

The Rosary

The word “*Rosary*” means “*garden of flowers.*” The *Christian Rosary of the Blessed Virgin Mary* is perhaps the most well known modern type of prayer associated with counting devices. Religious people throughout the world have a long history of using such devices to assist with the repetition of prayers. Different religions and peoples of very diverse cultures tell of ancient days when the earliest spiritual people used stones, sticks, notched wood, knotted ropes and beads to count prayers.

Early Christians used cords with one hundred and fifty knots on which they would say a variety of prayers. One hundred and fifty was significant because it reflected the number of Psalms found in the Old Testament. In the earliest days, it was common for Christians to pray the Our Father (or *Pater Noster*) one hundred and fifty times as a form of devotional prayer. This was done because most people were uneducated and thus unable to read the Bible or prayer books. By praying the series of Our Fathers, common people were able to be part of the daily prayer of the Church.

By the seventh century, the *Angelic Salutation* (“Hail Mary, Full of Grace”) found in Luke 1:28 was also being used for prayers on the *Pater Noster* cords. By the twelfth century, the *greeting of Elizabeth* (“blessed are you among women”) found in Luke 1:42, was used as well. Eventually the “*Hail Mary*” prayer took a more distinct form with the addition of the ancient prayer to Mary: “Holy Mary, Mother of God pray for us sinners.” In different parts of Europe the prayer cords took on different distinct forms. In some places the one hundred and fifty knots or beads were divided into *decades* or groups of ten.

According to tradition, the Blessed Mother appeared to Saint Dominic Guzman in 1208 with a Rosary in her hand. She taught him how to pray the Rosary using the “Hail Mary” prayer as it had evolved. The Hail Mary was prayed fifty times while meditating on various Biblical passages, especially as they related to the life of Jesus. Saint Dominic and the friars of the Dominican order that he founded became principal promoters of the Rosary.

In the middle of the sixteenth century the Rosary took a form more familiar to us today. At that time it had one hundred and fifty “Hail Mary” beads divided into groups of ten separated by fifteen larger “Our Father” beads. The beads were attached to form a circle and a pendant or medal, hung from one of the large beads; from it hung three small and one large bead and it ended in a cross. Particular prayers were prescribed for the various beads. An abbreviated form of the Rosary, containing only fifty “Hail Mary” beads eventually replaced the larger one. This is the most common type of Rosary used today.

The *Mysteries of the Holy Rosary* as we know them today did not develop until late in the fifteenth century. In addition to the Joyful, Sorrowful and Glorious mysteries, Pope John Paul II recently added the “Luminous” mysteries.

How to Pray the Rosary

The Rosary enables us to pray to Jesus through Mary. In it we remember particular events, or “mysteries” in the history of our Christian faith. Today there are *twenty mysteries* of the Rosary divided into four groups of five. One mystery is used for meditation while praying each decade (that is, for every ten Hail Mary prayers recited). There are the *Joyful mysteries*, the *Luminous mysteries*, the *Sorrowful mysteries* and the *Glorious mysteries*. They are as follows:

The Joyful Mysteries: (1) the Annunciation by the Angel Gabriel to Mary, (2) the Visitation of Mary to her cousin Elizabeth, (3) the Nativity of Jesus in the stable at Bethlehem, (4) the Presentation of the infant Jesus in the Temple of Jerusalem and (5) the Finding of the boy Jesus in the Temple.

The Luminous Mysteries: (1) the Baptism of the Lord by John the Baptist, (2) the Wedding Feast at Cana, (3) the Proclamation of the Kingdom of God, (4) the Transfiguration of Jesus on the Mountain and (5) the Institution of the Eucharist at the Last Supper.

The Sorrowful Mysteries: (1) the Agony in the Garden, (2) the Stripping and Scourging at the Pillar, (3) the Crowning with Thorns (4) the Carrying of the Cross and (5) the Death of Jesus on the Cross.

The Glorious Mysteries: (1) The Resurrection Jesus rises from the dead, (2) the Ascension of Jesus into Heaven, (3) the Descent of the Holy Spirit the Apostles and Disciples, (4) the Assumption of Mary body and soul into heavenly glory and (5) the Coronation of Mary as Queen of heaven and earth.

The *Joyful mysteries* are said on Monday and Saturday (and on Sundays in Advent and during the Christmas Season), the *Luminous mysteries* on Thursday, the *Sorrowful mysteries* on Tuesday and Friday (and on Sundays during the Season of Lent), and the *Glorious mysteries* on Wednesday and Sunday (except when replaced by the Joyful or Sorrowful during certain times of the year).

The order of prayers for the Rosary: (1) We begin with the *Sign of the Cross* and (2) the *Apostles' Creed*. (3) We pray an *Our Father* on the first large bead and (4) a *Hail Mary* on each of the three small beads. The first three *Hail Mary* prayers are prayed for an increase in the three theological virtues, faith, hope and love. (5) After the first three *Hail Mary* prayers we pray a *Glory Be*. (6) Before each large bead that precedes a *decade* of small beads, a *mystery of the Rosary* is announced. (7) We pray an *Our Father* on the large bead preceding each *decade*. (8) We pray a *Hail Mary* on each of the ten beads of each *decade*. (9) At the conclusion of each *decade* we pray one (10) *Glory Be* and (11) one *Fatima prayer*. At the conclusion of the last *decade* of *Hail Mary* prayers, *Glory Be* and final *Fatima prayer*, (12) we pray the *Hail Holy Queen*. (13) Finally, we end with the *Concluding prayer*.

One person is usually designated as the “leader” of the Rosary. When the Rosary is said as a group, most of the prayers are divided into two parts. The leader (or half the group) usually says the first part of each prayer (noted before the “ // ” mark and the *italicized* words in the prayers below), and the others (or other half of the group) respond with the second part. Everyone recites all of the “*Sign of the Cross,*” the “*Fatima prayer*” and the “*Hail Holy Queen.*” The leader alone recites the *Concluding prayer.*

The Prayers of the Rosary

The Sign of the Cross

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

The Apostles' Creed

I believe in God the Father Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth; and in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord; Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried. He descended into hell; the third day He rose again from the dead; He ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God, the Father Almighty; from thence He shall come to judge the living and the dead. // *I believe the Holy Spirit, the holy Catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and life everlasting. Amen.*

The Lord's Prayer (Our Father)

Our Father, Who art in heaven, hallowed by Thy name, Thy kingdom come; Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. // *Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil. Amen.*

The Hail Mary

Hail, Mary, full of grace; the Lord is with thee; blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus. // *Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death. Amen.*

The Glory Be

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit. // *As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.*

The Fatima Prayer

O my Jesus, forgive us our sins, save us from the fires of hell, and lead all souls to heaven, especially those most in need of your mercy.

The Hail Holy Queen

Hail, holy Queen, Mother of mercy, our life, our sweetness and our hope. To thee do we cry, poor banished children of Eve. To thee to we send up our sighs, mourning and weeping in this valley of tears. Turn, then, most gracious advocate, thine eyes of mercy toward us, and after this, our exile, show unto us the blessed fruit of thy womb, Jesus. O clement, O loving, O sweet Virgin Mary.

Leader: Pray for us, O holy Mother of God.

Response: *That we may be made worthy of the promises of Christ.*

The Concluding Prayer

Let us pray. O God, Whose Only-Begotten Son, by His life, death and resurrection, has purchased for us the rewards of eternal life: grant, we beseech you, that by meditating upon these mysteries of the most holy Rosary of the Blessed Virgin Mary, we may imitate what they contain, and obtain what they promise, through the same Christ our Lord. Amen.