

October is the month of the Holy Rosary. This serves as a reminder for us to make use of this sacramental given to us by Our Lady for our sanctification and support. A sacramental according to the Baltimore Catechism is anything set apart or blessed by the church to excite good thoughts or increase devotion, and through these movements of the heart, to remit venial sin. A rosary has certainly been set aside for devotional purposes and it is customary to have them blessed by a priest.

The use of “prayer beads” goes back to ancient times, predating Christianity. By the Middle Ages, strings of beads were used to keep track of Our Fathers and Hail Marys. Tradition has it, that St. Dominic had been preaching against the Albigensian heresy in Southern France without much success. Our Lady appeared to him and told him to use her psalter to obtain an abundant harvest. Following this, he preached the rosary and its mysteries and won numerous converts back to the faith. The rosary that we have today is based on this “Dominican rosary.” It consists of the praying of 5 decades containing one Our Father, ten Hail Marys, and one Glory be. It concludes with the *Salve Regina* or “Hail Holy Queen.” The prayers are recited while meditating on the Mysteries of Our Lord’s life, death and ministry. Devotion to the rosary has been powerful throughout history.

On October 7th, 1571, Catholic forces under Don Juan of Austria, won a stunning naval victory over the Ottoman Turks at the battle of Lepanto. St. Pope Pius V had asked all of Christendom to pray the rosary for victory over the larger Muslim forces. Upon hearing the news of the victory, the Holy Father pronounced October 7th as the feast of Our Lady of Victory. The feast was later extended to the Universal Church in 1716 by Pope Clement XI. The name has been changed to the feast of Our Lady of the Rosary in recognition of the power of the faithful praying for deliverance from the encroachment of the Turks. The power of prayer is infinite. People united in prayer has Christ’s assurance that He is with us. “For where two or three are gathered in My name, I am there among them.” (MT 18:20)

Another great miracle of the rosary occurred when Fr. Petrus Pavilicek, a Franciscan priest, started a campaign to free Austria from the Soviets. Following World War II, Austria had been divided up among the victorious Allied Powers as Germany had been divided. The United States, Great Britain, France, and the Soviet Union all had Occupation Zones. Vienna was likewise divided as Berlin had been. In 1946, Fr. Petrus organized a rosary campaign to have the Soviets leave Austria. He thought if he could get 10% of the 7 million Austrians to pledge a daily Rosary for peace, the Soviets would leave. After a slow start, momentum built, and eventually he had well over a half million pledged rosaries. Leopold Figl, the Prime Minister, and members of the cabinet joined. In 1955, ten years after the war had ended and the Cold War was still in full force, the Soviet Union signed a Peace Treaty with Austria, and voluntarily left the country without a shot fired. It was the first time ever the Soviets had voluntarily left a country. By contrast, the Soviets put down revolts in Hungary in 1956 and Czechoslovakia in 1968 with much bloodshed. The date for their departure from Austria? May 13th, the Feast of Our Lady of Fatima.

In Fatima: Our Lady’s final words at the first apparition on May 13th, 1917, were, “Pray the rosary every day to obtain peace for the world and the end of the war.” The war of course being, World War I, which was still devastating Europe. Notice that our prayers, specifically in this case, praying the rosary, can have such a powerful effect. So much so, that it can effect world events and end a world war! Never doubt the power of prayer. Particularly prayer with Faith and Perseverance and, united collective prayer.

At each of the six appearances Our Lady was seen holding a rosary, and the one thing mentioned at all six was praying the rosary. On June 13th, Lucia asked Mary, “What does Your Grace wish of me?” Our Lady’s response: “I want you to come here the thirteenth of the next month, to **pray the rosary every day**, and to learn to read.” On July 13th, Lucia again asks, “What does Your Grace wish of me?” Our Lady responds: “I want you to come here on the thirteenth of the next month and to **continue to pray the rosary** every day in honor of Our Lady of the Rosary, in order to obtain peace for the world and the end of the war, for she alone can be of any avail.” Notice, continue praying the rosary daily, demonstrating the shepherd children have been. And, she alone, meaning Our Lady of the Rosary alone, can be of any avail. In other words, God in His providence has decided that Rosaries offered to Our Lady of the Rosary are required for an end to the World War. The children are then

given a vision of Hell and all its horrors. She then warns that if people do not stop “offending God,” a worse one will break out. This was followed by a promise to return and ask for a consecration of Russia to Her Immaculate Heart and the Communion and reparation of the First Saturdays. The request to consecrate Russia would be given to, now Sr. Lucia, at her convent in Tuy, Spain in 1929. And the First Saturday devotion would be given to Sr. Lucia at her convent in Pontevedra, Spain in 1925 – 1926.

At the August apparition, August 19th, (due to the shepherd children having been under arrest on the 13th), the dialogue continues. Sr. Lucia: “What does Your Grace wish of me?” Our Lady: “I want you to continue to go to the Cova da Iria (the place of the apparitions) on the thirteenth of each month and to **continue to pray the rosary every day.**” On September 13th, Our Lady: “**Continue to pray the rosary to obtain the end of the war.**” Finally, on October 13th Our Lady: “**I am the Lady of the Rosary. Continue to pray the rosary every day.** The war is going to end, and the soldiers will soon return to their homes.” Following the dialogue between Lucia and Our Lady, the “Miracle of the Sun” occurred. This was witnessed by a crowd of an estimated 70,000 people. Even the secular newspapers of Lisbon were on hand to report and provide photographs of the crowds.

School of Mary. In his Apostolic Letter, “*Rosarium Virginis Mariae*,” St. John Paul II, called the rosary the “school of Mary.” Through which, She teaches us the mysteries of the faith as if we are in the home at Nazareth learning from Our Heavenly Mother as Christ was learning from His mother. What a beautiful reflection.

Oremus pro invicem. Fr. Charles Smith