

The Rosary: Intention, Attention, and Retention

Delivered extempore on 11 October 2020, celebrated as the Feast of Our Lady of the Rosary, with episcopal permission



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

Brothers and Sisters,

Why don't we live the Christian life which we have been called to; the life which we wish to live, which we even love in our hearts, and yet in our actions so often fail to realise? We are almost traitors to the faith to which we have been called. In part, oddly enough, this is due to our desiring the perfection of holiness, but lacking patience. We want it too quickly. Sometimes, if you reach for something too quickly, you can't get it. There are certain fragile things which, if you grab for them, you destroy in the act of clutching. Other things are too large, and if we are hasty, we drop them. In a way, this is true also of the life which we are called to: *the life of holiness*; it is both fragile and tremendous. It cannot be bought, bartered, or traded, and it is not the fruit of a day. For people such as ourselves, a process of seeking and receiving grace is needed for holiness.

We can be too impatient with ourselves. We know that if we are training, for example, to strengthen the back – to build up muscle there to be pain free – it needs time. We can't go to the gym once, and then walk out with a new physique. It needs time. If we're cooking, everything has its time: food has to be in the oven for a certain period to be baked. We need wisdom to understand how much time and what type of effort is needed. The effort I need to clean the glasses is very different from the effort I need to scrub the floor. If I use that type of activity to clean the glasses, I will smash them. And yet, if I try to scrub the floor the way I dust the glasses, it will never get clean.

We are in need of divine wisdom to know how to change, so that our souls can be cleansed, purified and strengthened; to allow the right amount of time and use the right methods. I am going to speak about the rosary from this perspective. Of course I could speak about other ways of cleansing and illuminating the soul: the sacraments most of all. I could speak about fasting. I could speak about alms-giving. These are all valuable. But this morning I am going to speak about the rosary.

I will meditate upon the rosary in three ways. First of all, to approach it with **intention**. When I pray the rosary, I intend to turn my mind, my heart, all my strength, to God through Mary. To Jesus through Mary. I am intending to approach the supernatural life. The world is beautiful, especially on a day like today. It is filled with the glory of God. That is why it is beautiful, because God's glory shines through nature which He made. Remember, we are taught by the sacred author that when God made the world, he saw that it was good, and when He looked at the whole of creation, He saw that it was very good. That goodness is still there. The problem is the resistance to God. We resist Him,

under the influence of darkness, when we should be cooperating. So first of all, we aim to pray the rosary with the intention of obtaining supernatural grace.

Secondly, after **intention**, comes **attention**. While I am praying the rosary, I train my mind. I need a discipline. The first week I was here, I spoke to you about *moral discipline*, and how important that is. Discipline is also necessary when we pray. But again, an appropriate type of discipline. When distracting thoughts come in while I am praying the rosary, I put my attention back on the rosary. “Hail Mary, full of grace.” A thought comes into my head. Doesn’t matter whether it’s this or that, it’s still a distraction. Maybe it’s important, but it will be there when I have finished the rosary, so I can turn back to the rosary with full attention, and I know that when the rosary is finished I will remember it again. So, for this short period, when I am praying the rosary, that’s where my attention is.

Finally, we come to **retention**. When I have completed the rosary, I wish to retain something of it. Here the discipline is critical. I don’t just get up from the rosary, collapse in front of the t.v., and blank out for three hours. When I get up from the rosary, I am a person who has been engaged in prayer before God. I’ve been addressing Our Lady, asking her to pray for me. I’ve been turning my heart to the Lord. I’ve been raising my thoughts to heavenly things, so when I get up, I take with me that spiritual exercise.

Whatever I do, I do it in a prayerful spirit. Maybe I’ve got to weed the garden for my mother. It’s a good thing to do. Or maybe my dad has asked me clean out the garage. It’s good, not only for the sake of cleanliness and order, but because I wish to please God by assisting my parents. But I clean it in a prayerful state. I remember that I am a man who has just got up from praying the holy rosary of Our Lady, and I do the job well, with love. You all know the difference it makes when a meal is cooked with love, and when it is cooked as a chore. And if I am a father or a mother, I turn to my spouse, my children, and to my duties in the world, in that prayerful spirit – the spirit of the Rosary does not end when I have said the final “Amen.”



We Catholics have too long compartmentalised our lives: this is when I pray, this when I am at work, this is when I am cooking. Too often, we forget that God is always present. Everything I do should be united into one course of conduct by my supernatural aim, which is to realise the presence of God, and praying the rosary is a very important part of that.

My friends, I could speak for another hour about the rosary, but that is the essential point I wished to make today. When we pray the rosary, take three things to it: intention for supernatural grace, attention for moral discipline, and retention, that my life is a life lived in the spirit of the rosary of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.