



PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR THE FAMILY

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The Rosary as Family Prayer

In the recent Apostolic Letter *Rosarium Virginis Mariae*, the Holy Father John Paul II once more urged Christian families to pray in their home by reciting the Rosary: "We need to return to the practice of family prayer and prayer for families, continuing to use the Rosary" (n. 41). Already at the end of the Great Jubilee he had said: "it is especially necessary that listening to the word of God should become a life-giving encounter, in the ancient and ever valid tradition of *lectio divina*, which draws from the biblical text the living word which questions, directs and shapes our lives ... we must rekindle in ourselves the impetus of the beginnings and allow ourselves to be filled with the ardour of the apostolic preaching which followed Pentecost" (*Novo Millennio ineunte*, nn. 39 and 40).

Domestic church

It is first of all a question of re-applying, if not in its form, certainly in its spirit, the living, fervent spiritual atmosphere that marked the meetings at *home* of the first Christian communities. Indeed, the first disciples, "went to the temple area together every day, while in their *homes* they broke bread ... praising God" (Acts 2,46). Through this witness, "day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved" (Acts 2,47).

This family dimension of prayer and Christian worship is rooted in the faith experience of the people of the Old Covenant, which has been inherited by the Christian community. Indeed, it is well known that the paschal supper was celebrated in the *home*, and was a family celebration.

The wave of secularization that has swept through the life of our communities in recent decades has brought a deep crisis, even in the context of the family, and hence in family prayer as an expression of communion and an indispensable source for the mission the family is called to carry out in the Church and in society.

Family prayer, use the Rosary

Confronted by this disturbing situation, pastors in recent centuries have not ceased to recommend the devout practice of the Rosary, which Pope Pius XII described as "the compendium of the entire Gospel", to implore the Lord, giver of all good things, through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin, Queen of the Rosary, for the gifts of faith and peace in families and among nations.

We know well how deeply rooted Marian devotion is in the heart of Peter's Successor. He

placed his ministry under her protection, "*Totus tuus*", and we know that the Rosary has a special place in his devotions. We are used to seeing him with the Rosary beads between his fingers. His desire is for the Rosary to become popular again, especially in families.

Rosary takes us to the heart of the faith

The Rosary, in its simplicity and depth, goes to the heart of Christian experience in the dialogue of faith expressed in prayer. It has a strong evangelizing impact. The members of the family can contemplate the central events at the heart of the faith through the mysteries. Now, we have the mysteries of light, in which we are invited to reflect on the wedding of Cana and on the beginning of a new family. We could say that in the Our Father and Hail Mary, we find a synthesis in which a dynamic, effective transmission of the faith passes through it that fortifies the experience of the family community in a special union that is a powerful aid because it is also stable and solid before the Lord of the Covenant.

With this *Letter on the Rosary* the Holy Father has touched the hearts of the faithful. Indeed, the recitation of the Rosary does not only "go to the very heart of Christian life, offering a familiar yet fruitful spiritual and educational opportunity for personal contemplation" (cf. n. 3), but also enables people to recover "the ability to look one another in the eye, to communicate, to show solidarity, to forgive one another and to see their covenant of love renewed in the spirit of God" (cf. n. 41).

Captures spiritual atmosphere

The recitation of the Rosary in the family captures something of the spiritual atmosphere of the household at Nazareth, "because its members place Jesus at the centre, they share his joys and sorrows, they place their needs and their plans in his hands, they draw from him the hope and the strength to go on" (n. 41). There, in fact, as Paul VI said on his pilgrimage to Nazareth, one learns "to be resolute in good thoughts, focused on the interior life and ready to understand clearly the secret inspirations of God and the exhortations of the true teachers" (*Insegnamenti di Paolo VI*, II, 1964, p. 24).

Serves to neutralize widespread harmful trends

This prayer also serves to neutralize the most varied and disorienting messages and unpredictable experiences that are rapidly making their way into childrens' lives. These experiences are a source of anxiety to parents because young people are exposed to dangers while they are growing up.

Praying the Rosary is certainly a spiritual aid in finding the solution to many problems, and is a protection against many temptations and difficulties. As this Pontifical Council for the Family said in the *Final Statement of the 15th Plenary Assembly*, today we are living in a situation marked by "the fear of commitment, the practice of cohabitation, the *trivialization of sex*", as John Paul II has described it. "Life styles, women's fashions, films, TV sitcoms make people question the value of marriage and go so far as to spread the idea that the reciprocal gift of spouses until death would be unrealistic. They weaken the family institution and even manage to discredit it, to the advantage of other pseudo-family "models" (*ORE*, 20 November 2002, p. 9, II). Indeed, the same document deplores the "invasion of many areas of human activity by a radical individualism: economic life, excessive competition, competition in all fields of human activity, disregard of the

marginalized, etc." (*ibid.*). In the face of these problems, prayer is a fundamental, indispensable response, the living witness of parents. As the Holy Father says in *Familiaris consortio*: "only by praying together with their children can a father and mother - exercising their royal priesthood - penetrate the innermost depths of their children's hearts and leave an impression that the future events in their lives will not be able to efface" (n. 60).

Family education

As everyone knows, an important purpose of the prayer of the domestic church is to serve as the natural introduction for children to the liturgical prayer of the whole Church, both in the sense of preparing for it and of extending it into family and social life (cf. *Familiaris consortio*, n. 61). Thus family prayer is not an escape from social commitment, but a strong incentive to the Christian family to assume fully all its responsibilities as the primary and basic cell of human society.

Reinforces stability, solidity of family

In this way prayer reinforces the spiritual soundness and solidity of the family, helping to ensure that it shares in the strength of God. Indeed all the power of the Rosary lies in its Gospel character and in its distinctly Christological orientation, for it makes us think specifically and in our own way of the most important events of salvation that were brought about in Christ, seen through the heart of Mary, who was closest to the Lord Jesus. Indeed, the main feature of the Rosary is contemplation, without which it would be like a body without a soul; the typical features are constituted by the petition of the *Our Father*, the praise in the litany-like succession of *Hail Mary's*, the adoration of the doxology, *Glory [be] to the Father*. It is also characterized by the simplicity that favours the tranquil rhythm and a lingering in thought which fosters meditation. As John Paul II has said, "fruitful nourishment of personal piety, the Rosary is in a certain sense the typical prayer of the Christian family.... In reciting the Rosary, the domestic church savours its own unity, enjoys the sharing of affections, is elevated to the contemplation of the divine, places its own needs, concerns and the conquests of daily living in this higher dimension" (*Address to youth*, Reggio Calabria, 7 October 1984, n. 7; *ORE*, 5 November 1984, p. 11).

From this fervent Gospel spirit, from the contemplation of the mysteries of our redemption in this *Year of the Rosary* (October 2002 - October 2003), a renewed commitment is expected, so that the preparation of engaged couples for marriage will include a witness of greater fidelity to the definitive commitments that they are about to make before God and men. May educators, spiritual directors and Christian couples help young people to discover in themselves an authentic love, with all that it involves, feeling, attachment and passion itself and also the use of reason. May the Church's message on responsible parenthood be understood and better received, and may the special attention that must be paid to children who come from broken homes be given to them with loving tenderness.

In this way the pastoral care towards the family will be able to offer couples during their married life possibilities and opportunities to reflect on their celebration of the sacrament, especially in moments of recollection, such as in the recitation of the Rosary. Besides, it will ensure that the feast of the Holy Family and other celebrations when couples gather wishing to renew their matrimonial commitments in the Church, may have a significance that has an impact on their spiritual journey. In this light, in possible moments of crisis, all the aids that the Holy Father has recalled in this Apostolic Letter can contribute to solving the tensions and will enable spouses to return to the sources of their first love. From the sacrament of Marriage they will be able to draw the energy to reawaken the great ideals that must direct

their relations and overcome their difficulties.

Revival of Rosary in family will evangelize society

In this regard, Bl. Bartolo Longo said that "whoever spreads the Rosary is saved" (n. 8). John Paul II echoes him when he says: "the revival of the Rosary in Christian families, within the context of a broader pastoral care of the family, will be an effective aid to countering the devastating effects of this crisis typical of our age" (n. 6).

One writer said that in the evangelized nations in every family, at nightfall, the recitation of the Rosary rose like a symphony. Why should we not strive to restore this witness, imbuing the domestic church with the Word that all may savour, sharing it with children like bread, in an attitude that will evangelize a society that is in danger of growing cold and falling away from God?

"As a mother who teaches her children to speak and so to understand and communicate, the Church our Mother teaches us the language of faith in order to introduce us to the understanding and life of faith" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, n. 171). This is also what praying the Rosary does.

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