

20

A N S W E R S



THE ROSARY

Catholic Answers

20 Answers: The Rosary

Tom Nash

Introduction

A friend of mine calls the rosary “the gospel on a string.” It’s an apt description for this fruitful devotion in which we meditate on the mission and ministry of Jesus Christ, the God-man who came to redeem mankind and offer us the gift of eternal salvation.

We might also describe the rosary as a *contemplative catechism*, for we deepen our relationship with Jesus and his Church through reflecting on the key events of his life: his conception, birth, and boyhood, his preaching the kingdom and instituting the Eucharist, his suffering and death, and his triumph over sin and death in rising from the dead. After his resurrection, we reflect on his sending the Holy Spirit and welcoming his mother into heaven as his greatest disciple and queen of heaven and earth.

In short, the rosary reaffirms that Catholicism, properly understood, begins and ends with Jesus. In the same vein, our devotion to Mary flows from her being the mother of God. And Christianity is not simply rooted in something Jesus *did* 2,000 years ago, a “finished” event (John 19:30) from which we can still draw saving grace; rather, the Faith is rooted in a redemptive sacrifice that continues in his resurrection and culminates in everlasting glory at Christ’s ascension, as “he always lives to make intercession” for us in “heaven itself, *now*” (Heb. 7:25, 9:24, emphasis added).

The rosary reminds us that Jesus is the high priest of heaven, offering his one and only sacrifice (Heb. 8:1-3), which becomes present on earth every time we heed Christ in offering the Eucharist—“Do this is in remembrance of me” (Luke 22:19)—and partake of his body and blood as the New Covenant Passover Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world (1 Cor. 5:7; Matt. 26:28).

Indeed, as he promised, Jesus is with us until the end of the age (Matt. 28:20), most especially in the Eucharist (John 6:53-58) and other sacraments. Praying the rosary helps us better appreciate and access these great gifts our Lord continues to dispense through his Church.

Jesus also gives us his mother, Mary, the exemplar of Christianity, to accompany us on this meditative journey through the four sets of rosary mysteries: Joyful, Luminous, Sorrowful, and Glorious. Mary welcomes Jesus from the beginning of his earthly

mission, and her assumption and coronation illustrate Jesus fulfilling his salvific promises and demonstrate that his mother¹ is *God-qualified* to intercede on our behalf. From the Annunciation, Mary testifies that *God* is the object of our worship in the rosary, responding to the angel Gabriel, “Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word” (Luke 1:38). Mary thus expresses a lifelong commitment to doing God’s will, proclaiming at her visitation that “all generations will call me blessed” (Luke 1:48). Also, at the wedding of Cana, in reference to her divine son, she faithfully advises the servants—and us by extension—“Do whatever he tells you” (John 2:5).

Given her model discipleship, which she exemplifies all the way to the cross and beyond, the Lord highly exalts Mary. As Scripture attests, Mary is not simply the Mother of God, but the spiritual mother of *all* of Christ’s disciples, “her offspring . . . those who keep the commandments of God and bear testimony to Jesus” (Rev. 12:17; see John 19:26-27). Consequently, like any good mother, Mary seeks the good of her children, which ultimately means helping them attain heaven, in stark contrast to the devil, who seeks their destruction (Rev. 12:17).

Because of Mary’s concern for her spiritual offspring, we invoke her assistance in the holy rosary, “now, and at the hour of our death.” In this booklet, we will explore the rosary’s structure, its biblical basis and other history, various objections to praying this devotion, and also practical advice to pray it well. The goal is for Catholics and other Christians to pray it more fruitfully and defend its use, and for others of goodwill to have obstacles removed and draw closer to Jesus and Mary in praying this venerable devotion.

1. What is the rosary?

The rosary is a prayer in which we meditate on key events or “mysteries” in the life of Jesus Christ and his Blessed Mother while invoking the prayerful assistance of both our Lord and Our Lady in witnessing their love to the world. The events are organized into four groups of five mysteries: Joyful, Luminous, Sorrowful, and Glorious. The faithful pray one “Our Father” (Lord’s Prayer) and ten “Hail Marys” while meditating on each mystery of a group, for a total of fifty Hail Marys per group.

The repeated prayers not only help Christians focus their minds while meditating on each mystery, but also enable a believer to better hear how Christ may be speaking to them in their individual lives regarding particular relationships, work, other issues, etc. In

¹ Martin Luther and John Calvin, the two most influential founders of Protestantism, affirmed Mary’s divine maternity (*Luther’s Works*, 22:492-93; John Calvin, *Commentary on Matthew, Mark, Luke, Vol. 1*, Luke 1:39-45). Calvin did have concerns about the maternal title because of perceived Catholic misuse. In addition, though neither believed in Mary as an intercessory advocate, Luther referred to Mary as “queen of heaven” (see *Luther’s Works*, 21:327, 36:208, 45:107), showing that Protestants who reject these titles have deviated from their religious foundations.

this light, before beginning and while praying the rosary, Christians should keep in mind the prophet Samuel's wise response to the Lord: "Speak, for your servant is listening" (1 Sam. 3:10). People can lose heart in praying the rosary when they forget that an important part of prayer is listening to God.

The rosary is often characterized as a Marian devotion, given the fifty Hail Marys prayed for each set of mysteries. But, as we noted, the prayer is really Christ-centered,² for its purpose is to help disciples better know and love Jesus with the aid of his blessed mother. As prayerful Dominicans explain:

The vocal prayers are sometimes called the body of the rosary, while the mental prayer is its soul. While the lips are uttering the words of the Hail Marys, the mind should dwell on some aspect of the mystery being considered. For example, for the first Sorrowful Mystery, while the lips are uttering the Hail Marys, the mind dwells on our Lord's Agony in the Garden of Gethsemane. *We are not meant to focus our attention on the [words of] the Hail Marys.* The ten Hail Marys are *a measuring device* to determine *the length of time* to reflect on this incident in the passion of Jesus.³

This counsel reinforces the need to transcend the words of the Marian prayers and use them as a meditative device not only to concentrate on the mysteries, but also—again—to hear God's "still small voice" (1 Kings 19:12).

Thus, although the number of Hail Marys is ten times greater than the Our Fathers prayed in each five-decade rosary group, the goal is always to lead the faithful to their Lord and savior, and through Christ to a deeper union with the Father and the Holy Spirit in trinitarian communion (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC) 259-60). Here we see that the Blessed Mother is not a distraction from or competitor with her divine son, but rather a collaborator in our eternal salvation, one who always seeks to do Christ's will (Luke 1:38) and lead others to do the same (John 2:5).

The rosary begins with the Apostles' Creed, a summary of the Faith, which reminds Christians of the centrality of Jesus in their lives in general and the rosary in particular.

After the Creed, we pray one Our Father, in which we can remember the pope's intentions, and then three Hail Marys, in which we can pray for an increase in the theological virtues of faith, hope, and love (see CCC 1812-13).

Then follows the praying of a particular group of five mysteries, each mystery beginning with an Our Father followed by ten Hail Marys. These groups of ten are known as

² See Pope St. John Paul II, *Rosarium Virginis Mariae*, 1, and Pope St. Paul VI, *Marialis Cultus*, 42.

³ *Praying the Rosary without Distractions* (Portland, OR: The Rosary Center, 1994), 4, ALL-CAP emphases original; italicized emphases added.

decades. The faithful contemplate the events of each mystery, perhaps zeroing in on a particular virtue that Jesus or Mary exemplifies, while remaining open to how God might be speaking to them otherwise.

The four groups of five rosary mysteries, in the chronological order they occurred in the lives of Jesus and Mary, are these:

Joyful: Annunciation, Visitation, Nativity, Presentation, Finding in the Temple

Luminous: Baptism in the Jordan, Wedding at Cana, Proclamation of the Kingdom of God, Transfiguration, Institution of the Eucharist.

Sorrowful: Agony in the Garden, Scourging at the Pillar, Crowning with Thorns, Carrying of the Cross, Crucifixion.

Glorious: Resurrection, Ascension, Descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary into Heaven, Coronation of Mary as Queen of Heaven and Earth.

At the end of each decade, a “Glory Be” is prayed, followed by the prayer given by Our Lady of Fatima: “Oh, my Jesus, forgive us our sins, save us from the fires of hell, lead all souls to heaven, and help especially those most in need of thy mercy.”

At the conclusion of a group of five mysteries, the faithful pray the “Hail, Holy Queen,” also known as the “Salve Regina.” Often added is a concluding rosary prayer, as well as, depending on the group, the optional “Prayer to St. Michael the Archangel” and additional prayers for the Holy Father—typically a Hail Mary, an Our Father, and a Glory Be.

2. What is the biblical basis of the basic rosary prayers?

The Apostles’ Creed, which begins the rosary, is a summary of the Christian faith and thus solidly rooted in Scripture. Catholic belief in one God in three divine persons is especially anchored in the four Gospels, the heart of the New Testament—and indeed the whole Bible—since the incarnation and ministry of Jesus Christ are the culmination of salvation history (Heb. 1:1-3).

St. John affirms that Jesus and the Father are one, yet distinct divine persons, in his Gospel (John 1:1-3, 17:20-23). He also makes clear that Jesus became man at the Incarnation (John 1:14). In addition, when Jesus ascribes to himself the divine name “I AM,” which his Father revealed to Moses (John 8:58; Exodus 3:14), his Jewish confreres seek to stone him, confirming they understand that Jesus is claiming equality with God (John 8:59; see John 5:18; Deut. 13:15).

The Holy Spirit, the third person of the Holy Trinity, is affirmed in various passages, including John 14:26 and 16:13-14 (see also Matt. 28:18-20). The Creed also affirms, among other fundamental Christian doctrines, the Catholic Church, headed by St. Peter and the apostles, which Jesus establishes to oversee and lead God's people (Matt. 16:18-19; 18:15-18). So identified are the apostles with Jesus that Scripture refers to our Lord's doctrine as "the teachings of the apostles" (Acts 2:42).

The importance of the teaching Church is manifest early on, both at the Council of Jerusalem (Acts 15:1-29) and through the apostles' successors in combating heresies that denied Jesus' humanity (Docetism) and then his divinity (Arianism), as well as through the guidance of the Holy Spirit (see John 16:13).

Included in the Creed is that Jesus was born of the Virgin Mary, a teaching most Protestant Christians affirm with Catholics. In addition, many Protestants affirm and recite the Creed in general, even though they understand it differently from how Catholics do, particularly regarding the nature of the Church Jesus founded.

The second basic prayer of the rosary is the Our Father, which St. Matthew provides in full in his Gospel (Matt. 6:9-13; see Luke 11:2-3).

The Glory Be, which closes each decade of the rosary, is an affirmation of the Trinity. Finally, the Hail, Holy Queen is founded on Mary's maternity as both Mother of God (Luke 1:43) and spiritual mother of all his disciples (Rev. 12:17). We will address these teachings more fully in subsequent questions, including regarding Mary's heavenly coronation.

The main prayer of the rosary is the repeated, meditation-aiding Hail Mary. The first portion of the prayer is Gabriel's angelic salutation: "Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee" (Luke 1:38). The second part is Elizabeth's proclamation upon hearing the greeting of her arriving cousin: "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb" (Luke 1:42). The word "Jesus" is then added to affirm the identity of the Blessed Mother's divine son. The Hail Mary then concludes, "Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death. Amen." That she is holy is supported by Mary's proclamation that "all generations will call me blessed" (Luke 1:48), and that she is the Mother of God, as we have seen, is affirmed by her being the mother of her divine son.

That Mary can intercede for us is implied by her being the mother of all Christians (Rev. 12:17), and what mother doesn't act on behalf of her children? This question will be further addressed later on. For now, consider that if Mary can't intercede for her spiritual children, then she falls short of the standard we expect of mere earthly mothers for their

naturally birthed children. Why, then, would the Almighty designate her a mother in any sense for his disciples?

3. When and how did the rosary begin and develop?

Until recent centuries, illiteracy was widespread. Things began to change in the mid-1400s, when Johannes Gutenberg invented a printing press that allowed for mass production of literature with associated major cost savings. Prior to that, those who read the Bible were the educated few, including many Catholic clergy.

Regarding praying from Scripture, praying from the book of Psalms goes back to religious times prior to the Incarnation, when Jews would pray the Psalms at certain time of the day and also read other excerpts from the Bible. The early Church continued this tradition, which over time became the Divine Office or Liturgy of the Hours that was compiled in a book called the *breviary*.⁴

In time, beginning in the 800s and particularly with uneducated Irish monks, a “poor man’s psalter” or breviary developed for those who couldn’t read and understand Latin. It consisted of the repeated praying of the Our Father or, in Latin, *Paternoster*. The term *psalter* derives from the 150 psalms in the book of Psalms. The monks and lay faithful would use prayer beads to keep track of the number of Our Fathers prayed.

Devotion to the Blessed Mother also increased over time, with the “Marian Psalter” becoming more common in the 1100s, and the praying of 150 Hail Marys mirroring the Paternosters prayed in the poor man’s psalter. Also, fifteen Our Fathers were added in short order to divide the Hail Marys into sets of ten or *decades*.

Then, in 1208, in Fanjeaux, France, according to the longstanding pious tradition, to which popes have attested for centuries, St. Dominic received from Our Lady the mandate to combine the recitation of the Marian Psalter with preaching and meditation on the key mysteries of her divine son’s life.

The timing was providential, because Dominic and other leaders in the Church were combating the Albigensians, a heretical group whose members believed that the spiritual aspect of man was made by a good god and thus morally good, whereas the body was made by an evil god and thus morally bad. Consequently, mysteries of our Lord’s life that countered this dualistic error—e.g., the Incarnation and Christ’s passion, death, resurrection, and ascension—enabled Dominic and his confreres to form the faithful well through preaching and related meditation.

⁴ Father Fernand, Cabrol, OSB, “Divine Office,” *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, Vol. 11 (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1911), as given at newadvent.org.

Some critics have countered that the tradition that Mary gave St. Dominic the rosary originated only in 1470, the miscreation of another Dominican, Blessed Alan de la Roche.⁵ In addition, these critics have argued, Dominic the Prussian, a Carthusian monk, actually started the meditative rosary—versus simply praying Hail Marys—earlier in the 1400s.

However, in the mid-20th century, Mathieu Gorce, a French Dominican, reported on a fellow Dominican who describes in a document—from the early 1300s—the praying of the Hail Mary while meditating on mysteries of the Faith, a preaching-praying method St. Dominic received as a heavenly mission. In addition, in 1977, Andreas Heinz, who served as a historian at the University of Trier in Germany, discovered a manuscript that detailed the praying of a rosary with meditations on Christ’s life. It also dates from the early 1300s.

The last portion of the Hail Mary, in which Mary is prayerfully invoked, dates to the mid-1300s, as a response to the Black Plague that ravaged Europe. Though variations on the mysteries developed over time, the fifteen traditional mysteries would become standardized, beginning with the rosary revival Blessed Alan de la Roche started in the 1400s and which Pope St. Pius V authoritatively reaffirmed in his papal bull *Consueverunt Romani* in 1569.

Finally, with his letter *Rosarium Virginis Mariae* in 2002, Pope St. John Paul II instituted the Luminous Mysteries, which cover the period of Christ’s life from his adolescence to the beginning of Holy Week.

4. What are the Joyful Mysteries?

The Joyful Mysteries chronicle important events in the early life of our Lord with Our Lady. They fittingly begin with the Annunciation, when Jesus and Mary commence their ministerial collaboration (Luke 1:26-38). In focusing on the life of Christ, many people jump to his redemptive paschal mystery—our Lord’s passion, death, resurrection, and ascension—yet none of that happens without Mary’s “yes,” without the Incarnation, without God’s humbly becoming man in the person of Jesus Christ.

Indeed, the sweep of Christ’s redemption begins when “the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us” (John 1:14). Jesus becomes man so that we could become like God, “partakers of the divine nature” (2 Pet. 1:4; CCC 460).

⁵ Herbert Thurston and Andrew Shipman, “The Rosary,” *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, Vol. 13 (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1912), as given at newadvent.org. Regarding Blessed Alan, the authors state, “He it undoubtedly was who first suggested the idea that the devotion of ‘Our Lady’s Psalter’ (a hundred and fifty Hail Marys) was instituted or revived by St. Dominic.”

Mary becomes the mother of the Messiah, “the Son of the Most High,” who will restore the kingdom of Israel in the line of David (Luke 1:32-33). St. Matthew summarizes it this way in opening his Gospel: “The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham” (Matt. 1:1). The link with Abraham confirms that Jesus will be the one through whom all the “nations”—i.e., the Gentiles—will be blessed (Gen. 22:18; see Isa. 11:10).

Mary’s “Fiat” rings down the corridors of salvation history: “Be it done unto me according to thy word.” Her trust is a virtue to pray for in pondering this mystery, as are the humility and docility of Jesus in becoming man (Phil. 2:3-7).

The Visitation is the second Joyful Mystery. Our meditation can be divided between Mary’s arrival and the response of St. Elizabeth and her unborn son (Luke 1:39-45), and then Mary’s “Magnificat” praising God for her singular blessing in becoming the mother of Jesus (Luke 1:46-57). Mary, pregnant herself, journeys to help her cousin, who is in “the sixth month” of carrying St. John the Baptist (Luke 1:36).

Mary is filled with the Holy Spirit and praises the Lord, because as the Mother of Our Savior, “all generations will call me blessed” (Luke 1:48), and Israel in particular and the posterity of Abraham in general will receive God’s mercy (Luke 1:54-55).

St. Luke further affirms Mary as the Mother of God in Luke 1:56: “And Mary remained with her about three months, and returned to her home.” Elizabeth lived in “the hill country” of Judea. Likewise, the Ark of the Covenant, upon whose mercy seat God intimately manifested his divine presence in Old Covenant times (See Exod. 25:8; 17-22) stayed in the same hill country, remaining three months in the home of O’bed-e’dom (2 Sam. 6:10-11). The Ark of the Covenant therefore serves as a parallel, or type,⁶ for Mary, the “ark” or vessel carrying Jesus, the Word made flesh.⁷

The third Joyful Mystery is the Nativity, the birth of Jesus. Luke and Matthew provide narratives of Christ’s infancy, as Luke records the birth of our Lord (2:1-20) and Matthew the wise men’s encounter with the Baby Jesus later (Matt. 2:1-12). An angel proclaims the messianic pedigree of Jesus (Luke 2:11), and the wise men’s gifts affirm Christ’s Davidic kingship (gold), priesthood (frankincense), and self-offering unto death (myrrh [Matt. 2:11]).

The Nativity gives us much to ponder and anticipate, including the childlikeness of the divine Son of God in becoming man and thus how we are called to be humble as his

⁶ Typology illustrates how symbols, events, persons, etc., in the Old Testament prefigure the same in the New Testament era, which is inclusive of Christ’s Second Coming (see CCC 115-19; 128-30).

⁷ This connection illustrates that Mary is not only the New Eve, but also the New Ark of the Covenant. Further, the Ark and Mary are typologically juxtaposed in Revelation 11:19 and 12:1, which were not originally separated by chapter demarcations.

disciples, persevering like trusting children in even the most adverse circumstances (see Matt. 18:1-4).

The fourth Joyful Mystery is the Presentation (2 Luke 2:22-38), in which Simeon praises God for allowing him to live to see the Messiah, whose salvation will be offered to all, “a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to thy people Israel” (Luke 2:32). St. Joseph and Mary marvel at what Simeon says, yet his words are also troubling, as he tells Mary:

Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising of many in Israel,
and for a sign that is spoken against
(and a sword will pierce through your own soul also),
that thoughts out of many hearts may be revealed (Luke 2:34-35).

The shadow of Christ’s cross tempers his parents’ joy, as they hear that his salvation will come at a great cost. This mystery encourages us to maintain our trust in God, as Simeon’s proclamation illustrates that God is faithful. We need to meditate on that good reminder, because, as Joseph and Mary hear, there will be no Easter joy without the price of a sorrowful Good Friday. And so the Presentation girds us to carry our own crosses (Luke 9:23), realizing that God’s “power is made perfect in [our] weakness,” too (2 Cor. 12:8-10).

The pain of the cross’s shadow becomes more acute for Joseph and Mary in the fifth Joyful Mystery, the Finding of the Child Jesus in the Temple (Luke 2:41-51). As Jesus will be in the tomb three days (Matt. 12:40), so Joseph and Mary search anxiously for their son, who has stayed behind in the temple in Jerusalem following the celebration of Passover (Luke 2:46).

Joseph’s and Mary’s concern for their missing child is humanly understandable, yet Jesus points to his divinity in his response: “How is it that you sought me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father’s house?” (Luke 2:49). Joseph and Mary do not understand their son’s response, which—something to ponder in this mystery—can happen in our own lives. Yet “we walk by faith, not by sight” in staying true to the Lord and his Church (2 Cor. 5:7). Like the famous “Footprints” poem, we realize that Jesus is always with us, and he even carries us when we feel most abandoned.

5. What are the Luminous Mysteries?

In 2002, Pope St. John Paul II added these events from Christ’s public ministry, designating them as “luminous” or “mysteries of light” because each is “*a revelation of the Kingdom now present in the very person of Jesus*” (*Rosarium Virginis Mariae*).

The first Luminous Mystery is the Baptism in the Jordan, when John the Baptist submits to Jesus in baptizing the Lord. Jesus does not need this baptism, yet, as a good Jew, he asks John to comply, for it “is fitting for us to fulfil all righteousness” (Matt. 3:15). Jesus “submits to the rite to identify with sinners and align himself with God’s plan. Jesus performs Old Covenant regulations to fulfill and perfect them in the New (Matt. 5:17; cf. Luke 2:21-28; CCC 536).”⁸

In showing solidarity with sinners, Christ’s baptism anticipates his redemptive cross. It also shows the manner in which he will share the merits of his paschal mystery through the Church—i.e., the sacrament of baptism (see Matt. 28:18-20). And so we can meditate here on Christ’s baptism and how it serves as a prelude for our own.

Jesus’ first public miracle, the Wedding at Cana, is the second Luminous Mystery, which St. John uniquely reports (John 2:1-11). Mary asks her son to aid a bride and groom, who have run out of wine at their wedding reception. Jesus tells his mother that “my hour has not yet come,” referring to the offering of his paschal sacrifice, which begins at the Last Supper,⁹ yet Christ prefigures it here by changing water into wine. Mary’s words to the wedding servants are a perennial reminder of our Lord’s trustworthiness: “Do whatever he tells you” (John 2:5).

The Proclamation of the Kingdom of God is the third Luminous Mystery: “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand,” Jesus proclaims (Matt. 4:17). Accepting God’s kingdom means accepting the Savior savior he sent: “For God so loved the world that he gave his only son,” Jesus says of himself, “that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16). This belief will entail repenting of our sins and recognizing that Jesus alone can atone for them. “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God,” Jesus teaches, indicating how salvation will come through baptism, by which we partake of the redemptive merits of his sacrifice of Calvary (John 3:6; see 1 Pet. 3:18-22).

At the same time, salvation is not a one-time event, as some Christians teach, because Jesus teaches that we must persevere in accepting and maturing in that divine gift. As Jesus tells the rich young man, “if you would enter life, keep the commandments” (Matt. 19:16-17; see John 8:31-32).

In the fourth Luminous Mystery, the Transfiguration, Jesus reassures his disciples that death will not have the last word in his witness. He takes Peter, James, and John up a mountain, where he is transfigured, prefiguring his resurrected glory, as “his face shone like the sun, and his garments became white as light” (Matt. 17:2).

⁸ *The Ignatius Catholic Study Bible New Testament* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2010), 12.

⁹ See Scott Hahn, *The Fourth Cup* (New York: Image, 2018). Hahn argues that Christ’s New Covenant Passover sacrifice begins in the Upper Room at the Last Supper and culminates on the cross in his consumption of the traditional fourth cup of Passover wine (John 19:28-30).

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus teaches, “Think not that I have come to abolish the law and the prophets; I have come not to abolish them but to fulfil them” (Matt. 5:17). Now Christ dramatically affirms that reality, as he is flanked by Moses, who represents the law, and Elijah, who represents the prophets (Matt. 17:3; see Luke 9:28-36). As at his baptism, the Father affirms his Son. He adds here to the three apostles, “Listen to him!” (Luke 9:35; Matt. 17:5).

In the fifth Luminous Mystery, Jesus transforms and fulfills the Passover Communion sacrifice with the Institution of the Eucharist. Although scholars agree that Jesus partook of the traditional Old Covenant Passover lamb at the Last Supper, Christ’s focus is on how *he will serve*, as John the Baptist proclaimed, as “the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29). Indeed, it is by offering his body and blood on our behalf that Jesus will redeem mankind (Matt. 26:26-29; see Luke 22:19-20; Mark 14:22-25).

In informing his apostles that his is the quintessential gift that keeps on giving, Jesus commands them, “Do this in remembrance of me” (Luke 22:19), illuminating his words from the Bread of Life discourse, “He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day” (John 6:54). As in the Old Covenant, Christ “our Passover Lamb” is both sacrificed and eaten (1 Cor. 5:7). And so we meditate on the Eucharist as our food on the journey to our heavenly homeland, recognizing it as the most profound fulfillment of Christ’s words: “And lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age” (Matt. 28:20).

6. What are the Sorrowful Mysteries?

The Sorrowful Mysteries help us meditate on the key events of Christ’s passion and death. We learn that the greatest of triumphs are born from tremendous sacrifice, suffering, and sorrow. Any holy couple can relate, including growing through the trials of their children.

Jesus won the greatest victory in marriage—and human—history on behalf of his mystical spouse, the Church. As Ven. Fulton Sheen says so well, “Every other person who ever came into this world came into it to live. [Jesus] came into it to die.”¹⁰

In meditating on the Passion, beginning with our Lord’s Agony in the Garden, the first Sorrowful Mystery, Christians likely focus on his *physical* sufferings, which movies like *The Passion of the Christ* vividly portray.

¹⁰ Fulton J. Sheen, *Life of Christ* (New York: Image Books, 1977), 20.

However, Christ's much greater *spiritual* suffering is implicit in Gethsemane, both by the God-man's triple-request to remove his cup of suffering (Matt. 26:36-46; see 2 Cor. 12:8-10) and his sweating blood without any accompanying physical punishment (Luke 22:39-46). Any human could endure—at least for a short while—a scourging and maybe also a crucifixion. But no mere human could last a nanosecond taking on the spiritual weight of all of the sins in human history. Only the God-man could attain our insurmountable atonement.

When we wonder how much Jesus loves us, the spiritual suffering he endured for our redemption and salvation should be front and center, and the Sorrowful Mysteries are ideal for fostering such meditation.

In considering the Scourging at the Pillar, the second Sorrowful Mystery, we should remember that a lashing left raised welts on a person's skin, as St. Paul and other Jews experienced (2 Cor. 11:24; Deut. 25:3), whereas a scourging tore up skin and caused serious bleeding, as basic leather strips gave way to knotted ones from which fearsome pieces of bone and metal protruded.

Isaiah's prophecy of the Suffering Servant is meditatively apt here (Isa. 52:13-53:12), as well as St. Peter's related reflection (1 Pet. 2:19-25) and St. John's on what constitutes the greatest love (John 15:12-14).

The third Sorrowful Mystery is the Crowning with Thorns, which all four Gospels record (Matt. 27:27-31; Mark 15:16-20; Luke 22:63-65; John 19:1-2). The soldiers mock Jesus, who doesn't resist their perverse tribute, enduring their persecution in silent patience. Jesus shows us how to suffer well, though we should never seek out suffering, nor should we endure it unjustly if possible. Discipleship in Christ will provide its own sufficient—and redemptive—suffering.

In our world of powerful cinematic superheroes, Jesus provides a counter-witness—one who becomes his most powerful and triumphant through his seemingly weakest moments.

The Carrying of the Cross is the fourth Sorrowful Mystery. Here we walk with Jesus on his long road to Calvary (Matt. 27:31-33; Mark 15:20-22; Luke 22:26-32; John 19:17). Jesus tells us we too must bear our own crosses, so we can integrate into our meditation the trials we're enduring, those we are about to face, or those from which we haven't yet recovered, uniting our suffering with the sacrificial Lamb of God.

Simon the Cyrenian supported Jesus on his trek to Golgotha, and Jesus will aid us all the more in ours (Mark 15:21-22). Jesus also exhorts the women of Jerusalem to weep not for him, but for themselves, anticipating the destruction Jerusalem will face in A.D.

70 for rejecting him, a sober warning if we ourselves do not persevere in following the Lord (Luke 23:27-31).

“The seven last words of Jesus,” uttered while he hung on the cross, provide us much meditative food for the fifth and final Sorrowful Mystery, the Crucifixion. They are, in order:

- 1) “Father, forgive Them; for they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34).
- 2) “‘Woman, behold, your son!’ Then he said to the disciple, ‘Behold, your mother!’” (John 19:26-27).
- 3) “Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise” (Luke 23:43).
- 4) “I thirst” (John 19:28).
- 5) “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” (Matt. 27:46; Mark 15:34).
- 6) “It is finished!” (John 19:30).
- 7) “Father, into thy hands I commit my spirit!” (Luke 23:46; See Psalm 31:5).

Any *one* of these words suffices for this mystery’s meditation, although you can progress through all of them briefly during a single decade. In any event, Christ’s humanity is on shocking display, yet we never lose sight that he’s a divine person in control in willing our salvation and triumphing over sin. The Sorrowful Mysteries are a great gift to help navigate our own trials, and none is greater in guiding us than the culminating Crucifixion.

7. What are the Glorious Mysteries?

These mysteries celebrate the triumphant accomplishment of Christ’s mission, including our collaboration and ultimate share in his victory, epitomized by his blessed mother and the commencement of her heavenly reign in union with her divine son. Whereas meditating on the Sorrowful Mysteries can help us through our own trials, and inspire us to pray for others who are also experiencing challenges, the Glorious Mysteries give us hope that our “Good Fridays” will eventually bear fruit in related “Easter Sundays,” just as they did originally for Jesus

The Resurrection is the first Glorious Mystery. All four Gospel writers provide different perspectives on this marvelous event and its aftermath (Matt. 28; Mark 16; Luke 24; John 20-21). There is much for meditation, including the discovery of the empty tomb by the apostles John and Peter (John 20:1-9); how, on the road to Emmaus, two disciples come to know Jesus “in the breaking of the bread,” an early Church term for the celebration of the Eucharist (Luke 24:13-35; see Acts 2:42; 20:7,12); and Christ’s empowering his apostles to forgive sins (John 20:21-23).

The Ascension of Jesus into Heaven is the second Glorious Mystery, which St. Mark (16:19-20) and St. Luke (24:50-53) report on briefly. Both St. Matthew (28:16-20) and Mark (16:14-18) include the Church's Great Commission that precedes Christ's ascension (Matt. 28:18-20). Luke provides more detail in Acts 1:6-11.

It's St. John who shows us clearly that, as wonderful as the Resurrection is, the Ascension is no mere footnote or "drive home" after the "finished work" of Jesus (see John 19:30). Rather, it is an integral part of the Lord's paschal mystery: when a joyous St. Mary Magdalene seeks to embrace her risen savior, Jesus replies, "Do not hold me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father" (John 20:17).¹¹

As the letter to the Hebrews makes clearer, Jesus fulfills not only the Old Covenant Passover sacrifice (fifth Luminous Mystery), but also the Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement) sacrifices set forth in Leviticus 16. As the high priest would take atoning blood into the holy of holies, so Jesus ascends to a heavenly sanctuary, "taking not the blood of goats and calves but his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption" (Heb. 9:12). Thus, Christ's one sacrifice culminates in everlasting glory in heaven, which is why Jesus holds his priesthood permanently (Heb. 7:23-35; 8:1-3).

Therefore, Christ's offering is not simply a cherished event of the past, but one in which heaven and earth become most profoundly united *now* according "to the order of Melchizedek" (Heb. 5:5-10)—i.e., under the signs of bread and wine (Gen. 14:18-20)—*every time* a priest heeds Christ's command at Mass, "Do this in remembrance of me" (Luke 22:19).¹²

St. Paul affirms that the sacrifice of the Mass, the Eucharist, is a real participation in the body and blood of Jesus (1 Cor. 10:16, so "whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of profaning the body and blood of the Lord" (1 Cor. 11:27).

The Descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost is the third Glorious Mystery. The Holy Spirit empowers the apostles and other disciples gathered (Acts 2:1-4), and their fellow Jews hear them preach in their respective languages about "the mighty works of God" (Acts 2:11). In the process, the Holy Spirit empowers the Church to begin operating that day as the fully restored kingdom of Israel (Acts 1:6; see Acts 1:2; Gal. 6:16). The Spirit makes clear that, in the New Covenant, Jesus Christ is the only king, and his reign encompasses the whole world (Amos 9:11-12; Acts 15:13-18).

The apostles also now better understand Gabriel's words to Mary at the Annunciation regarding her soon-to-be-conceived son: that "the Lord God will give to him the throne

¹¹ Jesus' reference to "my God" does not deny his divinity, which he affirms elsewhere (see, e.g., John. 8:58-59). Rather, he affirms his created humanity and thus that as man, he has a creator God.

¹² For more, see Thomas J. Nash, *The Biblical Roots of the Mass* (Manchester, NH: Sophia Institute Press, 2015).

of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there will be no end” (Luke 1:32-33). To convey this reality, on Pentecost Peter notes that the great King David died, and his tomb remains present in Jerusalem, yet Jesus has ascended into heaven. Thus he proclaims, “Let all the house of Israel therefore know assuredly that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified” (Acts 2:36; see 2:22-27).

Christ the King rules from heaven, yet he also commissions his apostles to lead the new Israel on earth, beginning with Peter, the chief of apostles, whose having “the keys to the kingdom of heaven” mirrors the special authority the steward had in the Old Covenant kingdom of Israel (Matt. 16:18-19; see Isa. 22:15-25). Jesus also commissions his apostles in general: “As the Father has sent me, even so I send you” (John 20:21). How has the Father sent Jesus? With “all authority in heaven and on earth” (Matt. 28:18), a share of which the apostles and their successors receive, so that Christ’s doctrine and theirs—“the apostles’ teaching” (Acts 2:42)—are one and the same!

The fourth Glorious Mystery is Mary’s Assumption into heaven—body and soul—at the end of her life. The fifth Glorious Mystery is the Coronation of Mary as Queen of Heaven and Earth. Many Christians argue that these final two mysteries are not biblically rooted. They are mistaken.

We will address these two contested mysteries in answers 15 and 16. Suffice it to say for now that these mysteries are a fitting way to culminate the rosary. God became man so that man could become like God (2 Pet. 1:4). That is, Jesus came not simply to atone for our sins, but to give us new life, ultimately in heaven with redeemed and glorified souls *and* bodies.

8. What have been some of the “signs and wonders” associated with praying the rosary?

In chronicling the wonders of the rosary and Marian intercession in general, some people begin with the victories wrought against the Church’s human opponents, including Islam. However, St. Paul reminds us that our greatest enemies are angelic beings—“the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places”—who are irrevocably opposed to Christ, his mother, and the Church.

The battle between Satan and Our Lady is forecast in the opening book of the Bible, when God tells the serpent, who represents the devil:

I will put enmity between you and the woman,
and between your seed and her seed;

he shall bruise your head,
and you shall bruise his heel (Gen. 3:15).

This passage is known as the *Protoevangelium* (the “First Gospel”), for God makes clear he will not abandon mankind to our sinfulness, but will ultimately send a savior, born of a woman, who will crush the serpent’s head. The savior’s mother works closely with her son, supporting his disciples who combat “the great dragon,” “that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world” (Rev. 12:9).

So identified is Mary with her son’s kingdom that Satan’s enmity extends to her and our Lord’s other followers, whom St. John refers to as Mary’s spiritual sons in the final book of the Bible: “Then the dragon was angry with the woman, and went off to make war on the rest of her offspring, on those who keep the commandments of God and bear testimony to Jesus” (Rev. 12:17).

Because of her faithful docility to her son’s mission, demons cower at Mary’s invocation, as any priest exorcist can tell you.¹³ “Men do not fear a powerful hostile army,” St. Bonaventure summarizes, “as much as the powers of hell fear the name and protection of Mary.”¹⁴ Indeed, the Church formally invokes the Blessed Mother in the Rite of Exorcism: “The glorious mother of God, the Virgin Mary, commands you; she who by her humility and from the first moment of her immaculate conception crushed your proud head.”¹⁵

The most famous human victory attributed to the rosary is the Battle of Lepanto in October 1571, a naval clash between Christians and Muslims off the coast of Greece’s northern mainland. Christian soldiers defeated an Ottoman fleet intent on reaching Rome and turning St. Peter’s Basilica into a mosque, as Muslims had done a century earlier in Constantinople with the Hagia Sophia.

Pope St. Pius V exhorted the faithful to support the Christian fleet in praying the rosary. As the combatants readied to engage on the water, the winds favoring the Muslim fleet dramatically changed, unexpectedly shifting to favor the Christians, who took full advantage in routing their opponents. October 7 became the feast of Our Lady of Victory, a liturgical celebration known today as Our Lady of the Rosary.

More recently, 70,000 people testified to the Miracle of the Sun that took place in Fatima, Portugal, on October 13, 1917, the culmination of six apparitions to three

¹³ See, e.g., Philip Kosloski, “According to Popes and Exorcists, the Devil Fears the Blessed Mother,” *Aleteia*, May 7, 2018, as given at aleteia.org.

¹⁴ St. Alfonso Maria de Liguori, *The Glories of Mary*, trans. and ed. by Robert Aston Coffin, CSsR. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University), 1868, 124.

¹⁵ Catholic News Agency, “Why The Devil Hates Mary—Especially during Exorcisms,” March 8, 2018, as given at catholicnewsagency.com.

shepherd children. Here is how Avelino de Almeida, the theretofore skeptical editor of the secular Lisbon newspaper *O Século*, reported the day's events:

A spectacle unique and incredible if one had not been a witness of it. . . . Before the astonished eyes of the people, . . . the sun has trembled, and the sun has made some brusque movements, unprecedented and outside of all cosmic laws—the sun has “danced,” according to the typical expression of the peasants.¹⁶

Holiness of life is another wonder of the rosary, specifically among those Christians who have committed themselves to praying it. There are fifteen traditional “promises” made to those faithfully pray the rosary (see answer 19) including that doing so “will make virtue and good works flourish, and will obtain for souls the most abundant divine mercies.” In the *Catechism* (156), the Church says the related lives of the saints are one sign of Catholicism's credibility. John Paul II, who gave personal witness to this reality, affirms, “It would be impossible to name all the many saints who discovered in the rosary a genuine path to growth in holiness” (*Rosarium Virginis Mariae*).

9. The Bible teaches that Jesus is our “one mediator” (1 Tim. 2:5). So isn't praying to Mary—and asking for her intercession—wrong?

The question presumes that Jesus acts independently and unilaterally in saving us—i.e., without his disciples' participation. The passage Protestant Christians cite most often in arguing against intercessory prayer is from St. Paul's first letter to Timothy:

For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all, the testimony to which was borne at the proper time (1 Tim. 2:5-6).

But does Paul's teaching preclude the salvific collaboration of Christ's disciples here on earth and the saints, particularly the Blessed Mother, in heaven? No, it doesn't. In fact, leading up to these verses, Paul teaches just the opposite:

First of all, then, I urge that *supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all men*, for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life, godly and respectful in every way. *This is good, and it is acceptable in the sight of God our Savior*, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth (1 Tim. 2:1-4, emphases added).

¹⁶ William Thomas Walsh, *Our Lady of Fatima* (Garden City, New York: Image Books, 1954), 147. See also Jimmy Akin, “Getting Fatima Right,” *Catholic Answers Magazine Online*, May 8, 2019, as given at catholic.com.

Paul teaches that Jesus, our one mediator, wants everyone to be saved, and so Paul encourages St. Timothy—and those whom he serves in the Church—to intercede in prayer for all human persons to achieve this noble goal.

Elsewhere, Paul teaches that we can offer not only our prayers, but also our sufferings for the good of others:

If we are afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation; and if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which you experience when you patiently endure the same sufferings that we suffer (2 Cor. 1:6).

The great lay apologist Frank Sheed distills the teaching of Scripture and the Church succinctly:

None of these things . . . love, prayer (the Mass above all) suffering . . . would be of any effect if Christ had not died for us; but in union with his redemptive act they are of immense power. From the beginning of the Christian Church, their effect is taken for granted. Thus St. Paul can tell his converts to pray for others *precisely because* there is one mediator between God and man (1 Tim. 2:5). In other words, the fact that our Lord is mediator does not make our prayer for one another unnecessary; it makes it effective.¹⁷

In this light, we see that Mary and the other saints are not would-be competitors with Christ, but God-ordained collaborators with Jesus. Their prayerful collaboration—like ours on earth—is rooted in and made possible by Jesus, and brings our Lord further glory rather than detracting from his role as the one mediator between God and man. For we give edifying witness to God in doing so, as Jesus himself proclaims:

Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven (Matt. 5:16).

By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be my disciples. As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you; abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.

This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you (John 15:8-12).

10. Mary died. So isn't praying to her necromancy, which the Bible condemns?

¹⁷ F.J. Sheed, *Theology for Beginners*, 3rd ed. (Ann Arbor, MI: Servant Books, 1981), 132, emphasis original.

Necromancy is the occult practice of inquiring into the future or attempting to influence persons and events by communicating with the spirits of the dead. A biblical example is King Saul's conjuring the spirit of the deceased prophet Samuel through a medium at Endor (1 Sam. 28:3-19; see Deut. 18:10-12). The Catholic Church categorically condemns these practices, collectively known as "divination," because they are done apart from God and because of a lack of trust in God, as Saul shows in explaining why he sought Samuel's counsel:

I am in great distress; for the Philistines are warring against me, and God has turned away from me and answers me no more, either by prophets or by dreams; therefore I have summoned you to tell me what I shall do (1 Sam. 28:15).

Divination also includes magic and sorcery, "by which one attempts to tame occult powers, so as to place them at one's service and have a supernatural power over others" (CCC 2117).

Praying to the saints is something wholly different. In response to the Sadducees, who did not believe in the resurrection of the dead, Jesus proclaims that those who die in God's fellowship live on in God, versus coming back to life only when their bodies and souls are reunited at the end of time: "Have you not read what was said to you by God, 'I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'? He is not God of the dead, but of the living" (Matt. 22:31-32).

That's why Jesus could converse with Moses and Elijah—who had died many years before—at the Transfiguration, a miraculous event that only Sts. Peter, James, and John were privileged to witness (Matt. 17:1-8). The Transfiguration is not a divine exception to necromancy, but rather an interaction with the faithful departed that conforms with God's will, including because the spirits are in communion with Jesus.

Similarly, St. Paul teaches that all Christians are intimately united in Christ's mystical body, without making any exception for those who have died: "For as in one body we have many members, and all the members do not have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another" (Rom. 12:4-5). Indeed, death cannot separate us from "the love of God in *Christ Jesus* our Lord" (Rom. 8:38-39, emphasis added). And since we are one body in Christ Jesus, death cannot separate us from one another (see 1 Cor. 12:12).

Consequently, Jesus says, as a shepherd rejoices over finding a lost sheep, "just so, I tell you, *there will be more joy in heaven* over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance." And as a woman rejoices in finding her lost silver coin, "just so, I tell you, there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents" (Luke 15:7, 10, emphasis added). Some might counter that Jesus

mentions in Luke 15 the angels but not specifically the saints. However, John provides clarifying insight in the book of Revelation. In his vision of heaven, John writes, “the four living creatures and the *twenty-four elders* fell down before the Lamb, each holding a harp, and with golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints” (Rev. 5:8, emphasis added).

Because they are elders, these people must be Christians who have died and are now in heaven. And John presents them as mediating the prayers of the saints on earth in concert with Jesus, the one mediator, because the elders present the bowls filled with prayers to Christ the Lamb. And because they are united with Jesus in heaven, the intercessory prayers of these “spirits of just men made perfect” (Heb. 12:23) are efficacious for Christian life (see CCC 2683), whereas practicing necromancy most certainly is not.

11. The rosary focuses on Mary, not Jesus. Isn't *that* blasphemous?

This is a misunderstanding based on the greater number of Hail Marys than Our Fathers. First, as noted in answer 2, the Hail Mary is a biblically based prayer, including, as explained in answers 9 and 10, that Mary and the other saints can intercede for us. Also, the Hail Mary itself is an affirmation of Jesus, because Mary is the “Mother of God,” who is thus her creator. Fittingly, the rosary is also distinguished by a cross or crucifix, recalling Christ—not a symbol of the Blessed Mother.

In addition, the repeated Hail Marys are a means to an end. They aid our meditating on the central events and mysteries of Christ's life and their fruitful impact on his mother. Also, as theologian Edward Sri notes, Christ is the focus of each and every Hail Mary:

At the heart of the Hail Mary is the holy name of Jesus: “And blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus.” John Paul II says that Jesus' name not only serves as the hinge joining the two parts of the Hail Mary but is also this prayer's “center of gravity.” The Hail Mary leads us to the person of Jesus, and at the center of this prayer we speak his sacred name with reverence and with love. . . .

We have an intimate, personal relationship with Jesus Christ. By reciting the Hail Mary throughout the rosary, we participate over and over again in the wonder-filled response of Gabriel and Elizabeth to the mystery of Christ. Bead after bead, we ask Mary to pray for us that we may be drawn closer to her son. And most of all, prayer after prayer, we affectionately speak the name of our Beloved at the very center of each Hail Mary: “Blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus . . . Jesus . . . Jesus.” The holy name of Jesus, repeated with tender love, is the heartbeat of the entire rosary.¹⁸

¹⁸ Edward Sri, “The Scandal of the Decades,” *Catholic Answers Magazine*, March 2006, as given at catholic.com.

In short, the saving ministry of Jesus is the focus and goal of the rosary. Because Mary is the Mother of our savior and has attained our heavenly goal in full glory, body and soul, she is uniquely positioned to collaborate with her son in his mission. Indeed, Scripture describes Mary as the spiritual mother of all her son's disciples, "those who keep the commandments of God and bear testimony to Jesus" (Rev. 12:17).

Why? Because the Blessed Mother always works in union with Jesus and thus always leads people to him, beginning with her "yes" to become Christ's mother at the Annunciation (Luke 1:38) and in her perennial exhortation to follow Jesus: "do whatever he tells you" (John 2:5). So Mary isn't a distraction from encountering Jesus. To the contrary, we honor Mary precisely because she is the Mother of God, as we similarly respect the pope because he holds the God-ordained office of "vicar of Christ." And so we honor Jesus by honoring his mother in fulfilling the Fourth Commandment, and she in turn blesses us through her intercessory role as our spiritual mother.

Further, Mary is a paragon of humility and childlike docility. Even though she is without sin, she recognized the need for a savior (Luke 1:47). She is also our exemplar in following her savior son. Because she is the Mother of God and the spiritual mother of all his disciples, little wonder that Scripture proclaims about her, "For behold, henceforth all generations will call me blessed; for he who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name" (Luke 1:48).

12. Doesn't the rosary violate the biblical prohibition against "vain repetitions"?

This objection rests on one passage from Jesus' Sermon on the Mount:

And in praying do not heap up empty phrases ["vain repetitions" in the King James Version (KJV)¹⁹] as the Gentiles do; for they think that they will be heard for their many words (Matt. 6:7).

St. Paul conveys that Christ's being the one mediator between God and man doesn't preclude our praying for each other (see answer 9). In addition, Jesus makes clear in Matthew 6 that "vain repetitions" do not refer simply to prayers that are repeated. Indeed, if Jesus were prohibiting *any* form of repeated prayer, he would've immediately contradicted himself in giving us the Lord's Prayer in Matthew 6! In fact, Christ gave the Our Father to be prayed more than once, and one which Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant Christians have all long and regularly prayed (Matt. 6:8-15).²⁰

There is also the repeated prayer of the heavenly creatures who surround God's heavenly throne:

And the four living creatures, each of them with six wings, are full of eyes all round and within, and day and night they never cease to sing, "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come!" (Rev. 4:8; see Isa. 6:1-3).

Consider too that Psalm 136 repeats the words "for his steadfast love endures for ever" twenty-six times in twenty-six verses. And in the garden of Gethsemane, Jesus prays a "third time," "My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt" (Matt. 18:44, 39; see 18:38-44).

What does Jesus mean, then, by "empty phrases" or "vain repetitions"? As Matthew 6:7 conveys, Jesus was referring to the misguided prayers of the non-Jews in his day. Catholic apologist Karlo Broussard explains:

He was condemning *Gentile* prayers, which were meaningless or mindless repetitious prayers, as the Greek word *battalogeseite* suggests. The Gentiles recited prayers *only* to appease their gods. They were, as the Revised Standard Version translates it, "empty phrases" having nothing to do with expressing one's love for and trust in God. They would simply say the words, and that was it—they went their

¹⁹ The KJV is traditionally a popular translation among Protestant Christians.

²⁰ For an early Catholic expression of the Lord's Prayer, see the Didache, which dates from the late first or early second century. Ironically, the popular Protestant rendition of the Lord's Prayer—i.e., with the closing doxology, "For thine is the power and the glory for ever and ever"—is not recorded in Matthew 6 or Luke 11, but is only a later development. See, for example, the Didache, 8, as given at ewtn.com.

merry way and lived their lives as they wanted. *That's* what Jesus is condemning, not repetitious prayer such as we find in the rosary.²¹

Catholic apologist Tim Staples affirms:

The pagans would say their incantations, offer their sacrifice, but there was no real connection between the moral life and the prayer. Jesus is saying that this will not cut it in the New Covenant Kingdom of God! One must pray from a heart of repentance and submission to God's will. But does Jesus mean to exclude the possibility of devotions like the rosary or the divine mercy chaplet, which repeat prayers? No, he does not.²²

13. When Catholics pray the rosary, they often kneel in front of statues of Mary. Isn't that Idolatry?

Some Christians argue that kneeling and praying before a statue of Mary—or any supposedly sacred image, for that matter—is idolatry, condemned by the First Commandment:²³

You shall not make for yourself a graven image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; *you shall not bow down to them or serve them* (Exod. 20:4-5, emphasis added).

As Exodus 20 makes clear, simply fashioning a religious image need not be idolatrous. The Ark of the Covenant featured two cherub angels on God's mercy seat, which served as the Ark's covering (Exod. 25:17-22). The golden angels were undoubtedly graven images whose making God ordered, yet they were not stumbling blocks to idolatry for the Israelites. Instead, they served to draw attention to the place where the Almighty manifested his presence most intimately on earth in Old Covenant times—atop the mercy seat of God within the holy of holies, first in the wilderness tabernacle and later in the temple of Jerusalem.

In addition, a strictly literal interpretation of Exodus 20:4-5 would convict God of aiding and abetting idolatry, because the Lord had Moses make a bronze serpent and mount it

²¹ Karlo Broussard, "Why the Rosary Isn't 'Vain Repetitions,'" emphasis original, as given at catholic.com. See also Dr. Kenneth Howell, "Is Jesus Against Catholic Prayers?," *Catholic Answers Magazine*, May 2004, as given at catholic.com.

²² Tim Staples, "Do Catholics Pray 'Vain Repetitions?'" *Catholic Answers Magazine*, as given at catholic.com.

²³ Protestant Christians list this as a separate commandment, whereas Catholics view it as encompassed in the First Commandment: "I am the Lord your God: You shall not have strange gods before me" (see CCC 2110ff.).

on a pole, and then he directed the Israelites to look at the graven image to get well,²⁴ after seraph serpents had bitten the people because they had grumbled against God and Moses in the wilderness (Num. 21:4-9). In addition, because some Israelites later worshiped this bronze serpent, King Hezekiah destroyed it (2 Kings 18:1-4).

So was God guilty of making a graven image for the purpose of idolatry, or at least putting an idolatrous stumbling block in the path of his people? No, the bronze serpent served as a means to get the Israelites to repent and refocus their attention on the Lord, and also to prefigure the way in which Christ would redeem the world through his one sacrifice of Calvary: “And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness,” Jesus proclaims, “so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life” (John 3:14-15).

In this light, we see that crucifixes, like statues of Mary, are not idols. In a Catholic church or school, they remind the faithful daily that Jesus triumphed over sin and death on our behalf. So, like St. Paul, we can proclaim “Jesus Christ and him crucified” (1 Cor. 2:2), because “the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men” (1 Cor. 1:24).

Consequently, when Catholics kneel before the statue of a saint, they are not worshiping the person depicted, let alone the stone or plaster image as such. Catholics don’t pray *to* images; they pray *through* them to the holy persons who are depicted. Sacred images help the faithful focus their minds and hearts when asking for a particular saint’s intercession. In other words, these images are *instruments* of prayer, not *objects* of prayer in the strict sense.

Also, the veneration or honor given to statues and other holy images is similar to the regard given across all cultures to photos of loved ones. For example, people adorn the walls of their homes with images of family members, whether a wedding photo of Mom and Dad, a family portrait, or images of the children to commemorate special occasions like high school graduations. These images are not occasions for idolatry; they are reminders of what and who is important in that home. Consequently, if a visitor willfully destroyed these images, the family members would take great offense—less because photographic paper, wooden frames, or glass and plastic coverings had been ruined and more because of the contempt shown to an image of a loved one.

That is also why many a husband has photos of his wife and children on his desk at work or in his wallet: to remind him of and motivate him regarding the most important people in his life.

²⁴ Inspired by this scriptural account, many medical associations use as their emblem the Rod of Asclepius, the Greek god associated with healing and medicine, which features a staff entwined by a single serpent. Another medical symbol is the Caduceus, which is associated with Hermes (Mercury) It is a staff entwined by two snakes and often surmounted by wings.

Further, Martin Luther, even after he broke communion with the Catholic Church, maintained his reverence for the Blessed Mother in key ways, seeing in her a model of Christian discipleship, and so he affirmed that paintings and statues of Mary could be placed in churches. John Calvin also recognized Mary as the Mother of God, perpetual virgin, and a great disciple in general; however, he was influential in advancing an iconoclasm akin to what you would see in Islam, not authentic Christianity.

14. How can Mary hear our prayers, let alone answer them, when we pray the rosary?

When we think of the saints in heaven, including the Blessed Mother, we tend to impose on them the limitations we humans experience here on earth. For example, by virtue of our limited human nature alone, there's no way we could simultaneously hear a multitude of prayers from people dispersed around the world, let alone intercede for each and every person by name to God. So what difference can heaven make, since we're still finite human beings?

However, even while living on earth, Christians have exceeded their limited human powers, as Scripture attests, precisely because they received special gifts from God, thereby showing the wondrous possibilities of what it means to be "partakers of the divine nature" (2 Pet. 1:4). Consider the Old Testament prophets Elijah and Elisha, who both parted the Jordan River and immediately crossed over on a dry river bed (2 Kings 2:6-8, 11-14). And consider Peter, who healed Aeneas, a paralytic man in Lydda, and then raised from the dead Tabitha, a woman who resided in Joppa (Acts 9:32-42).

In addition, contrary to what some Protestant apologists imply,²⁵ having such powers doesn't make a person omnipotent, but it does mean that any believer who performs a miracle has a share in God's omnipotence, which enables him to exceed the limitations of his human nature.

If that's divinely possible for us on earth, why not in heaven? Some Catholic apologists argue that heaven is beyond the boundaries of time and space that we operate within on earth, therefore the saints in heaven would necessarily not be impeded by the limitations they experienced on earth.

Not necessarily. Human beings are not God, who by nature is not limited by time and space—or anything else he creates. So any power that allows the saints in heaven to

²⁵ For example, see Eric Svendsen, *Evangelical Answers: A Critique of Current Roman Catholic Apologists* (Lindenhurst, NY: Reformation Press, 1999), 156-57. We say "imply," because Svendsen specifically addresses how Mary would have to be "omniscient and omnipresent (or both)" to hear and respond to a multitude of prayers in heaven.

surpass their humanity—as experienced on earth—would have to be a divine gift, since they’d have no human ability to attain that power on their own.

In addition, Scripture indicates that the saints in heaven can transcend what they experienced on earth, because “the first-born who are enrolled in heaven” are “the spirits of just men *made perfect*” (Heb. 12:23, emphasis added). In other words, the disciples in heaven—the spirits of just men—have had their spiritual nature perfected by God.

What could this perfection mean? It could mean that, even though they are without their bodies until the resurrection of the dead at Christ’s Second Coming, the saints in heaven are able to observe, because of God’s blessing, what is happening in the lives of their fellow disciples who are on earth. In fact, the author of the letter to the Hebrews makes clear that the saints in heaven can do this:

Therefore, since *we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses*, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us (Heb. 12:1-2, emphasis added).

The witnesses referenced here are not angels, but the spirits of just men who have died, as the immediately preceding litany of Old Covenant heroes in Hebrews 11 makes plain. Scripture also illustrates that these spirits are aware of what’s going on with us on earth *now*. “They are pictured crowded into a stadium, looking down on believers still running the race of faith and urging them on to victory,” the authors of *The Ignatius Catholic Study Bible New Testament* say of this great throng of heavenly witnesses. They add:

At the finish line stands Jesus, waiting to reward us (12:2). Images of the faithful departed cheering us on hint at the communion and intercession of the saints. It shows that the Church in heaven is neither cut off from nor disinterested in the pilgrim Church on earth but is actively solicitous of her salvation (CCC 2683).²⁶

It makes no sense that these spirits of perfected just men would lack the intercessory power they possessed on earth as imperfect human persons. If “the prayer of a righteous [on earth] man has great power in its effects” (James 5:16), how much more would prayers from one who has finished the race, has been perfected in his spirit, and now reigns with Christ in heaven?

In addition, Scripture illustrates that saints *can* intercede for multiple people simultaneously:

²⁶ *The Ignatius Catholic Study Bible New Testament*, 433.

And when [the Lamb] had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each holding a harp, and with golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints (Rev. 5:6-8).

The twenty-four elders can only be human persons, disciples of Christ who have died and attained heaven. John presents them as clearly mediating the prayers of the saints on earth, because the elders present the bowls filled with prayers to Jesus the Lamb, the one mediator. Note well that these prayers don't go directly to Jesus; they are brought to him by the mediating efforts of the saintly elders in heaven, meaning that Christ's serving as the one mediator between God and man can accommodate cooperative sub-mediators—namely, his disciples.

Somehow, in a way we here on earth can't fully understand, God enables the saints in heaven, beginning with the Blessed Mother, to both receive and intercede for our prayers. Indeed, Scripture shows that the saints have a limited share in God's divine attributes, some while living on earth through miracles, and all in heaven through their prayerful intercession. In summary, we see that the collaborative mediation of the saints in heaven is rooted in and made possible by Christ, who empowers them to do what they could not humanly do here on earth (CCC 2683).

15. How can you say Mary was assumed into heaven soul *and* body when there's no evidence in Scripture—and Catholics venerate her tomb?

Although they acknowledge the Gospel roots of the other eighteen mysteries of the rosary, many Protestants argue that the Assumption and the Coronation are without biblical foundation. But though Scripture doesn't chronicle these events *as they occurred*, as it does with the events of the other mysteries, strong evidence exists in both Scripture and Sacred Tradition that both the Assumption and the Coronation did occur.

Few Christians would question whether Mary, the mother of Jesus, is in heaven. In Hebrews, we read, "But you have come to . . . the heavenly Jerusalem, . . . and to the assembly of the first-born who are enrolled in heaven . . . and to the spirits of just men made perfect" (12:22-23). Surely this would include the Blessed Mother, who, from the Gospels alone, we can easily conclude was a faithful disciple.

Many Christians, though, reject that Mary was assumed into heaven *bodily*. Does the Bible show the Blessed Mother as being bodily in heaven, and not just in spirit? Consider "the woman" of Revelation 12, who, although she images the Church,²⁷ especially represents Mary. Not only is Mary herself a daughter of Israel and a disciple of Jesus in his Church, but she also conceives and gives birth to the Lord so he can achieve his redemptive mission.

Indeed, strictly speaking, the Church does not conceive and give birth to Jesus. Only Mary does. In addition, although Christ is born in the line of Abraham and David (Matt. 1:1), he is conceived by the Holy Spirit, not by mere man, and born of the Virgin Mary. Consequently, the Blessed Mother must be the primary entity that "the woman" in heaven represents, as she is portrayed as giving birth to a royal son who will "rule all the nations" (Rev. 12:5)—i.e., Jesus.²⁸

We should not be surprised, given the other biblical connections between the Ark of the Covenant and the Blessed Mother (see answer 4). In John's vision, Mary is shown in heaven, indicating that she is *bodily* present in heaven, not simply spiritually, as are the "just men made perfect" (Heb. 12:23), which affirms her assumption. Also, in promulgating the Church's related dogma, Pope Pius XII cites Doctors of the Church who view Revelation 12 as substantiating Mary's Assumption:

²⁷ Consider, for example, that the woman's twelve stars signify the twelve apostles, on whom Jesus founded his Church (Eph. 2:19-20).

²⁸ The woman represents the Blessed Mother in other ways. For example, the conflict between the woman and the "ancient serpent" (Rev. 12:9) recalls Genesis 3:15, "the first prophecy in Scripture to foretell the demise of the devil through the offspring (Messiah) of a woman (a new Eve)" (*The Ignatius Catholic Study Bible New Testament*, 506).

Moreover, the scholastic Doctors have recognized the assumption of the virgin mother of God as something signified, not only in various figures of the Old Testament, but also in that woman clothed with the sun whom John the apostle contemplated on the island of Patmos (*Munificentissimus Deus*).

Consider also the matter of relics, items associated with a saintly person's life. Relics have always been venerated in the Church, including because miracles have been worked through them. In the Old Testament, a dead man was brought back to life when his corpse touched the bodily remains of the prophet Elisha (2 Kings 13:21-22). Examples from the early Church include the handkerchiefs St. Paul touched, through which God healed the sick and exorcized demons (Acts 19:11-12). Another is the reverence given to the bones of St. Peter, the first pope, which are venerated and safeguarded in St. Peter's Basilica in Rome.

In great contrast, there aren't *any* historical claims for the Blessed Mother's earthly remains, such as purported actual relics of her corpse. That's remarkable, given that she is the preeminent Christian in Church history, so her relics would have been greatly prized. Like her divine son, Mary has a tomb—likely either in Jerusalem or Ephesus—yet, as with her resurrected son, there are neither relics of her mortal remains nor reports of them otherwise.

In Jesus' case, we do have relics of his crucifixion and burial—e.g., the Crown of Thorns, portions of the true cross, and the Shroud of Turin—which have bodily remnants of Christ's passion, death, and resurrection, but not of his actual corpse. This is because the God-man rose in glory on that first Easter morning.

More to the point, given the early Church's well documented practice of venerating the relics of saints, there should be testimony about relics of the Blessed Mother's bodily remains if they existed. In this sense, in the context of early Christian devotional practices, silence about Mary's relics speaks loudly.

Some argue that the Feast of the Assumption was not celebrated until the sixth century, but there is solid evidence of belief earlier than that. For example, while refuting worshipers of Mary in his work *Panarion* ("Medicine Chest"), St. Epiphanius matter-of-factly affirms belief in the Assumption around the year 375, demonstrating that the teaching was already an accepted and non-controversial doctrine at that time:

Like the bodies of the saints, however, [Mary] has been held in honor for her character and understanding. And if I should say anything more in her praise, she is

like Elijah, who was virgin from his mother's womb, always remained so, and was taken up, but has not seen death.²⁹

In summary, the dogma of the Assumption is rooted in both Scripture and Tradition. Thus, we uniquely celebrate and honor the Blessed Mother as now possessing fully the heavenly glory for which we all yearn.³⁰

²⁹ St. Epiphanius, *Panarion*, 79, 5, 1.

³⁰ Based on Genesis 6:24 and 2 Kings 2:11-12, some argue that Enoch and Elijah preceded Mary in being bodily present in heaven. In any event, the Church uniquely celebrates Mary's being assumed into heaven body and soul in a glorious manner.

16. How can you call Mary “queen of heaven and earth” when her coronation is not recorded in the Bible?

Debate over Mary’s designation as queen of heaven and earth³¹ is of relatively recent vintage in Christian history. As with the Assumption, Orthodox Christians affirm the Blessed Mother’s coronation. Even Martin Luther, who started the Protestant break with Catholicism, spoke of Mary’s heavenly status with effusive praise that would shock many Christians today who revere him: “No woman is like unto thee! Thou art more than an empress or a queen . . . blessed above all nobility, wisdom, or saintliness!”³²

Mary’s royal accolades should not surprise us, as the Bible affirms that the Blessed Mother is a celestial queen: “And a great portent appeared in heaven, a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars” (Rev. 12:1, emphasis added).³³ In addition, not only is Mary the mother of the child who reigns over heaven and earth and is hunted by the dragon or the devil (Rev. 12:4-6),³⁴ but she is also—through grace in Christ and as exemplified by St. John (John 19:26-27)—the spiritual mother of all her son’s disciples, who are also pursued by the demonic dragon:

³¹ Protestant apologists confuse honoring Mary as the God-given queen of heaven and earth with the idolatrous worship of Astarte, the Mesopotamian goddess to whom sacrifices were offered and which the prophet Jeremiah condemned (Jer. 7:18; see 44:15-26). See Tim Staples, “Is There a Queen in the Kingdom of Heaven?,” *Catholic Answers Magazine Online*, November 12, 2015, as given at catholic.com. See also Edward Sri, “Is Mary’s Queenship Biblical?,” *Catholic Answers Magazine*, August 19, 2019, as given at catholic.com. Dr. Sri notes that the prophet Jeremiah himself recognizes that the king of Judah had a queen mother (Jer. 13:18, 20), and that Jesus is the fulfillment of the king in the New Covenant (Rev. 17:14), while Mary is the fulfillment of the queen mother—and that she reigns from heaven (Rev. 12:1).

³² *Luther’s Works*, Vol. 36, 208; Vol. 45, 107.

³³ For more on how Mary is “the woman” of Revelation 12, see answer 15 on the Assumption. Mary’s birth pangs cannot be construed literally, any more than the devil was literally present as a dragon at the birth of Jesus, ready to devour him. Neither element is noted in the historical infancy narrative of Luke 2, and the prophet Isaiah provides evidence, in conformity with Church teaching, that Mary didn’t experience the pains of childbirth (Isa. 66:7-8). Also, Mary’s suffering in Revelation 12:2 symbolizes her participation in Christ’s paschal mystery and thus is inclusive of his triumphant resurrection (see Rev. 12:3-6).

However, if Mary’s birth pangs and a dragon-embodied Satan are not historical in Revelation 12, why infer as literal Mary’s bodily state in heaven in the same chapter? The former, as noted in light of Luke 2 and Isaiah 66, must be metaphorical, and so Mary’s conflict with the devil dramatically illustrates her irrevocable opposition to him (see Gen. 3:15). Meanwhile, beyond the exegetical affirmation by St. Epiphanius (*Panarion*, 79, 5, 1) and Ven. Pope Pius XII (*Munificentissimus Deus*, 27), Mary’s assumption is supported by the historical absence of relics of Mary’s mortal remains, the affirmation of Mary’s assumption in the early Church.

³⁴ The dragon’s murderous designs on the Christ Child can be understood primarily as King Herod the Great’s pursuit of the young Jesus, who escaped to Egypt with his foster father St. Joseph and his mother, before the king’s slaughter of the Holy Innocents (boys two and under) in Bethlehem (see Matt. 2:13-18).

Then the dragon was angry with the woman, and went off to make war on the rest of her offspring, on those who keep the commandments of God and bear testimony to Jesus. And he stood on the sand of the sea (Rev. 12:17).

What else can we learn about Mary as mother and queen? In the Old Covenant Davidic kingdom of Israel, it was the mother of the king who reigned with her son, not the king's wife, including because kings often had multiple wives, starting with King David himself. The queen mother or *gebirah*—"great lady"—consequently had special power, including intercessory influence with the king.³⁵ Adonijah tried to use the influence of the queen mother Bathsheba to get his half-brother Solomon to give him as his wife Abishag the Shunammite, who served their father King David in his old age (1 Kings 2:13-23; see 1 Kings 1:11-16, 22). "He will not refuse you," Adonijah says to Bathsheba, alluding to her intercessory prerogative (1 Kings 2:17). Adonijah's statement implies that—under normal circumstances—the queen mother's request carried great weight with the king, although all decisions ultimately rested with Israel's royal leader.

Because of Abishag's connection with their mutual father David, Adonijah knew that securing her as his spouse would aid his attempt to usurp the throne of Solomon. However, Solomon saw through his half-brother's devious ploy to use Bathsheba and her position of royal power to topple him, and so he killed Adonijah.

In the New Covenant Davidic kingdom of Israel, there is only one queen mother, Mary, "who is queen and mother of the king, and who stands above all choirs of angels in her golden dress, gilded by the divinity; not that she is God, but because she is the Mother of God."³⁶

In addition, as the queen mother of Jesus, Mary operates in perfect harmony with her divine son, the "king of kings" (Rev. 17:14). Therefore, we can go to her in great confidence, for as much as Jesus gave Mary to John as his spiritual mother, so too she is our maternal advocate. And as surely as the deceased human elders can intercede for the faithful here on earth (Rev. 5:8)—these "spirits of the just made perfect" (Heb. 12:23), who form "so great a cloud of witnesses" (Heb. 12:1) in surrounding us with familial care—so Mary wields even greater influence as the queen of heaven and earth, precisely because she is the mother of the divine king.

17. Is Pope St. John Paul II's promulgation of the Luminous Mysteries a legitimate development of the rosary?

³⁵ See Scott Hahn, *Hail Holy Queen: The Mother of God in the Word of God* (New York: Doubleday, 2001), 79; see 78-85. See also Staples, *Behold Your Mother*, 273-80; and Edward Sri, *Queen Mother: A Biblical Theology of Mary's Queenship* (Steubenville, OH: Emmaus Road Publishing, 2005).

³⁶ T.E. Bird, "The Psalms," in Dom Bernard Orchard, et al., eds., *A Catholic Commentary on Holy Scripture* (New York: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1953), 456 (347d). See also Isaiah 60:15, which speaks of Israel's redemption.

As a child, I wondered why the rosary jumped from finding the adolescent Jesus in the temple to the events of his passion and death as a man. What about Christ's three-year public ministry leading up to that first Good Friday? So I rejoiced in 2002 when John Paul II issued the Luminous Mysteries, proclaiming that he wanted "to bring out fully the Christological depth of the rosary" so it could "become more fully a 'compendium of the gospel.'"

Some Catholics recognize the pope's power to modify the rosary but view the Luminous Mysteries as a bad idea or an abuse of that power. Others say their addition was invalid and sacrilegious, showing they don't distinguish well between infallible and thus *unchangeable* doctrine, which is drawn from Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition (CCC 81-84), and what is often called small-"t" or ecclesial traditions, which are changeable:

[Sacred] Tradition is to be distinguished from the various theological, disciplinary, liturgical or devotional traditions, born in the local churches over time. These are the particular forms, adapted to different places and times, in which the great Tradition is expressed. In the light of Tradition, *these traditions can be retained, modified or even abandoned under the guidance of the Church's Magisterium* (CCC 83, emphasis added).

One such tradition that has developed over time is the rosary, beginning with St. Dominic. In other words, the rosary isn't part of public revelation (CCC 66); rather, it came from private revelation—i.e., special messages from God, including through the Blessed Mother:

Throughout the ages, there have been so-called "private" revelations, some of which have been recognized by the authority of the Church. They do not belong, however, to the deposit of faith. *It is not their role to improve or complete Christ's definitive [public] Revelation*, but to help live more fully by it in a certain period of history. *Guided by the Magisterium of the Church, the sensus fidelium* ["sense of the faithful"] knows how to discern and welcome in these revelations whatever constitutes an authentic call of Christ or his saints to the Church (CCC 67, emphases added).

In instituting the Luminous Mysteries, John Paul II did not alter the fifteen original mysteries. He merely added new ones that are representative of Christ's public ministry before that first Good Friday, and which can be integrated into the weekly praying of the rosary—e.g., on Thursdays.

Critics counter that the 150 Hail Marys of the longstanding fifteen mysteries mirror the 150 biblical psalms, and that's why, as tradition holds, Mary told St. Dominic, "Preach my psalter." That venerable nickname doesn't imply that the rosary could not be

modified, though, given the aforementioned and God-given magisterial power of the pope (CCC 67, 83). Indeed, the rosary is not set in stone, as if immutably handed down by God on Mount Sinai like the Ten Commandments.

Some Catholics, as exemplified by the late Father Nicholas Gruner, still argue that the Blessed Mother provided a definitive prayer form, mostly reaffirmed to the children at Fatima in 1917 and beyond:

So when she says at Fatima for the First Saturdays that you spend 15 minutes meditating on the *fifteen* mysteries of the rosary, which mysteries are the Luminous Mysteries going to replace? . . . I'm not against people meditating on some other aspect of our Lord's life. I do that myself. It's not a crime. It's a good thing to do. But it's not part of the mysteries of the rosary, that's all. . . . It's not on my authority, or power, or even the pope's to change Our Lady's fifteen mysteries of the rosary.³⁷

Father Gruner, who died in 2015, is mistaken. He is correct in saying that neither he nor anyone else besides the pope has the power to modify the rosary—or any other ecclesial tradition, for that matter. However, the pope *does* have such authority, precisely because the Holy Father, “by reason of his office as vicar of Christ, and as pastor of the entire Church has full, supreme, and universal power over the whole Church, a power which he can always exercise unhindered” (CCC 882; see CCC 67, 83).

So the Luminous Mysteries can be integrated into meditating on fifteen mysteries per the Five First Saturdays devotion, or one could meditate on all twenty mysteries over twenty minutes.

Raising the rosary to the level of unchangeable dogma ignores the historical development of the devotion, undermines the legitimate authority of the pope to modify ecclesial traditions, and also truncates our meditation on the life of our savior in a popular pious practice.

18. How can we pray the rosary more fruitfully?

Modern surveys tell us that only a small percentage of Catholics pray the rosary with anything close to regularity. And yet, the Church has for centuries extolled the rosary as one of the most profitable spiritual exercises in which the faithful can participate.

³⁷ “Your Questions Answered by Father Gruner: ‘The Luminous Mysteries—Why Not?’” emphasis original, as given at youtube.com.

To pray the rosary more fruitfully and more often, many Catholics will first need to rethink how they use the Hail Mary in prayer. Normally, if we pray a single Hail Mary, or perhaps several as part of a confession penance, we're rightfully inclined to concentrate on *each and every word* addressed to the Blessed Mother, because it's a personal prayer. Ditto with the Lord's Prayer.

That approach won't work for the rosary. As we discussed in answer 1, don't attempt to pray the rosary in a way that Jesus, Mary, and the Church are not expecting you to pray it. The rhythmic Hail Marys are designed to help calm you so you can meditatively soar above their repeated words and focus on the events of the mysteries. Thus, don't be burdened or intimidated about praying the rosary "perfectly" or "worthily." Instead, *relax*, take at least 30 seconds to quiet yourself before you start, and then imagine the rosary as a wonderful opportunity to encounter Jesus and his Blessed Mother while growing in your faith.

Second, when meditating on each mystery, imagine yourself not simply as an eyewitness observer of the events pondered, but also sometimes as a participant. For example, in the fifth Sorrowful Mystery, imagine you're one of the soldiers who pierced our Lord with nails, realizing that *your* sins crucified Christ, yet taking heart that Jesus mercifully offered himself for you and the whole world.

Third, make sure to listen to how God may be speaking to you about important matters in your life. Prayer is fundamentally conversation with God, talking to Jesus and *hearing* his "still small voice" (1 Kings 19:12). How do we do that in praying the rosary? In meditating on each mystery, be attentive to how God may be enlightening you to apply its lessons in your own life, whether in your marriage, family, work, etc. In other words, while you pray the rosary, Jesus can inspire you to alternate back and forth between contemplating the events of the mysteries and how to put them into practice in your own life.

Therefore, it's not an either/or, but a both/and: *both* contemplating the mysteries *and* opening yourself to how God may be speaking to you personally regarding the themes of each rosary mystery. In this light, including receiving *inspirations* from Jesus on how to address personal matters in our lives, the rosary becomes a much more inviting, engaging, and spiritually beneficial exercise. God can provide personal inspirations for our lives while we're praying the rosary—or perhaps later the same day or within the week, because an inspiration from praying the rosary may come to fruition over time. Patience and perseverance are key, for the Lord is faithful.

Fourth, if you experience a genuine distraction, simply relax and refocus. This includes sinful thoughts that may pop into your head as you pray. Do this as much as needed

without losing heart. Better to persevere through periodic distractions than give up the rosary altogether. God will honor your faithfulness, as he mercifully does in other prayer.

When we think of unwinding or decompressing via prayer, the rosary's attractiveness grows significantly. Nearness to Jesus and Mary will reduce our stress. As Jesus tells his apostles, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. *Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid*" (John 14:27, emphasis added).

Indeed, praying the rosary regularly will help you increasingly gain the peace that only Jesus can give. Your life will not be free of trials (Matt. 16:24-26), but the same divine peace that fueled and sustained great saints like Maximilian Kolbe, Mother Teresa, and Damien of Molokai—all of whom maintained valiant serenity in the crucible of suffering and distress—will also help you ascend to unexpected heights in fulfilling God's plan for your life (see Eph. 3:20).

19. What are the benefits of praying the rosary?

The first and greatest benefit you will gain from praying the rosary—and praying it regularly—is drawing closer to our Lord Jesus Christ, his mother, and his mystical body and bride the Catholic Church, through which he saves the world (CCC 846).

As we saw in answer 18, the serenity with which saints have faced trials testifies to the efficacy of praying the rosary, including receiving the peace that the world cannot give, because it comes from Jesus who is eternal God (John 14:27). In helping you grow in holiness, praying the rosary will help you advance in various virtues, including chastity, of which the Blessed Mother is the Christian exemplar.

In addition, praying the rosary can benefit your physical health. Various studies have shown that praying can be a positive factor in fostering psychological health—including the reduction of anxiety³⁸—and other health benefits.³⁹

Prayer can also aid in learning the Faith and also help you become less concerned with yourself and more concerned for others. In addition, praying among married couples

³⁸ See Kristen Rogers, "The Psychological Benefits of Prayer: What Science Says about the Mind-Soul Connection," CNN, June 17, 2020, as given at cnn.com.

³⁹ See the Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights, "The Power of Prayer," as given at catholiceague.org. See also NBC News, "Power of Prayer: What Happens to Your Brain When You Pray?—Doctors Disagree About Religion's Role in Modern Medicine," December 23, 2014, as given at nbcnews.com.

can strengthen their relationships, including fostering better communication regarding the needs and concerns of each other, as well as their children. Praying the rosary is also a great means to strengthen other relationships, and to foster solidarity in the Church at the parish, diocesan, national, and universal levels.

Further, the rosary is one of the most effective weapons we have in waging spiritual warfare.

Finally, according to a tradition held by the Dominicans, the Blessed Mother entrusted to St. Dominic and Blessed Alan de la Roche fifteen promises to Christians who faithfully pray the rosary, which are ordered toward helping us attain our eternal end:

- 1) Whoever shall faithfully serve me by the recitation of the rosary, shall receive signal graces.
- 2) I promise my special protection and the greatest graces to all those who shall recite the rosary.
- 3) The rosary shall be a powerful armor against hell; it will destroy vice, decrease sin, and defeat heresies.
- 4) The rosary will cause virtue and good works to flourish; it will obtain for souls the abundant mercy of God; it will withdraw the heart of men from the love of the world and its vanities, and will lift them to the desire of eternal things. Oh, that souls would sanctify themselves by this means.
- 5) The soul which recommends itself to me by the recitation of the rosary shall not perish.
- 6) Whoever shall recite the rosary devoutly, applying himself to the consideration of its sacred mysteries, shall never be conquered by misfortune. God will not chastise him in his justice, he shall not perish by an unprovided death; if he be just he shall remain in the grace of God, and become worthy of eternal life.
- 7) Whoever shall have a true devotion to the rosary shall not die without the sacraments of the Church.
- 8) Those who are faithful to recite the rosary shall have, during their life and at their death, the light of God and the plenitude of his graces; at the moment of death they shall participate in the merits of the saints in paradise.
- 9) I shall deliver from purgatory those who have been devoted to the rosary.
- 10) The faithful children of the rosary shall merit a high degree of glory in heaven.
- 11) You shall obtain all you ask of me by the recitation of the rosary.
- 12) All those who propagate the holy rosary shall be aided by me in their necessities.
- 13) I have obtained from my divine son that all the advocates of the rosary shall have for intercessors the entire celestial court during their life and at the hour of death.
- 14) All who recite the rosary are my sons and daughters, the brothers and sisters of my only son Jesus Christ.

15) Devotion to my rosary is a great sign of predestination.⁴⁰

Although praying the rosary is not obligatory for Catholics, growing closer to Jesus and giving faithful witness to him in our lives are. The Church recommends the rosary as an especially effective devotion in helping us reach our non-negotiable goal of Christlikeness. It serves as a powerful means to fulfill what is mandatory for us as Christ's disciples.

20. How can we get more Catholics and other Christians to pray the rosary?

The solidarity of praying the rosary as a family or other group can draw more people to profit from this edifying devotion.

Consider first the nuclear family. When children are taught how to pray the rosary fruitfully (see answer 18 for guidelines), they can better grow in their faith in God and his Church with the helpful oversight of their parents. Mothers and fathers should encourage their kids to bring their personal petitions to the rosary every day, asking God to help them grow closer to him and their family. Parents should also exhort their children to remain faithful, because God may respond to our personal requests with a loving "no," and he also permits others for whom we pray to say "yes" or "no" to his grace. Still, we should never lose hope for someone's repentance and conversion.

In addition, by praying the rosary regularly, and asking their children to announce their intentions, parents will get to know their kids better, which can help foster and further family solidarity. As Notre Dame social scientists have concluded:

Young Catholics whose parents regularly attend Mass, are involved in their parishes, *and who talk with their children about religious faith* are more likely to remain Catholic themselves, compared to those whose parents are less involved in Church and who talk less about religious matters. . . . The difference between having nominal and actively practicing parents is a significant one in the lives of Catholic versus former Catholic emerging adults. The Church can potentially engage with this issue by encouraging parents to adopt consistent small habits expressing faith, and making religious practice a fixture in the everyday life of the family.⁴¹

⁴⁰ See Joseph Pronechen, "15 Super Promises of Our Blessed Mother for Faithfully Praying the Rosary: An Offer like No Other that Comes Directly to Everyone from Their Mother," *National Catholic Register*, October 7, 2015, as given at ncregister.com.

⁴¹ Nicolette Manglos-Weber and Christian Smith, "Understanding Former Young Catholics: Findings from a National Study of American Emerging Adults, University of Notre Dame," 25, no. 7, emphasis added, as given at mcgrath.nd.edu. The data used in the report are from the National Survey of Youth and Religion (NSYR). The Notre Dame report further reads, "This is a longitudinal panel study, following a representative sample of American adolescents from their preteens into their young adult years. All statistics are based on the sample of 2,144 who

Parishes could provide weekly eucharistic adoration that includes the rosary and have a reception afterward with food and refreshments—a great way to increase participation, especially among young men! Pastors could also distribute handouts to pray the rosary more fruitfully (see answer 18) and encourage its recitation at home and with other families. Also, online Rosaries are a great way to foster increased participation among Catholics and other Christians, especially for shut-ins, during inclement weather, etc.

As a further incentive, and to foster greater awareness of the faithful departed, Catholics should be reminded—or taught for the first time—that praying the rosary on your own can yield a partial indulgence,⁴² with fulfillment of the other usual conditions,⁴³ and praying it in a group can attain a plenary indulgence.⁴⁴

Also, fruitful meditation is much more likely to occur when we pray the rosary in a pious manner versus praying it quickly to “check off a box.” Worse yet is when a group leader prays at a “machine-gun rosary” pace—i.e., when the devotion is completed in seven to nine minutes. We’re not competing to see how quickly we can pray the rosary, nor are we auditioning to become an auctioneer.

Finally, it’s never too late to start praying the rosary. This means all hands on deck, including godparents, and aunts and uncles, and friends and extended family members—especially in our toxic culture today. The Church is universal, we’re all interrelated by grace, and we need to act like it. Let us pray.

responded to both the initial survey at wave 1 in 2002-2003 and the wave 4 follow-up survey in 2013. More information is available at youthandreligion.nd.edu.”

⁴² Indulgences remit the “temporal punishment” of already forgiven sins, punishments that include our painful purification from our “unhealthy attachment to creatures” and other created things (see CCC 1472). Indulgences can be attained for oneself or a member of the faithful departed.

⁴³ Besides the work assigned, in this case the praying of the rosary, the other conditions for attaining an indulgence are praying for the intentions of the pope; going to confession; receiving the Eucharist; and being detached from all sin, including venial sin.

⁴⁴ A plenary indulgence fully remits the “temporal punishment” of already forgiven sins, whereas a partial indulgence provides only partial remittance (see CCC 1471).