intercessor for humanity.

The words “Mother of God” were affirmed at the Council of Ephesus in 431 AD, underscoring Mary's pivotal role in the incarnation of Christ and her ongoing place within the life of the Church. As Christians faced plagues, wars, and personal hardships, the plea for Mary's prayers “now and at the hour of our death” became especially meaningful, expressing trust in her maternal care at every moment, especially in life's final hour. By the 16th century, the Hail Mary had taken on its present form in the West, officially included in the Roman Breviary in 1568 by Pope Pius V. The prayer thus grew organically, shaped by both Scripture and the loving faith of generations. It became a touchstone of comfort and hope, a simple yet profound way of drawing near to Christ through His Mother.

In the context of the rosary, the Hail Mary is not simply recited as an isolated prayer, but woven into the meditation on the mysteries of Christ's life. Its gentle repetition, echoing through the centuries, continues to unite us as Christians in a living tradition of contemplative prayer, one that is both ancient and ever new.

How We Pray: Structure and Practice

The rosary is beautifully simple, yet profoundly rich. It's a prayer that engages the whole person - body, mind, and spirit - and it unfolds gently, bead by bead, mystery by mystery. Whether you're new to it or returning

after time away, here's a step-by-step guide to help you pray the rosary with confidence and peace.

What You'll Need

A standard rosary consists of:

- A crucifix at the beginning
- A short strand of beads leading to a medallion (often depicting Mary)
- Five sets of ten beads, called *decades*, each separated by a single bead

Each part of the rosary has its place in the rhythm of prayer.

Beginning the Rosary

Start by holding the crucifix and making the **Sign of the Cross**, saying:

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Then, still holding the crucifix, pray the **Apostles' Creed**:

*I believe in God, the Father almighty, Creator of heaven and earth,
and in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried;
he descended into hell; on the third day he rose again from the dead;
he ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of God the Father
almighty;
from there he will come to judge the living and the dead.*

*I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy Catholic Church,
the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body, and life everlasting. Amen.*

Move to the first bead and pray the **Our Father**:

*Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name;
thy kingdom come; thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us;
and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. Amen.*

On the next three beads, pray three **Hail Marys**—traditionally offered for an increase in faith, hope, and charity:

*Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee;
blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus.
Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners,
now and at the hour of our death. Amen.*

Then pray the **Glory Be** on the next bead:

*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 Mysteries of the Rosary

The heart of the rosary lies in its *mysteries* - events from the lives of Jesus and Mary that we meditate on as we pray. Each set contains five moments, one for each decade. You may choose one set depending on the day of the week or liturgical season:

Joyful Mysteries (Mondays and Saturdays)

1. *The Annunciation* - Luke 1:26-38
2. *The Visitation* - Luke 1:39-56
3. *The Nativity* - Luke 2:1-20
4. *The Presentation in the Temple* - Luke 2:22-38
5. *The Finding of Jesus in the Temple* - Luke 2:41-52

Luminous Mysteries (Thursdays)

1. *The Baptism of Jesus in the Jordan* - Matthew 3:13-17
2. *The Wedding at Cana* - John 2:1-12
3. *The Proclamation of the Kingdom of God* - Mark 1:14-15
4. *The Transfiguration* - Matthew 17:1-9
5. *The Institution of the Eucharist* - Luke 22:14-20

Sorrowful Mysteries (Tuesdays and Fridays)

1. *The Agony in the Garden* - Matthew 26:36-46
2. *The Scourging at the Pillar* - John 19:1
3. *The Crowning with Thorns* - Matthew 27:27-31
4. *The Carrying of the Cross* - Luke 23:26-32
5. *The Crucifixion* - Luke 23:33-46

Glorious Mysteries (Wednesdays and Sundays)

1. *The Resurrection* – Matthew 28:1–10
2. *The Ascension* – Acts 1:6–11
3. *The Descent of the Holy Spirit* – Acts 2:1–4
4. *The Assumption of Mary* – Revelation 12:1 (traditionally understood)
5. *The Coronation of Mary as Queen of Heaven* – Revelation 12:1; Psalm 45:9 (symbolic references)

Before each decade, announce the mystery you're about to contemplate.

For example:

The First Joyful Mystery: The Annunciation.

Then pray:

1. **Our Father** on the single bead
2. **Ten Hail Marys** - one on each bead of the decade
3. **Glory Be** after the tenth Hail Mary
4. *(Optional)* Pray the **Fatima Prayer**:

*O my Jesus, forgive us our sins, save us from the fires of hell,
lead all souls to heaven, especially those in most need of thy mercy.*

Repeat this pattern for all five decades.

Closing the Rosary

After the final decade, many choose to pray the **Hail Holy Queen**, a beautiful prayer of praise and petition to Our Lady:

*Hail, Holy Queen, Mother of mercy, our life, our sweetness, and our hope.
To thee do we cry, poor banished children of Eve;
to thee do we send up our sighs, mourning and weeping in this valley of
tears.*

*Turn then, most gracious advocate, thine eyes of mercy toward us,
and after this our exile, show unto us the blessed fruit of thy womb, Jesus.*

O clement, O loving, O sweet Virgin Mary.

*Pray for us, O Holy Mother of God,
that we may be made worthy of the promises of Christ.*

You may also add any personal intentions or prayers, such as the **Memorare**, or simply speak to God from the heart.

End with the **Sign of the Cross**, just as you began.

As the beads slip through our fingers, our lips recite familiar prayers, and our minds contemplate divine mysteries. In this rhythm of repetition and reflection, the rosary draws the whole person - body, mind, and spirit - into God's story.

The Rosary's Spiritual Power

Why pray the rosary? Because it brings peace.

In times of chaos, its gentle repetition calms the mind and opens the heart. The mysteries keep our gaze fixed on Jesus, helping us see every joy and sorrow through His eyes.

Saints and ordinary Christians alike have testified to the clarity, consolation, and transformation that flow from this prayer. The rosary is not magic - but it is powerful. It strengthens faith, deepens love, and protects us from despair.

An Invitation to Begin

So dear friend, if you've never prayed the rosary, or if it's been a while, I invite you: begin again. Start with a single decade. Pray while walking, waiting, or winding down at night. Let the beads move through your fingers and the words settle in your heart.

There's no need to rush or worry about perfection. Simply offer your time and presence to God and Mary.

The rosary is a path - a way of journeying with Mary into the heart of Christ. It reminds us that our faith is not just spiritual, but physical; not just words, but flesh; not just private, but communal.

As we pray, may we rediscover the joy of encountering God in all things - body, mind, and spirit - and so walk the path of holiness, one bead at a time.

Amen.



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Discover the Rosary as a Living Encounter with God

The rosary is more than a string of beads - it is a path of prayer rooted in the mystery of the Incarnation. In this gentle and accessible reflection, Fr Luke Goymour invites readers to rediscover the rosary as a physical and spiritual way of drawing near to Christ through His Mother.

From its biblical origins and historical development to its enduring power in times of struggle, this booklet explores how the rosary engages the whole person - body, mind, and soul. Learn how each bead becomes a doorway to grace, each prayer a step into God's story.

Whether you're new to the rosary or returning after time away, this guide offers clarity, encouragement, and a heartfelt invitation to begin again—one bead at a time.

***"The Shepherd's Voice", pamphlets, booklets and devotional resources from
Fr Luke Goymour***

Fr Luke Goymour was ordained to the priesthood in 2010. He completed his studies at St Mary's College, Oscott, earning a Bachelor's degree in Applied Theology with Catholic Philosophy from Birmingham University, as well as a *Sacrae Theologiae Baccalaureum* (STB) in Catholic Theology from the *Université Catholique de Louvain*. Following ordination, he furthered his education at Heythrop College, obtaining a Master's degree in Pastoral Theology from the University of London. He currently serves as Parish Priest of St Mark's with Holy Family Brantham and St Mary Magdalen, Ipswich. He is dedicated to teaching and preaching the gospel, with a strong commitment to helping others come to know Jesus Christ in the fullness of the Catholic Faith.