

TWENTY-SIXTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (2024 - B)  
THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY AND THE ROSARY

The Month of October begins on Tuesday this week, and this month has been set aside by the Church as a month of special devotion to the Holy Rosary. For that reason, I would like to say a few words today about the Blessed Virgin Mary and about her Rosary.

First of all let's look at the idea of saints, who they are and what they do.

Saints are persons, either human or angelic who are in heaven with God. In heaven, they enjoy eternal happiness and see God as He is. Saints can be those who are recognized as such by the Church like Saint Peter or Saint Teresa or Saint Michael.

However, saints can also be those who are unknown to us or to most of the world. They can be parents or grandparents or uncles or aunts or brothers or sisters or children or even babies who died in the womb. Saints are all those who are in heaven with God.

Now on earth, we pray for each other. On earth, we intercede for each other. We ask God for favors for those we love, and we do this all the time. Not only that, we ask people to pray for us, or for those we know who could use prayers.

So here's the thing. When someone dies and goes to heaven, would it make sense for them to stop caring about the ones they love back on earth? Would it make sense that they no longer have an interest in the lives of their family and friends? Could a mother forget her child?

Of course not! The saints in heaven still love those of us here on earth. The saints in heaven still care about our lives and what happens to us, and here's the good part. They are with God and are in a better position to intercede for us than they were while here on earth. They can ask God directly to help us, and that is why we are encouraged to pray to the saints. We honor them as friends of God. We ask for their help. Saints cannot perform miracles, but they can ask God to do so which brings us back to the Blessed Virgin Mary.

Mary is the greatest of all the saints, and this is so for a number of reasons. First and foremost is this: She is the mother of Jesus who is the Son of God and our Savior. Without her, Jesus would not have been born and we could not be saved.

It's also the case that God had prepared Mary for this role from the first moment of her conception. When she was conceived in her mother's womb, God bestowed upon her a special grace. Theologians call this a prevenient grace, that is, a grace which came before the Redemption. God preserved Mary free from original sin and its effects. Mary was given the same grace God had given to Adam and Eve, a share in His divine life, sanctifying grace.

This was so because sin in any form is incompatible with life in Christ. The Son of God could not be born from a woman tainted in even the slightest way with any sin, either original or actual. Furthermore, we know that Mary was free of sin because of how the Angel Gabriel addressed her. He said to her, "Hail full of grace" meaning there was no sin in her.

Mary is also a virgin, meaning she gave her whole life to God. We see this again in her response to the Angel Gabriel when he said to her, "You will conceive and bear a Son and you are to name Him Jesus. Mary replied, "How can this be since I know not man."

We also know that Mary remained a virgin and had no other children but Jesus because when our Lord was hanging on the cross, He entrusted Mary's care and welfare to Saint John when He said, "Behold your mother." The gospel account then adds, "From that hour, the disciple took her into his home (Jn 19:27)." If Mary had other children, Jesus would not have given her to Saint John.

Even more important from our standpoint are the words Jesus spoke just before this. He said to Mary, "Woman behold your son." It was here that our Lord entrusted to Mary's love and care the entire human race, and all of us who are members of it.

How you might ask does this work? Well, think about it ... Jesus taught us to begin our prayers with these words, "Our Father." That means if God is our Father and Jesus is the Father's Son, then we too are brothers and sisters of Jesus because we have the same Father, God.

Furthermore, if we are brothers and sisters in Christ, if we are all related spiritually by virtue of our shared faith and baptism, then we are brothers and sisters of Saint John to whom our Lord entrusted Mary's care.

Finally, if Jesus said to Mary, "Woman behold your son" referring to the disciple who is our brother in Christ, that makes us spiritual sons and daughters of Mary as well. She is truly our Blessed Mother.

Now mothers love and care for their children and are always thinking about them. Mothers want what is best for their children. This is also true with Mary. She wants what's best for us, and what is best for us is that we will someday live in heaven with God, and so she helps us stay on the path that leads to heaven, and I will say a bit more about this in a moment.

However, Mary is not just concerned that we get to heaven. She also wants to help us in our daily lives, and there is proof of this in the Scriptures. At the wedding at Cana, when the young couple had run out of wine for their guests, Mary interceded for them. She asked Jesus to work a miracle, and it was then, at her request, that Jesus worked his first miracle by changing water into wine.

Notice that this was at the request of Mary. She had interceded for this young couple. She did not perform the miracle herself, our Lord did, but He did so at her request. That said, could you think of anything Jesus would refuse His mother? Our Lord honors His mother like any good son would do. He cares for her and would refuse her nothing.

So, it makes sense for us to ask Mary, our spiritual mother for help as well. It makes sense for us to ask her to speak to her Son on our behalf when we are in need. It makes sense for us to ask her to bring our petitions to Jesus who will act on them just as He did at the wedding in Cana when Mary said to Him, "They have no more wine."

Now I mentioned that Mary wants most of all that we join her and the saints and angels in heaven where we will live in peace and joy praising God forever. To that end, Mary has appeared at various times to encourage us to stay on the road that leads to heaven, or to warn us when we have strayed. I mention here briefly just three of these times.

One was in Mexico in 1531 when Mary appeared to a humble Indian named Juan Diego who is now a saint. She wanted to make known to the native peoples of Mexico her Son Jesus. She identified herself as "the ever virgin Holy Mary, Mother of the True God for whom we live, of the Creator of all things, Lord of heaven and the earth."

By imprinting her image on the tilma Juan Diego was wearing, she left a miraculous sign that what she said to him was true. As word of her apparition spread, more than six million people in Mexico came to believe and were baptized.

Another time in which Mary appeared was at Lourdes in France in 1858. This time she appeared to a young girl named Bernadette Soubirous. It was a time of little faith when many had rejected belief in God for the greatness of science. They believed everything could be explained in a natural way and that belief in God was a primitive superstition.

This time Mary identified herself as the "Immaculate Conception," and she asked people to pray to God for sinners. To prove that she had actually appeared, a spring miraculously appeared, and when people drank from the water or bathed in it, many were healed from terrible diseases or terminal illnesses. People are still healed at Lourdes today.

One more instance where our Lady appeared was at Fatima in Portugal in 1917. This time she appeared to three children and asked them to warn the world that if people did not repent, a terrible war would come as a punishment for man's sins. She urged people to pray the Rosary in reparation for the sins of mankind. To prove that she had actually appeared, a great miracle of the sun took place. Nearly 70,000 people witnessed this event.

All of these apparitions of Mary were not to call attention to herself but were out of her motherly concern for us, her spiritual children. She warned us at Fatima especially that the world was on a path that did not lead to heaven but rather, to hell. At Fatima she even showed the children a vision of hell, that place she said where poor sinners go.

At both Lourdes and Fatima, Mary urged us to pray the Rosary, and the Church has dedicated the whole month of October to promoting its use. The Rosary is a prayer which combines both holy words and meditation. The Rosary combines vocal prayers – the Lord's Prayer, the Hail Mary and the Glory Be – with meditation on the various mysteries. The Rosary is a powerful prayer, and it is powerful because it's directed to God through the Blessed Virgin Mary. We place our prayers and petitions in Mary's hands and she brings them to Jesus.

The Rosary is also a prayer that can be easily said at home or on break at work or with your family. I strongly encourage you to make the Rosary a part of your daily prayer. In fact, try to say the Rosary with your family at home each day.

By saying the Rosary each day, you will keep your spiritual priorities in order because the mysteries of Mary's Rosary will remind you of Christ's entire life, from His conception to His Ascension into heaven. So, every day, but especially during the month of October, pray the Rosary. After the Mass, we have no greater prayer. Amen.