

THE
ROSARY
HANDBOOK

*A Guide for Newcomers,
Old-Timers, and Those
In Between*

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INTRODUCTION

THE ROSARY AND YOU— A PERFECT MATCH

My earliest memories of the Rosary go back to the school year of 1953–54, when I was in the third grade. This was the first year that I attended a Catholic school, which happened to be Saints Peter and Paul School in the small, north-central Idaho town of Grangeville. Benedictine Sisters from the Monastery of St. Gertrude, from nearby Cottonwood, Idaho, served as our teachers. Our parents enrolled my younger sister and me in this little Catholic school even though we weren't Catholic. Less than two years later, however, the four of us—Mom and Dad included—found ourselves leaning over the baptismal font in the back of Saints Peter and Paul Church, as the pastor, Father Thomas Lafey, poured the waters of baptism over our heads. For me, it was the beginning of a lifelong love affair with Catholicism—and, as I was to discover only later—with the Rosary.

A few years ago, I had occasion to return to Saints Peter and Paul School, and I could still pinpoint the place in the school's gymnasium where I stood, one May morning—May being the month of the Blessed Virgin Mary—as a non-Catholic third grader, when one of the sisters designated me, along with some sixty other fidgeting kids, to represent one of the beads of a rosary. We were going to become, Sister said, a “living rosary.” (Throughout this book, I capitalize “Rosary” whenever I refer to

the prayer form that is called “*the* Rosary.” When I refer to a circlet of beads or other counter called “*a* rosary,” I spell “rosary” with a lowercase “r.”)

The idea was that each student would begin the prayer to be said for the bead that he or she represented, and then everyone would join in to complete the prayer until we had prayed all five decades of a complete Rosary. I was designated as a “Hail Mary,” but not being Catholic then, I had little clue as to how to recite one. As I recall, I represented one of the beads toward the end of the second or third decade. I listened closely as the kids before me prayed aloud, “Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus.” The entire assembly would then complete the prayer: “Holy Mary, mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death. Amen.”

I hadn’t a clue what “fruit of thy womb” might mean, but it didn’t seem to bother anyone else, so why should I let it bother me? When my turn came, I recited the opening words of the prayer correctly—more or less. To my relief, the Rosary continued with no major breakdown. The Rosary became part of my life from then on—it was simply a taken-for-granted part of being Catholic.

Years later, after graduating from a Catholic high school in 1964, I joined the U.S. Navy, and one of the ways I stayed in touch with my religious roots was through the Rosary. During the last of my four years in the Navy, in January 1968, I took a week’s leave and flew from Norfolk, Virginia, where I was stationed at the naval air station, to Louisville, Kentucky. From there, by bus, I traveled to Bardstown, Kentucky, and got a ride out to the famous Trappist Abbey of Gethsemani monastery,

where I was scheduled to make a weekend retreat. The white snows of winter lay all around, and the first day I was there I bought a good, sturdy rosary in the monastery's gift shop—one that I still have to this day.

During my years in the navy, I had formed the habit of taking long walks most evenings, around whatever naval air station I was attached to at the time. I walked with a rosary in my jacket pocket, and I prayed as my fingers moved slowly from one bead to the next. And so I managed to keep some semblance of a spirituality alive and kicking. Indeed, without being conscious of it, I became an amateur contemplative, for the Rosary is a prayer that lends itself to meditation on many levels—some of which we may be hardly aware of. But I'm getting ahead of myself. . . .

What's your story about the Rosary in your life? If you're a lifelong Catholic, you may have grown up in a family that prayed the Rosary together regularly at home, or maybe during Advent or Lent. Perhaps you have been praying the Rosary faithfully for many years. Then again, you might be considering returning to the Rosary after not having prayed it for a long time. Or maybe you never really learned to pray the Rosary before, and now you're wondering whether it's for you. Maybe you grew up in the years right after the Catholic Church's Second Vatican Council, in the mid-1960s, when the Rosary fell into disuse among many Catholics, and now you want to try it. And if you've recently become Catholic—or even if you're just thinking about it—you might want to find out what the Rosary is all about. Whatever role the Rosary has played in your life and whatever your reason for picking up this book, this is the book for you if you'd like to learn about, rediscover, or enrich your experience with the Rosary.

Why Another Rosary Book?

If you look around for books on the Rosary, soon you'll discover that there are more than a few available. Some are primarily devotional in nature. Others are popular studies of the Rosary. Some offer adaptations of the Rosary that incorporate Scripture into the prayer more than the conventional practice does. Others adapt the Rosary to a recovery-based spirituality. There really isn't any "wrong" approach to praying the Rosary—but if you're looking for frills, you won't find them here. This book will focus on the standard, straightforward, "no-frills" prayer that has been used for generation after generation.

The Rosary Handbook isn't just another book on the Rosary, though. My first aim in writing it was to provide a fresh perspective on the Rosary by looking at this age-old prayer through a thoroughly contemporary lens. I didn't want to simply pass along an understanding of the Rosary that was taken for granted by earlier generations. A great deal has happened in the Catholic Church in the last half century. Significant theological discussions have taken place. In particular, Catholic understanding of the role of Mary in the church and in salvation history has significantly evolved and sheds new light on the Rosary and other Marian devotions. This book will discuss the Rosary in the light of twenty-first century Catholic perspectives on Mary.

I wanted, also, to write a book about the Rosary that would convey and encourage the joy of praying this beloved prayer. Here, a grim or inappropriately solemn understanding of the Rosary won't be allowed to get even its toe in the door. The Blessed Mother is a joyful part of Catholic spirituality and devotional life, and the Rosary is a joyful prayer. It is quite true

that one can be a good Catholic and have little or no devotion to the mother of Jesus. Still, it's the rare Catholic who has no warm feelings whatsoever for the Blessed Virgin Mary.

In addition, I wanted to show that the Rosary is a prayer for everyone—old and young, clergy and laity, those who pray daily, and those who have trouble finding the time. And so, this book has no trace of the overly sentimental devotionism with which Mary and the Rosary have sometimes been viewed—and with which I, for one, am not comfortable. The Rosary and the Mary of this book will never be sticky-sweet.

Finally, I wanted to provide a practical guide for prayer, not a recipe for a desired outcome. Some resources convey a kind of magical view of the Rosary. For example, there are narratives of the “true story” genre that imply that you can guarantee a loved one's safety by praying the Rosary for him or her every day. You may have read stories about parents who prayed the Rosary daily while a child was fighting in the Korean War or the Vietnam War or Afghanistan or Iraq—and he or she returned home unharmed. I dare say, though, that there are also parents who prayed the Rosary each day whose sons and daughters did not come home safe and sound. God answers our prayers in his own way and in his own time, which may or may not conform to our desires—whether we pray the Rosary or any other prayer. There are certainly benefits for us in praying the Rosary, but only God can determine the answers to our prayers.

Who Should Pray the Rosary?

Although there are many different reasons why people have a fondness for particular prayers, I believe that there are several reasons why nearly everyone will find something they like in the Rosary. First, the Rosary that this book encourages and celebrates is a devotional prayer suited to many situations and circumstances. When I say that the Rosary is devotional, I mean that it is what all prayer is—an intentional turning to the Divine Presence, to the loving God, Creator, Source, and Goal of all life, who—to paraphrase St. Augustine (A.D. 354–430)—is closer to us than we are to ourselves. Like all methods of prayer, the Rosary is a way to be with the God who Scripture tells us “is love” (1 John 4:16).

The Rosary is a simple, uncomplicated, nonliturgical way to pray when conscious thoughts and words may fail you, no matter what your feelings or emotions may be at the moment. If you are depressed, the Rosary works. If you are happy or sad, the Rosary works. If you are bored, the Rosary works. If you are anxious or worried, the Rosary works. If you are sick or just plain sick and tired, the Rosary works. No matter how you’re feeling, the Rosary is a way to be physically and intentionally in the presence of the triune God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—in the company of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the mother of the risen Christ and, therefore—through the Sacrament of Baptism in Christ—our mother too.

Another reason that the Rosary has something to offer just about everyone is that, at the same time, the Rosary is simple and the Rosary is deep. It is so simple that the humblest believers love the Rosary. It is so deep that many of the great-

est thinkers and mystics down through the centuries have loved the Rosary. Indeed, the simplicity and depth of the Rosary are the simplicity and depth of the gospel itself, the good news of God's love and forgiveness for all in Christ. The combination of traditional prayers and meditation on sacred events makes the Rosary a particularly personal prayer that can be as uncomplicated or as complicated as you want to make it. Thus, it suits just about anyone's spirituality. In other words, chances are that the Rosary is a perfect match for you, no matter the shape or characteristics of your personal piety.

At the same time, we must admit that the Rosary doesn't suit everyone. Even the occasional saint has declared that he or she just couldn't pray the Rosary. Such saints and ordinary believers tend to be the exception, however, so give the Rosary a fair try before you decide one way or the other.

I hope that by this point I have your attention, and I hope that I have aroused your curiosity. A wonderful pilgrimage of discovery is ahead of us, one that I pray will lead us all closer to the risen Lord and to his—and our—Blessed Mother. Let us begin with joy and with hope.

CHAPTER 1

WHAT'S IN IT FOR ME?

Why You Should Pray the Rosary

I remember well the years immediately after the Second Vatican Council. The second half of the 1960s was an interesting time to be a Catholic—to say the least. One never knew what to expect next. Practically overnight the Mass became, in its appearance at least, remarkably different from what it had been for as long as anyone alive—not to mention the grandparents and great-grandparents of anyone alive—could remember. The baccalaureate Mass for my 1964 Catholic high school graduation was the standard, pre-Vatican II Mass, in which priest and congregation faced in the same direction, and all the prayers were said in Latin. Within a few short years, however, priest and assembly faced each other, and the prayers of the Mass were being said in the language of the people. Most important, the emphasis of the activity of the Mass shifted, so that the people in the pews were no longer mere spectators or observers of what the presider was doing at the altar, but were now full and conscious participants in the liturgy.

During the decades prior to Vatican II, it was not uncommon for people to pray the Rosary during Mass. Everyone was encouraged to follow the prayers that were being said in the Mass in a personal missal, and many did so. But it wasn't unusual to see someone with beads in hand, silently praying the

Rosary as the priest said Mass in Latin and the altar boys (never girls!) responded in Latin on behalf of the congregation. Once the “aftershocks” of Vatican II hit, however, Catholics got the message—either directly or indirectly—that praying the Rosary during Mass was definitely not okay. And for a good many years after Vatican II, the idea of praying the Rosary at any time at all fell into disfavor among many Catholics. Thinking back, I doubt that I held a rosary in my hands from about 1970 until 1985. That excellent old rosary I bought at the Abbey of Gethsemani lay neglected in the back of a drawer for all those years. Then, for mysterious reasons of the heart and the movement of divine grace, I returned to the Rosary.

The Rosary Is a Balanced Prayer

During the fifteen years that I wasn't praying the Rosary, I was active in my faith—studying theology and writing books and articles on popular theological topics. But I began to sense that my faith, although intellectually vibrant, was lacking an affective, devotional component. Believing that it was time for me to reintegrate my feelings into my spirituality and include a devotional component in my prayer, I returned to the Rosary. And as it turned out, I couldn't have been happier with the results. A faith with an active affective component is a balanced, healthy faith. Without it, faith may become little more than a “head trip.”

The last thing I would want to do here is to denigrate the place of the intellect in faith. There are far too many great saints who were intellectuals to do that. Authentic faith should never lead us to stop thinking or to neglect the critical intellectual faculties

God gave us. At the same time, faith includes an affective, or feeling, dimension. Our emotions belong in our faith and spirituality, too. That's why devotional practices belong in the everyday life of faith—and one of the best and most time-honored of these, for Catholics especially, is the Rosary.

The Rosary Is a Comprehensive Prayer

Not only is the Rosary an excellent way to give faith a healthy affective component, it is also a theologically comprehensive prayer. Apart from the Mass, the Rosary is the most fully Christian devotional prayer available to us. In a very real sense, it has everything that is most basic to a Christian outlook on life and the world: a prayerful gesture invoking and placing ourselves in the presence of the triune God (Sign of the Cross); the most ancient creed, or statement of Christian faith, that we have (Apostles' Creed); the prayer that Jesus himself gives us in the gospels of Matthew and Luke (Our Father); prayerful reminders of the key events in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus (mysteries); petitionary prayers to Mary (Hail Mary); prayers of praise to the God who is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (Glory Be/Doxology); and a prayer invoking, praising, and petitioning the prayers of the Blessed Virgin Mary (Hail, Holy Queen/Salve Regina).

The Rosary is also particularly Catholic—and not just because it's mostly Catholics who pray it. (The occasional Protestant Christian prays the Rosary, it's true, but this is a relatively rare occurrence. If anything is likely to identify you to others as a Catholic it will be to have a rosary in your possession.) The Rosary is especially Catholic because it draws upon what Catholics consider the

two inseparable sources of divine revelation, Scripture and sacred Tradition—another sign of the Rosary’s theological balance. All but two of the twenty mysteries, or sacred events, on which the prayers of the Rosary focus come directly from the gospels, and the other two (the fourth and fifth glorious mysteries) come from sacred Tradition.

In order to better understand the interdependence of Scripture and Tradition, we first need to grasp the nature and importance of the latter. Sacred Tradition is the term we use to refer to the living transmission of all the beliefs, doctrines, rituals, Scriptures, and life of the church. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC) writes that “through Tradition, ‘the Church, in her doctrine, life, and worship, perpetuates and transmits to every generation all that she herself is, all that she believes’” (78). We usually distinguish between sacred Tradition (capital “T”) and individual traditions (lowercase “t”), which are the various customary practices “adapted to different places and times, in which the great Tradition is expressed” (CCC 83).

Sacred Tradition is the life of the church—meaning all of us—from the beginning right down to the present day. It is the Christian community’s ongoing experience and understanding of the risen Christ throughout the centuries. More, it is all the true and authentic consequences of that experience. As our definition above notes, one of the first and most basic expressions of Tradition is Scripture itself. For it was the early church’s experience of and reflection on the church’s foundational events—in particular, the conception, birth, life, teachings, death, and resurrection of Jesus—that resulted in or gave birth to the New Testament. Indeed, it is part of sacred Tradition that the Bible as we know it includes the documents that it does, and no others.

Hence, all who accept the Christian Bible, whether they realize it or not, accept sacred Tradition, too.

In a weekly general audience in April 2006, Pope Benedict XVI explained,

Tradition is the communion of the faithful gathered round the legitimate shepherds throughout history, a communion which the Holy Spirit nourishes, guaranteeing a connection between the experience of apostolic faith lived by the original community of disciples and the present experience of Christ in his church. (Catholic News Service, April 26, 2006)

Beautifully illustrating that connection, the pope went on to say that “Tradition is a living river” connecting the faithful to Christ.

In other words, sacred Tradition did not cease once the canon of Scripture had been established, roughly speaking, in the late fourth century. The “communion of the faithful” with the risen Lord, “gathered around the legitimate shepherds,” continued and continues today, and development of the church’s understanding of that experience has gone hand-in-hand with it. Through its basis in Scripture and Tradition, the Rosary is a living prayer that nourishes our intimacy with the living, risen Christ, who is continually revealed to us through Scripture, the Mass, and the sacraments.

The Rosary Is a Christ-centered Prayer in the Context of the Communion of Saints

Part of the church's ongoing reflection on its faith experience relates to the place of Mary, the mother of Jesus, in the life of the church. The Rosary is sometimes used as evidence that Catholics are guilty of giving to a mere human being the adoration appropriate to God alone. Of course, most Catholics know better. Authentic Catholicism venerates Mary; we do not worship or adore her. God alone is worthy of worship and adoration. Moreover, the Rosary—although it is set in a Marian context—is actually a Christ-centered prayer. The Rosary focuses on what theologians call “the Christ event,” that is, the life, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus. It is a devotional prayer designed to bring these events to our attention, time and again, because they are key moments in the history of salvation and, for Christians, the foundational events in the history of the Christian community. What better form of prayer for anyone who calls himself or herself a disciple of the risen Lord?

As the mother of our Lord and, in fact, his first disciple, Mary has played an important part in the development of the church, and veneration of her has been part of the sacred Tradition of the church that has been handed down to us from the apostles. Essentially, the veneration of Mary belongs in the context of the Catholic doctrine of the communion of saints. In a nutshell, this doctrine simply says that the community of faith that is the church transcends space and time. Therefore, we belong to a community that exists in both this world and the next, a community made up of all those who strive, by God's grace, to live as disciples of Christ in this world plus the countless imperfect

but faithful disciples of Christ who have gone before us into eternity. Some hold a special place of honor in the public life of the church, beginning with the Blessed Virgin Mary, the mother of Jesus.

Just as we ask for one another's prayers in this world, so we can and should petition the saints in heaven to pray for us, as well—and logically enough, the first among the saints, the Blessed Virgin Mary, holds a special place among those whose prayers we request. Thus, our prayer for Mother Mary's intercession is, in its nature, no different from our requests for one another's prayers. The only unique characteristic of prayer to Mary, or to any of the saints, is who we are asking to pray for us. Just as we place a special value on the prayers of an especially holy person in this life, so we place an even greater value on the prayers of the saints—and first among them is the mother of the risen Lord.

When we pray the Rosary, we explicitly locate ourselves in the midst of this vast eternal community, and we petition our Blessed Mother for her prayers on our behalf and on behalf of all those we pray for. In this sense, to pray the Rosary is to pray with and in the whole church, the church in this world and in eternity, the earthly church and the heavenly church. Theologically, one of the activities we engage in when we pray the Rosary is to celebrate the reality to which the church's doctrine of the communion of saints refers.

The context of the Rosary, therefore, is the community of the church existing in time and space and eternity. But the focus and center of the Rosary is Christ Jesus, the Lord of time and space and the Lord of eternity. It is to him that the Rosary directs us, and in his presence that the Rosary places us—in the company of his, and our, Blessed Mother.

The Rosary Is a Spiritually Nourishing Prayer

The fact that the Rosary directs our prayer to Christ in the company of his mother is healthy for the spirituality of men and the spirituality of women—for different but complementary reasons. The Rosary nourishes in the spirituality of both men and women a healthy feminine dimension, because it is a Christ-centered prayer in a Marian, and thus feminine, context. That is, the focus of the Rosary is on Christ, but the primary prayer of the Rosary—the Hail Mary—praises the Blessed Virgin and petitions her for prayers on our behalf.

For men, praying the Rosary cultivates a deeper appreciation and respect for all things feminine. Through each Hail Mary, the Rosary places a man in the spiritual and very real presence of the woman who became, and remains, the mother of Christ—in the original Greek of the fourth-century Nicene Creed, the *theotokos* or mother of God. A particular young woman became critically important in the working out of our salvation precisely because she was and remains a woman. Thus, all women—because they are women—share in the honor and dignity of that one young woman. It was a young woman that the Creator of the universe chose, and upon whose word he waited, before the course of salvation could continue.

For a man to pray the Rosary is to expose himself, body and soul, to the woman Mary. And because all women share in the dignity of Mary's womanhood, the man who prays the Rosary—if he truly understands what he is doing, and remains open to the truth of what he is doing—cannot help but grow in sensitivity to the dignity of all women, in particular the women with whom he lives and works. Such a man gradually deep-

ens his ability to love and respect his wife, if he is married; his sisters, if he has any; and the women with whom he works—indeed all women who cross his path each day. They express the same feminine qualities as the mother of the Son of God himself. Thus, for a man who prays the Rosary and truly understands what he is doing, it would be impossible to disrespect or denigrate women in any way or to think of them as in any way inferior to himself.

If the Rosary leads the male heart to honor, welcome, and respect women as equal and complementary beings, the Rosary leads women—for the same reasons—to respect and honor themselves precisely because they are women. For a woman to pray the Rosary is to place herself in the spiritual and very real presence of the woman whose profoundly simple—yet far from simple-minded—faith made possible God’s plan for the salvation of the world. The God of Israel beckoned her but left her free to choose as she would. Her yes to God is a model for all of us—women and men—to say yes to whatever God’s plan is for our lives. When a woman consciously places herself in the presence of this strong, gentle, no-nonsense, delightfully surprising woman, she opens herself to the influence and guidance of this woman who so bravely cooperated with the will and plan of God.

A woman who prays the Rosary is a woman who sees no reason to think of herself as inferior to anyone, regardless of gender. At the same time, she treasures the gift of her feminine nature as equal in dignity and complementary to the masculine nature of men. The last thing a woman who prays the Rosary is likely to do—if she understands fully what she is doing—is to become a doormat for any man, no matter what assumptions some men carry around in their heads about women.

In an era when violence against women—physical and otherwise—is not uncommon, the Rosary can and should be for women a source of strength and of the power to embrace and nourish their God-given dignity. Women can pray the Rosary knowing that the woman interceding for them understands precisely what it means to be a woman. In other words—astonishing as it may be to some—the Rosary is a feminist prayer, and women and men who pray and live it are feminists in the best and truest sense of the word.

“Feminism” means taking for granted that woman and man are meant to complement each other while sharing equal dignity, equal rights, and equal humanity—nothing more and nothing less. And “feminists” are men and women who are ready to stand up and work in practical, adult, no-nonsense ways to bring about acknowledgment of this equality in places and situations where it is ignored, denied, or overlooked, no matter by whom. Of course, “feminist” does not refer here to anyone who thinks of women as superior to men, any more than one should think of men as superior to women.

To say that the Rosary is a feminist prayer means that those who pray the Rosary acknowledge the equality and complementarity of women and men and are prepared to live out and work with that equality and complementarity. It does not mean, however, that those who pray the Rosary know the solutions or answers to the practical theological questions and issues that relate to gender roles in a given society and culture, or even in the church.

Indeed, those who pray the Rosary are perhaps more likely than others to be willing to eschew dogmatism, whether from the left or from the right, because to pray the Rosary is to open

oneself to the ultimate mystery of the incarnation—the entering into human nature and human history of the divine mystery that we call God, and that the First Letter of John (4:8) identifies as love itself. To open oneself to this mystery is to know a love that fills the deepest recesses of the human heart precisely because it far transcends the human intellect. Therefore, dogmatism—in effect, an implicit, arrogant claim to personal infallibility—is no longer an option. Only humble adoration and a silent tongue constitute an appropriate response to this love and this mystery.

Praying the Rosary, therefore, is spiritually and psychologically healthy for both men and women. It is so for men because the Rosary steeps a man's heart and soul in the feminine dignity and presence of the woman Mary. It is so for women because the Rosary steeps a woman's heart and soul in the feminine dignity and presence of the woman Mary. Thus, men who pray the Rosary with understanding grow to respect and honor all women more. And thus, women who pray the Rosary with understanding grow to respect and honor themselves more.

The Rosary Is a Human, Sensual Prayer

But there is still more to be said about the value of praying the Rosary. Another important reason to pray the Rosary is its incarnational nature. Because by custom the Rosary almost always includes the use of rosary beads, or some substitute for rosary beads, the Rosary is a remarkably sensual way to pray. To pray with a rosary is to have something to grab on to. Thus, prayer becomes more than a matter of thought, words, and bodily posture; it becomes a physical activity. You hold the cir-

clet of beads, you feel the beads with your fingers, and you move the beads through your hands, from one to the next. Your hands pray as much as your mind, your words, and the rest of your body. So the Rosary is an embodied form of prayer because it involves your sense of touch.

At times of particular sadness or anxiety, or moments of special happiness or rejoicing, it can be comforting to have the prayer beads of a rosary to cling to, to hang on to, to help you focus. That's one reason, no doubt, that the Rosary remains so popular after so many centuries, with so many people of faith.

It's also true that the Rosary falls into the rhythmic, repetitive kind of prayer that eastern religions refer to as "mantric." That is, it utilizes the repetition of a single prayer in order to help the person praying to both focus his or her attention and go deeper. The "over-and-overness" of the Hail Mary, especially, gives the mind—and when prayed aloud, the tongue—something to do. Our mind tends to be like a popcorn popper: pop-pop-pop-pop, thoughts, ideas, and nonsense going off randomly in all directions, often uncontrollably, when the intention is to pray. While the conscious mind is occupying itself with the repetition of the Hail Mary, the heart, one's deeper center, can slip into the presence of our source and ultimate goal: the triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, who is love, compassion, mercy, forgiveness, and healing peace.

But, you might ask, in using repetitive prayer aren't we guilty of violating the words of Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew: "When you are praying, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do; for they think that they will be heard because of their many words" (6:7)? Fortunately, because of the teachings of the church as well as the insights of Scripture scholarship, we

know that the answer to that question is no. The point of Jesus' words in the gospel is to remind us that we don't need to repeat our requests to God over and over again out of a concern that God might not hear us. That is not the purpose of the repetitive prayers of the Rosary. The repetition is for our sake, not God's. We repeat the Hail Mary simply as a way to maintain some focus during our prayer and to nourish what we might call a "state of prayerfulness." It has nothing to do with thinking that if we repeat the prayers of the Rosary, God will hear us because of our "many words."

Finally, some may remind us that we should pray the Rosary because the Blessed Virgin Mary herself, in various apparitions, instructed us to do so. This is a reason not without value and importance, to be sure. At the same time, we must remember that the Catholic Church has never required that we accept or believe in apparitions validated by church authorities. For those of us who accept with gratitude and joy the authenticity of the Marian apparitions at, for example, Fatima and Lourdes, the Blessed Mother's admonitions to pray the Rosary are welcome. But we must keep in mind that, even based on these apparitions, we never have a right to get pushy about the Rosary with anyone, not even Catholics.

Pray the Rosary for any or all of the reasons discussed in this chapter. To put it simply, we can say that praying the Rosary is a good idea because it is such a balanced, comprehensive, Christ-centered, spiritually nourishing, thoroughly human way to pray. In a nutshell, that's pretty much it!