

IDENTEM PIUMQUE ANIMUM ENCYCLICAL OF POPE LEO XIII ON THE ROSARY

Leo XIII

Venerable Brethren, Health and the Apostolic Blessing.

We have already had the opportunity on several occasions during Our Pontificate of bearing public testimony to that confidence and devotion towards the Blessed Virgin which We imbibed in Our tenderest years, and have endeavoured to cherish and develop all our life long. For, having fallen upon times of calamity for Christendom and perils for the nations, We have realised how prudent it is to warmly recommend this means of safe-guarding happiness and peace which God has most mercifully granted to Mankind in His August Mother, and which hath ever been celebrated in the annals of the Church. The manifold zeal of Christian people has responded to Our desires and exhortations, most particularly in exciting a devotion to the Rosary; and a plentiful harvest of excellent fruits has not been wanting. Still we can never be satisfied with celebrating the Divine Mother, who is in truth worthy of all praise, and in urging love and affection towards her who is also the mother of mankind, who is full of mercy, full of grace. Yea, Our soul, wearied with the cares of the Apostolate, the nearer it feels the time of Our departure to be at hand, with the more earnest confidence looks up to her from whom, as from a blessed dawn, arose the Day of happiness and joy that was never to set. It is pleasant to us to remember, Venerable Brethren, that We have in other letters issued from time to time extolled the devotion of the Rosary; for it is in many ways most pleasing to her in whose honour it is employed, and most advantageous to those who properly use it. But it is equally pleasant to be able now to insist upon and confirm the same fact. Herein we have an excellent opportunity to paternally exhort men's minds and hearts to an increase of religion, and to stimulate within them the hope of eternal reward.

Necessity of Prayer

2. The form of prayer We refer to has obtained the special name of "Rosary," as though it represented by its arrangement the sweetness of roses and the charm of a garland. This is most fitting for a method of venerating the Virgin, who is rightly styled the Mystical Rose of Paradise, and who, as Queen of the universe, shines therein with a crown of stars. So that by its very name it appears to foreshadow and be an augury of the joys and garlands of Heaven offered by her to those who are devoted to her. This appears Clearly if we consider the nature of the Rosary of Our Lady. There is no duty which Christ and His Apostles more emphatically urged by both precept and example than that of prayer and supplication to Almighty God. The Fathers and Doctors in subsequent times have taught that this is a matter of such grave necessity, that if men neglect it they hope in vain for eternal salvation. Every one who prays finds the door open to impetration, both from the very nature of prayer and from the promises of Christ. And we all know that prayer derives its chief efficacy from two principal circumstances: perseverance, and the union of many for one end. The former is signified in those invitations of Christ so full of goodness: ask, seek, knock (Matt. vii., 7), just as a kind father desires to indulge the wishes of his children, but who also requires to be continually asked by them and as it were wearied by their prayers, in order to attach their hearts more closely to himself. The second condition Our Lord has borne witness to more than once: If two of you shall consent upon earth concerning anything whatsoever they shall ask, it shall be done to them by My Father who is in heaven. For where there are two or three gathered in My name, there am I in the midst of them (Matt. xviii. 19, 20). Hence that pregnant saying of Tertullian: Let us gather into an assembly and congregation that we may, as it were, make up a band and solicit God (Apologet. c. xxxix): such violence is pleasing to God; and the memorable words of Aquinas: It is impossible that the prayers of many should not be heard, if one prayer is made up as it were out of many supplications. (In Evang. Matt. c. xvii). Both of these qualities are conspicuous in the Rosary. For, to be brief, by repeating the same prayers we strenuously implore from Our Heavenly Father the Kingdom of His grace and glory; we again and again beseech the Virgin Mother to aid us sinners by her prayers, both during our whole life and especially at that last moment which is the stepping-stone to eternity. The formula of the Rosary, too, is excellently adapted to prayer in common, so that it has been styled, not without reason, "The Psalter of Mary." And that old custom

of our forefathers ought to be preserved or else restored, according to which Christian families, whether in town or country, were religiously wont at close of day, when their labours were at an end, to assemble before a figure of Our Lady and alternately recite the Rosary. She, delighted at this faithful and unanimous homage, was ever near them like a loving mother surrounded by her children, distributing to them the blessings of domestic peace, the foretaste of the peace of heaven. Considering the efficacy of public prayer, We, among other decrees which we have from time to time issued concerning the Rosary, have spoken thus: "It is Our desire that in the principal church of each diocese it should be recited every day, and in parish churches on every feast-day (Apostolic Letter *Salutaris Ille*, 24th December, 1883). Let this be constantly and devoutly carried out. We also see with joy the custom extended on other solemn occasions of public devotion and in pilgrimages to venerated shrines, the growing frequency of which is to be commended. This association of prayer and praise to Mary is both delightful and salutary for souls. We ourselves have most strongly experienced this - and Our heart rejoices to recall it - when at certain times in Our Pontificate We have been present in the Vatican basilica, surrounded by great crowds of all classes, who united with Us in mind, voice, and hope, earnestly invoked by the mysteries and prayers of the Rosary, her who is the most powerful patroness of the Catholic name.

Christ the one Mediator: Position of the Saints and Especially of Mary

3. And who could think or say that the confidence so strongly felt in the patronage and protection of the Blessed Virgin is excessive? Undoubtedly the name and attributes of the absolute Mediator belong to no other than to Christ, for being one person, and yet both man and God, He restored the human race to the favour of the Heavenly Father: One Mediator of God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself a redemption for all (1 Tim. ii. 5, 6). And yet, as the Angelic Doctor teaches, there is no reason why certain others should not be called in a certain way mediators between God and man, that is to say, in so far as they co-operate by predisposing and ministering in the union of man with God (Summa, p. III, q. xxvi., articles 1, 2). Such are the angels and saints, the prophets and priests of both Testaments; but especially has the Blessed Virgin a claim to the glory of this title. For no single individual can even be imagined who has ever contributed or ever will contribute so much towards reconciling man with God. She offered to mankind, hastening to eternal ruin, a Saviour, at that moment when she received the announcement of the mystery of peace brought to this earth by the Angel, with that admirable act of consent in the name of the whole human race (Summa, p. III, q. xxx., art. 1). She it is from whom is born Jesus; she is therefore truly His mother, and for this reason a worthy and acceptable "Mediatrice to the Mediator." As the various mysteries present themselves one after the other in the formula of the Rosary for the meditation and contemplation of men's minds, they also elucidate what we owe to Mary for our reconciliation and salvation. No one can fail to be sweetly affected when considering her who appeared in the house of Elizabeth as the minister of the divine gifts, and who presented her Son to the Shepherds, to the kings, and to Simeon. Moreover, one must remember that the Blood of Christ shed for our sake and those members in which He offers to His Father the wounds He received, the price of our liberty, are no other than the flesh and blood of the virgin, since the flesh of Jesus is the flesh of Mary, and however much it was exalted in the glory of His resurrection, nevertheless the nature of His flesh derived from Mary remained and still remains the same (de Assumpt. B. V. M., c.v., among the Opera S. Aug).

Divine Faith and the Rosary

4. Yet another excellent fruit follows from the Rosary, exceedingly opportune to the character of our times. This we have referred to elsewhere. It is that, whilst the virtue of Divine Faith is daily exposed to so many dangers and attacks, the Christian may here derive nourishment and strength for his faith. Holy writ calls Christ the Author and finisher of faith (Heb. vii. 2), the Author, because He taught men many things which they had to believe, especially about Himself in whom dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead (Colos. ii., 9), and also because He mercifully gives the power of believing by the grace and, as it were, the function of the Holy Ghost; the Finisher, because in Heaven, where He will change the habit of faith into the splendour of glory, He openly discloses to them those things which they have seen in this mortal life as through a veil. Now Christ stands forth clearly in the Rosary. We behold in meditation His life, whether His hidden life in joy, or His public life in excessive toil and sufferings unto death, or His glorious life from His

triumphant resurrection to His eternal enthronement at the right hand of the Father. And since faith, to be full and sufficient, must display itself, - for with the heart we believe unto justice, but with the mouth confession is made unto salvation (Rom. x., 10), - so have we also in the Rosary an excellent means unto this, for by those vocal prayers with which it is intermingled, we are enabled to express and profess our faith in God, our most watchful Father; in the future life, the forgiveness of sins; in the mysteries of the august Trinity, the Incarnation of the Word, the Divine Maternity, and others. All know the value and merit of faith. For faith is just like a most precious gem, producing now the blossoms of all virtue by which we are pleasing to God, and hereafter to bring forth fruits that will last for ever: for to know Thee is perfect justice, and to know Thy justice and Thy power is the root of immortality (Wisdom xv., 3). It is here the place to add a remark respecting the duties of those virtues which faith rightly postulates. Among them is the virtue of penance, and one part of this is abstinence, which for more reasons than one is necessary and salutary. It is true the Church is growing more indulgent towards her children in this matter, but they must understand they are bound to take all care to make up for this maternal indulgence by other good works. We rejoice for this reason also to propose particularly the use of the rosary, which is capable of producing worthy fruits of penance, especially by the remembrance of the sufferings of Christ and His Mother.

5. To those therefore who are striving after supreme happiness this means of the Rosary has been most providentially offered, and it is one unsurpassed for facility and convenience. For any person even moderately instructed in his religion can make use of it with fruit, and the time it occupies cannot delay any man's business. Sacred history abounds with striking and evident examples. It is well known that there have been many persons occupied in most weighty functions or absorbed in laborious cares who have never omitted for a single day this pious practice. Combined with this advantage is that inward sentiment of devotion which attracts minds to the Rosary, so that they love it as the intimate companion and faithful protector of life; and in their last agony they embrace and hold fast to it as the dear pledge of the unfading Crown of glory. Such a pledge is greatly enhanced by the benefits of sacred indulgences, if properly employed; for the devotion of the Rosary has been richly endowed with such indulgences by both our Predecessors and Ourselves. These favours will certainly prove most efficacious to both the dying and the departed, being bestowed as it were by the hands of the merciful Virgin, in order that they may the sooner enjoy the eternal peace and light they have desired.

Prayer for the Re-Union of Christendom

6. These considerations, Venerable Brethren, move us incessantly to extol and recommend to Catholic peoples this excellent and most salutary form of devotion. Yet another very urgent reason, of which we have often spoken both in Letters and Allocutions, encourages us to do this. For that earnest desire, which We have learnt from the Divine Heart of Jesus, of fostering the work of reconciliation among those who are separated from Us daily urges Us more pressingly to action; and we are convinced that this most excellent Re-union cannot be better prepared and strengthened than by the power of prayer. The example of Christ is before us, for in order that His disciples might be one in faith and charity, he poured forth prayer and supplication to His Father. And concerning the efficacious prayer of His most holy Mother for the same end, there is a striking testimony in the Acts of the Apostles. Therein is described the first assembly of the Disciples, expecting with earnest hope and prayer the promised fullness of the Holy Spirit. And the presence of Mary united with them in prayer is specially indicated: All these were persevering with one mind in prayer with Mary the Mother of Jesus (Acts i., 14). Wherefore as the nascent Church rightly joined itself in prayer with her as the patroness and most excellent custodian of Unity, so in these times is it most opportune to do the same all over the Catholic World, particularly during the whole month of October, which we have long ago decreed to be dedicated and consecrated, by the solemn devotion of the Rosary, to the Divine Mother, in order to implore her for the afflicted Church. Let then the zeal for this prayer everywhere be re-kindled, particularly for the end of Holy Unity. Nothing will be more agreeable and acceptable to Mary; for, as she is most closely united with Christ she especially wishes and desires that they who have received the same Baptism with Him may be united with Him and with one another in the same faith and perfect charity. So may the sublime mysteries of this same faith by means of the Rosary devotion be more deeply impressed in men's minds, with the happy result that "we may imitate what they contain and obtain what they promise."

7. Meanwhile, as a pledge of the Divine Favours and Our affection, We most lovingly impart to You, your clergy and

People, the Apostolic Benediction.

Given at St. Peter's in Rome, September 20, 1896, in the 19th year of Our Pontificate.

LEO XIII

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