

THE MOST HOLY ROSARY OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY

- A sermon by Rev. Clarence Kelly -

Editor's Introduction: It is fitting that October, the month of the Angels, is dedicated to the Holy Rosary. Angels play a prominent role in the first decade of each set of "mysteries" of that crown of roses for the Mother of God. The Archangel Gabriel appears at the very beginning of the Rosary, the first Joyful Mystery, setting in motion not only the prayer itself but the very events of our salvation which form the heart and soul of the Rosary. When no one else will watch with Christ, the Angel of the Passion draws near to console Our Lord during His Agony in the Garden, the first Sorrowful Mystery. The Angels greet the women at the tomb on Easter Sunday to announce unto them the first Glorious Mystery of Jesus' Resurrection - and those Angels, in turn, send the women as "angels" (messengers) themselves to relate the news of the Resurrection to the Apostles. Given the pre-eminence of the good Angels in the mysteries of our salvation, it is not surprising, therefore, that the Blessed Virgin Mary commands us to arm ourselves with this prayer in the "conflict with the powers of darkness," as Father Kelly begins his sermon.

WE ARE AT WAR

We are at war and our enemy is not human. We are fighting against Lucifer and his legions of fallen angels. St. Paul says, "our wrestling is not against flesh and blood but against principalities and powers, against the rulers of the world of this darkness, against the spirits of wickedness in the high places." (Ephesians 6)

FIGHTING THE PRINCE OF DARKNESS

But how can we fight the Prince of Darkness and expect to be victorious? How can we match strength "wrestling" with such an enemy? Why - it is impossible! It is impossible, that is, unless we have some way to "even up", as they say, the sides. We need a defense and a weapon. We need something that will make up for the difference between our weak-

ness and his strength. Now a small nation with limited conventional forces could not defeat a great nation with unlimited conventional forces unless it possessed weapons that were sufficiently powerful to make up for the difference. With such weapons the small could defeat the great.

OUR SPECIAL WEAPON

And so we need a kind of spiritual atomic weapon to compensate for our weakness. We have that weapon in the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mother of God. For there is no limit to the power of her influence with her divine Son. This is clear from the teaching of Sacred Scripture. At the wedding of Cana she told her Son that "they have no wine." She made known the needs of her clients, as it were. He then seemed to say "no" to her request. "Woman," He said, "What is that to me and to thee? My hour is not yet come." Our

Lady said not another word to Him but simply turned to the waiters and said: "Whatsoever he shall say to you, do ye."

THE SUBLIME CONFIDENCE OF MARY

In the face of this sublime motherly confidence, Our Lord was helpless even though His hour had not yet come. He then directed the waiters to fill the six water pots with water and then to take the water-made-wine to the chief steward of the feast. The chief steward, when he tasted the water-made-wine, marvelled at its quality and proceeded to boast of it.

OUR LORD AND SACRED SCRIPTURE TEACH US ABOUT MARY

From this miracle, performed through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary, we see that Our Lord means to teach us of the powerful intercession of His Blessed Mother. He means to teach us that we are to have recourse to her. How can we say this when Our Lord at first seemed to say "no" to her request? We can say this because His very response -- "my hour has not yet come" -- actually serves to illustrate the magnitude of her powerful intercession. For at her request He did change the time for the beginning of His public ministry.

Furthermore, the power of her intercession and His desire for us to have recourse to her is seen in the way He answered her prayer. He did not begrudgingly do what she asked, as some might say, who do not understand the loving Heart of Jesus. He did not do the minimum. He went to excess. He went to extremes both as regards the quality and the quantity of wine that He made at her request. The head waiter marveled. Surely the divine Winemaker made the finest wine that ever did touch the lips of man. And He made an enormous quantity -- about the equivalent of 175 bottles.

CLEAR TO THE UNBIASED MIND

To any unbiased mind it is clear what He means to teach us. It is clear what St. John and the Sacred Scriptures mean to teach us as well. For as a result of the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary, not only were the needs of the young couple satisfied but the glory of Her Son was secured. His glory did shine that day and His disciples did believe in Him. St. John says: "This beginning of miracles did Jesus in Cana of Galilee; and manifested his glory, and his disciples believed in him." (John 2:11)

MARY, THE TERROR OF DEMONS

How great is the humble Virgin Mother who warms the hearts of her children and strikes terror into the hearts of demons, for they know that she is the one who will crush the head of their Prince! As they fly from the holy name of Jesus so do they fly from the holy name of Mary. To be defeated by God-made-man is one thing but to be crushed under the foot of a humble Virgin is quite another. It shames them so, but O how it glorifies God!

Now as the Son is moved to act by the Mother, so the Mother is moved to act by us. And of all the ways to move this heavenly Mother to act on our behalf, few there are that are more effective than the Holy Rosary. It is the remedy for our needs and the needs of the world. To illustrate the power of the Rosary consider the following story told by St. Alphonsus Liguori in his wonderful book, *The Glories of Mary*.

CATHERINE THE FAIR AND THE POWER OF THE ROSARY TO CONVERT SINNERS

There once lived a certain woman called "Catherine the Fair." She was a very great sinner and had fallen completely away from

the Church. One day she heard St. Dominic preaching about the Rosary. She was very moved by what he said. In fact, she was so touched that she began to say the Rosary every day. Yet strange as it may seem, she did not change the way she lived. She continued to live a very sinful life.

One day a noble-looking young man came to see her. She could tell there was something special about him. And so she received him with courtesy and offered him something to eat. As he sat at the table, she noticed that when he took the knife to cut the bread, drops of blood were dripping from his hands. She looked around and saw that all the food on the table was covered with blood. "What is happening?" she must have thought. "What strange thing comes to pass?" She asked the young man what the meaning of this was. He said to her: "The food of a Christian should be tinged with the blood of Jesus Christ, and seasoned with the remembrance of His passion." (*The Glories of Mary*, p.172)

THE SUFFERING SAVIOR REVEALS HIMSELF

Catherine was astounded by the answer of the young man and she asked him who he was. "I will tell you," he said. He then got up from the table, turned from her and began to walk away as if he were going into the other room. As he did, Catherine saw that his whole appearance changed. His head was crowned with thorns. His flesh was mangled and torn. His back was covered with blood and pieces of flesh hung down like crimson rags. He turned and spoke to her: "Desirest thou to know who I am? Dost thou not recognize me? I am thy Redeemer. O, Catherine, when wilt thou cease offending Me? See what I have endured for thee. Thou hast now tormented Me enough; change thy life." (*The Glories of Mary*, p.172)

THE CONVERSION OF A GREAT SINNER BY THE GENTLE HEART OF JESUS

Catherine was, no doubt, shocked. She was overwhelmed with grief for her sins and pity for her Suffering Savior. In fact, she was so overcome that Jesus then comforted her. "Love me now," He said to her. "Love me now as much as thou hast offended Me; *and know that I have granted thee this grace on account of the Rosary thou hast recited in honour of My Mother*" With these words, Our Lord disappeared. (*The Glories of Mary*, p. 172)

The next morning Catherine went in search of St. Dominic. She found him and made her confession and from that point on began to live a most holy life. She distributed all her earthly goods to the poor. And she became something of a living saint. St. Alphonsus says of her that "ever afterwards [she] led so holy a life that she attained a very high degree of perfection. Our Blessed Lady appeared many times to her, and Our Lord Himself revealed to Saint Dominic that this penitent had become very dear to Him." (*The Glories of Mary*, p.173)

THE ROSARY PRESERVES THE FAITHFUL

How powerful the Rosary is to convert sinners! But it is also powerful to preserve the faithful. Father Arthur Tonne in one of his little books recounts a truly remarkable story about how the Rosary preserves the faithful in the midst of the most extraordinary adversity.

PERSECUTION IN KOREA

During the 19th century there was a terrible persecution of the Church in Korea. It broke out in the year 1886 and lasted for some time. It eventually subsided and the Church was again free to preach and to teach and to provide the sacraments. One day, forty-three

years after the persecution of 1886, there was a commotion outside a Catholic chapel located in the village of Kong-So. The excitement was caused by an elderly woman who said that she was a Catholic who had not seen a priest for many years. The missionary priest was inside the chapel. He heard the commotion and went out to investigate. As he stepped outside, the old woman saw him and fell at his feet. She clutched his cassock and knelt there weeping. But her tears were not tears of pain or sadness. They were tears of great joy. Eventually she got hold of herself and began to explain her story to the priest.

KIM AGATHA

Her name was Kim Agatha, she said. At the time of the great persecution of 1866 she was living in a nearby district not too far from the present mission. Because she and her husband were Catholic they feared for their lives. And so they went south to stay with some pagan relatives thinking that they would be safe there. But they were discovered and called upon to deny their faith. This they steadfastly refused to do. And so her husband was put to death and she was let off with eighty lashes. She then made her way back to the region of Kong-So -- which was not too far from the present mission. When she returned there she was an outcast. Everyone was afraid to associate with her because of the dreaded persecution. They thought they, too, might be punished if they had anything to do with this Catholic whose husband was executed because of his Catholic religion.

ALL ALONE

The poor woman seemed to be all alone - but not completely, for there was a young man who had compassion on the plight of this young widow. He was a pagan but a man of considerable natural virtue. He proposed marriage to her and she eventually agreed to it. They moved from the region to a safer area.

There they lived out their lives. In her new home she heard stories about the continued persecution of the Church. She was told that the priests and bishops had been put to death. It was a dark day for the Church in Korea. It was a dark night for Kim Agatha.

HEROIC PERSEVERANCE

During all the years that passed she still held onto the faith. She persevered as best she could in all things. She did, indeed, remain faithful. Though sorely tried, she did not give up hope. She did not abandon her Savior even though, in the eyes of the world, He seemed to abandon her. But she knew He did not. She said her prayers. She tried to keep holy the Lord's day. She even attempted to observe the liturgical seasons. These are the words she spoke to the priest: "For forty-three years I said my prayers, and my Rosary every day until it broke and [then] I had to count on my fingers. I counted the days with pebbles so that I could say extra prayers of Sundays, and try not to do unnecessary work. I did not eat meat at all and I fasted when I thought it was Lent."

A HAPPY DISCOVERY

It was only now that she learned that the Church continued in Korea. She had finally returned to their native district and on entering a house she saw a crucifix hanging on the wall. Very cautiously she asked if it were a Christian household, fearful, no doubt, that if it were not she might be arrested. Much to her delight she discovered indeed it was. She also learned that the persecution was over and the priests were free to preach and to teach and to administer the sacraments. And so there she was -- filled with heavenly joy -- because the Church was alive and well in her country and she could once again go to confession, attend Mass and receive Holy Communion. How grateful she was for the Most Holy Rosary and the Blessed Virgin Mary who protected her and preserved her in the faith.

ST. DOMINIC AND THE MOST HOLY ROSARY

So we see that the Rosary not only converts sinners but it also preserves the faithful in a most astounding way. This wondrous devotion was revealed to St. Dominic by the Blessed Virgin Mary. St. Dominic was in great distress of soul because of the Albigensian heretics of his day who were causing such harm to the Church and to souls. The Blessed Mother said to him: "This land will always be sterile until rain falls on it." (*The Glories of Mary*, p.510) St. Dominic understood "the rain", spoken of by Our Lady, to be devotion to the Rosary. He then began to propagate it with great fervor and the devotion eventually spread throughout the world with enormous success.

The Rosary triumphed over the Albigensians in his day. It saved the West at Lepanto and broke the back of the forces of Islam which were poised to overrun all of Europe. It defeated the Saracens in Hungary in 1716. And at Fatima it was offered to the world by the Ambassador of Heaven, the Most Blessed Virgin Mary, as our powerful weapon against modern evils.

POPE LEO XIII ON THE ROSARY

Pope Leo XIII, after listing the terrible evils of his day, said: "He who ponders this disorder and corruption of the most important things will not be surprised if the afflicted nations are groaning under the weight of God's wrath and are trembling in the apprehension of even worse calamities. Now, to appease the offended justice of God and to obtain the needed healing for those who suffer, there is nothing better than pious and persevering prayer, provided it be joined with the zeal and practice of a Christian life. *We believe these must be obtained mainly through the recitation of the Rosary in honor of Mary.*" (Encyclical, *Magnae Dei Matris*, Sept. 7, 1892)

THE ROSARY IS HATED BY THOSE WHO HATE THE CHURCH

Thus, because the Rosary is so powerful a tool in the arsenal of the Church, it is hated by those who hate the Church. Those who attack Catholic truth attack the Rosary. St. Alphonsus asks: "What is there that modern heretics, ... and others have not said to throw discredit on the use of [the] beads? But the immense good which this noble devotion has done to the world is well known. How many, by its means, have been delivered from sin! How many led to a holy life! How many to a good death, and are now saved!" (*The Glories of Mary*, p.510)

RE-DEDICATING OURSELVES TO THE PROPER SAYING OF THE ROSARY

During this time, let us re-dedicate ourselves to the daily, reverent and faithful recitation of the Rosary. Before we begin the Rosary let us momentarily recollect ourselves. Let us remind ourselves who it is we address with our "Hail Marys". It is no one less than the Immaculate Virgin Mother of God. If someone were to speak to us and not look at us while they spoke but instead willfully looked at and thought of other things, we would be both hurt and insulted. If children did it we would say they were rude and brought up badly. Now if we have a certain claim to respect when we are spoken to, what of the Mother of God? It is not enough to simply recite the words by rote and think of other things. Prayer is the raising of the mind and heart to God. The Rosary is a sublime prayer.

On the other hand we should not be distressed if we are afflicted with many distractions during the Rosary. As long as we strive to raise our minds and hearts and not deliberately and willfully entertain distractions then our Rosary is fruitful. It is those willful distractions that offend Our Lady and diminish the value of our prayer. Think then of the heavenly

person you are speaking to. Place in your imagination a concrete picture of one of the mysteries of the Rosary and try to realize the meaning of the words you address to your heavenly Mother. She will amply reward your perseverance and she will take no offense at your distractions as long as they are not willful. In fact when she sees you calmly but firmly and without distress or anxiety turn away from distractions, she will shower extra blessings upon you.

And so we pray from the Mass of the feast of the Holy Rosary:

“Make us worthy, O Lord, we beseech Thee, to offer Thee this sacrifice; and by means of the mysteries of the most holy Rosary may we so keep in mind the life, passion and glory of Thine only begotten Son, that we may be made worthy of His promises. (Secret of the Mass)

“May we be helped, O Lord, we beseech Thee, by the prayers of Thy most holy Mother, whose Rosary we are celebrating, that we may draw strength from the mysteries which we reverence and obtain the effect of the sacraments which we have received.” (Postcommunion)

*In each mystery, Mary shows us a picture of Christ. Meditate on it.
Ask for the grace suggested by each mystery.*

Joyful Mysteries - Sundays of Advent and Christmastide,
Mondays and Thursdays

1. ANNUNCIATION to obtain Humility.
2. VISITATION to obtain Love for neighbor.
3. BIRTH OF CHRIST to obtain Detachment from the World.
4. PRESENTATION OF JESUS to obtain Respect for Authority.
5. FINDING OF JESUS to obtain Love of Jesus.

Sorrowful Mysteries - Sundays of Septuagesima and Lent,
Tuesdays and Fridays

1. AGONY OF JESUS to obtain Resignation to God's Will.
2. SCOURGING to obtain the Spirit of Purity.
3. CROWNING WITH THORNS to obtain Moral Courage.
4. CARRYING OF CROSS to obtain Patience in Adversity.
5. CRUCIFIXION to obtain Sorrow for Sin.

Glorious Mysteries - Sundays after Pentecost,
Wednesdays and Saturdays

1. RESURRECTION to obtain an Increase of Faith.
2. ASCENSION to obtain an Increase of Hope.
3. DESCENT OF HOLY GHOST to obtain an Increase of Charity.
4. ASSUMPTION to obtain Devotion to Mary.
5. CROWNING OF MARY to obtain the Grace of Perseverance.