

# ENCYCLICAL OF POPE JOHN XXIII ON THE ROSARY: PRAYER

*John XXIII*

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To the Venerable Brethren, the Patriarchs, Primates, Archbishops, Bishops, and other Local Ordinaries in Peace and Communion with the Apostolic See.

Venerable Brethren, Greetings and Apostolic Benediction.

Among the pleasant recollections of Our younger days are the Encyclicals which Pope Leo XIII used to write to the whole Catholic world as the month of October drew near, in order to urge the faithful to devout recitation of Mary's rosary during that month in particular. (1)

2. These Encyclicals had varied contents, but they were all very wise, vibrant with fresh inspiration, and directly relevant to the practice of the Christian life. In strong and persuasive terms they exhorted Catholics to pray to God in a spirit of faith through the intercession of Mary, His Virgin Mother, by reciting the holy rosary. For the rosary is a very commendable form of prayer and meditation. In saying it we weave a mystic garland of Ave Maria's, Pater Noster's, and Gloria Patri's. And as we recite these vocal prayers, we meditate upon the principal mysteries of our religion; the Incarnation of Jesus Christ and the Redemption of the human race are proposed, one event after another, for our consideration.

Pope John's Devotion to the Rosary

3. These pleasant memories of Our younger days have not faded or vanished as the years of Our life have passed. On the contrary, We want to declare in complete frankness and simplicity that the years have made Mary's rosary all the dearer to Us. We never fail to recite it each day in its entirety and We intend to recite it with particular devotion during the coming month.

4. During Our first year as pope—a year which is almost over—We have several times had occasion to urge the clergy and laity to public and private prayer. But today We make this same request with even greater emphasis and earnestness, for reasons which this Encyclical will set out very briefly.

I

5. This coming October will mark the end of the first year since the saintly departure of Our predecessor, Pius XII, from this mortal life in which he had distinguished himself by so many glorious achievements.

6. Twenty days after his death, We, though all unworthy, were raised to the Sovereign Pontificate in accord with God's mysterious designs.

An Unbroken Succession

7. One pope bequeathed, as it were, to another pope, as a sacred legacy, the care of the whole Christian flock; with the same pastoral concern each of them declared his paternal love for all mankind.

8. These two events—the one full of sorrow, the other full of joy—attest clearly to the world that while all things human gradually decline and decay, the Roman Pontificate withstands the rush of centuries, even though the visible Heads of the Church must, one after another, leave this mortal exile as they complete the span of days which God in His providence has set for them.

9. But all Christians should turn their thoughts to the late Pope Pius XII and to his lowly successor, in whom Blessed Peter continues his eternal mission as supreme pastor, and they should address

this prayer to God: "To preserve in holy religion the Pope, and all clerics in holy orders, we beg Thee hear us." (2)

#### A Call to the Rosary

10. And now it is a pleasure also to recall that this same Predecessor of Ours urged all the faithful to pious recitation of the rosary during October in the Encyclical *Ingruentium malorum* (3) We would like to repeat one admonition (4) from that Encyclical: "Turn in spirit with ever greater confidence to the Virgin Mother of God, the constant refuge of Christians in adversity, since she 'has been made a source of salvation for the human race". (5)

## II

11. On October 11, 1959, We shall have the great pleasure of presenting mission crucifixes to a large group of Catholic missionaries who are about to leave their beloved homes and undertake the heavy responsibility of bringing the light of Christianity to distant people. (6) On the same day, in the afternoon, We are scheduled to visit the North American College on the Janiculum and there joyously celebrate with its superiors, faculty, and seminarians the completion of that college's first century. (7)

12. Although these two celebrations fall only by coincidence on the same day, they have the same meaning and importance: in all that she does the Catholic Church is motivated by heaven's inspiration and drawn on by the principles and precepts of eternal truth; all of her children contribute with a selfless and dynamic will to mutual respect, the fraternal union of mankind, and solid peace.

#### Hope for the Future

13. These young men present such a wonderful spectacle that We must be optimistic for the future. They have overcome many obstacles and inconveniences and given themselves to God that other men might gain Christ, (8) whether in foreign lands as yet untouched by the light of truth or in those immense, noisy, and busy cities in which the pace of daily activity, rapid as a whirlwind, sometimes makes souls wither and become content with earthly goods. From the lips of their elders, who have labored long in the same cause, comes the ardent prayer of the Prince of the Apostles: "Grant to thy servants to speak thy word with all boldness." (9)

14. We trust that the apostolic labors of these young men will be commended to the Virgin Mary in your devout prayers through the month of October.

## III

15. There is another matter also which compels Us to ask that the Sacred College of Cardinals, you, Venerable Brethren, all priests and nuns, the sick and disabled, our innocent children, and all Christians address earnest and suppliant prayers to Jesus Christ and His most loving Mother. It is this: that those who, in great measure, hold the future of nations in their hands consider attentively the dangerous pass to which our age has come. Be these nations large or small, their legitimate rights and their inheritance of spiritual riches are sacred and must be safeguarded.

#### A Prayer for Rulers

16. Therefore We pray God that their rulers may carefully weigh and consider the causes of dissension and endeavor in good faith to remove them. They must, above all, realize that war (God keep it from us!) can have only one result, vast ruins everywhere, and thus cannot be the object of anyone's reliance. They must adapt to the needs of men of today the laws which regulate the state and society and which bind together nations and classes of society. They must be mindful of the eternal laws which come from God and are the bases and pivots of all government. Finally, they must be ever aware that the individual souls of men are created by God and destined to possess

and enjoy Him.

#### False Philosophies

17. It must also be remarked that there are current today certain schools of thought and philosophy and certain attitudes toward the practical conduct of life which cannot possibly be reconciled with the teachings of Christianity. This impossibility We shall never cease from asserting in firm and unambiguous, though also calm terms. But God wishes the welfare of men and of nations! (10)

18. And so We hope that men will set aside those sterile postulates and assumptions, hard as rock and just as inflexible, which rise from a way of thinking and acting that is infected with laicism and materialism, and that they will find a complete cure in that sound doctrine which experience makes more certain with every day that passes. We mean that doctrine which attests that God is the author of life and its laws, that He is guarantor of the rights and dignity of the human person. God then is "our refuge and our Redemption." (11)

#### The Coming of God's Kingdom

19. Our thoughts turn to all the lands of this earth. We see all mankind striving for a better future; We see the awakening of a mysterious force, and this permits Us to hope that men will be drawn by a right conscience and a sense of duty to advance the real interests of human society. That this goal may be realized in the fullest sense—that is, with the triumph of the kingdom of truth, justice, peace, and charity—We exhort all Our children in Christ to be "of one heart and one soul" (12) and to pour out ardent prayers in October to our Queen in heaven and our loving Mother, reflecting upon the words of the Apostle: "In all things we suffer tribulation, but we are not distressed; we are sore pressed, but we are not destitute; we endure persecution, but we are not forsaken; we are cast down, but we do not perish; always bearing about in our body the dying of Jesus, so that the life also of Jesus may be made manifest in our bodily frame."

#### The Synod and the Council

20. Before We conclude this Encyclical We also wish to ask you, Venerable Brethren, to recite Mary's rosary through the month of October with particular devotion, and to entreat the Virgin Mother of God in suppliant prayer, for another intention which is dear to Our heart: that the Roman Synod may bring many blessings and benefits upon this city; that the forthcoming Ecumenical Council, in which you will participate by your presence and your advice, will add wondrous growth to the universal Church; and that the renewed vigor of all the Christian virtues which We hope this Council will produce will also serve as an invitation and incentive to reunion for Our Brethren and children who are separated from this Apostolic See.

21. In this fond hope, We lovingly impart the Apostolic Blessing to each and every one of you, Venerable Brethren, to the flocks entrusted to your care, and to those individuals especially who will respond to Our entreaties in a devout and zealous spirit.

Given at Rome, in St. Peter's, on the 26th day of September, in the year 1959, the first of Our Pontificate.

#### **JOHN XXIII**

#### **NOTES**

LATIN TEXT: *Acta Apostolicae Sedis*, 51 (1959), 673-78.

ENGLISH TRANSLATION: *The Pope Speaks*, 6 (Winter, 1959/60), 68-72.

#### **REFERENCES:**

(1) Cf. the following encyclical epistles in *Acta Leonis XIII*, in the volumes indicated: *Supremi*

Apostolatus, III, 280 ff.; Superiore anno, IV, 123 ff.; Quamquam pluries, IX, 175 ff.; Octobri mense, XI, 299 ff.; Magnae Dei Matris, XII, 221 ff.; Laetitiae sanctae, XIII, 283 ff.; lucunda semper, XIV, 305 ff.; Adiutricem populi, XV, 300 ff.; Fidentem piumque, XVI, 278 ff.; Augustissimae Virginis, XVII, 285 ff.; Diuturni temporis, XVIII, 153 ff.

(2) Litany of the Saints.

(3) On September 15, 1951: AAS 43 (1951) 577 ff.

(4) Ibid., 578-579.

(5) St. Irenaeus, Adv. haer. III, 22: Migne, PG VII, 959.

(6) A précis of the talk given on this occasion appears in TPS, v. 6 (1959) 46.

(7) A translation of the talk given on this occasion appears in TPS, v. 6 (1959), 37-42.

(8) Cf. Phil. 3.8.

(9) Cf. Acts 4.29.

(10) Cf. Wisd. 1, 14. There is a play on words in this sentence and the following paragraph which is difficult to render in English. The Holy Father uses language which can apply to physical health or to salvation.—Translator's note.

(11) Sacred Liturgy.

(12) Acts 4.32.

(13) 2 Cor. 4.8-10.

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