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### Pope John Paul II's Apostolic Letter on the Rosary

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## POPE JOHN PAUL II'S APOSTOLIC LETTER ON THE ROSARY

*Fr. Myles Murphy, S.T.L. \**

### Introduction

From my youthful years this prayer has held an important place in my spiritual life. I was powerfully reminded of this during my recent visit to Poland, and in particular at the Shrine of Kalwaria. The Rosary has accompanied me in moments of joy and in moments of difficulty. To it I have entrusted any number of concerns; in it I have always found comfort. Twenty-four years ago, on 29 October 1978, scarcely two weeks after my election to the See of Peter, I frankly admitted: The Rosary is my favorite prayer. A marvelous prayer! Marvelous in its simplicity and its depth. . . . How many graces have I received in these years from the Blessed Virgin through the Rosary: *Magnificat anima mea Dominum!* I wish to lift up my thanks to the Lord in the words of his Most Holy Mother, under whose protection I have placed my Petrine ministry: *Totus Tuus!*<sup>1</sup>

Pope John Paul II opens the Apostolic Letter *Rosarium Virginis Mariae* on a personal note. These words reflect his devotion to the Virgin Mary and the Rosary, and his confidence in the power of her intercession. Many of us "came" to Mary in our youth; others came later in life. In *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*, John Paul tells of his coming to know Mary: "During the Second World War, while I was employed as a fac-

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<sup>1</sup>John Paul II, "Apostolic Letter *Rosarium Virginis Mariae* of the Supreme Pontiff John Paul II to the Bishops, Clergy and Faithful on the Most Holy Rosary" (Washington, D.C.: U.S.C.C.B., 2003), 2. Hereafter RVM. References to this Apostolic Letter, as well as to other ecclesial documents in this article, will be to the numbered section of the document, not the page.

tory worker, I came to be attracted to Marian devotion. At first, it seemed to me that I should distance myself a bit from the Marian devotion of my childhood, in order to focus more on Christ. Thanks to St. Louis of Montfort, I came to understand that true devotion to the Mother of God is actually Christocentric, indeed, it is very profoundly rooted in the mystery of the Blessed Trinity, and the mysteries of the Incarnation and Redemption."<sup>2</sup>

Another major influence was Jan Tyranowski whose cause for canonization is now under review and of whom the pope said, "He was a very important person in my life and in my way to the priesthood. He showed me the beauty of eternal life." At the age of nineteen or twenty, Karol Wojtyla joined a prayer group called the Living Rosary led by Tyranowski. Fifteen young men would gather with Tyranowski on a weekly basis. Each would pray a decade of the Rosary every day, while meditating on a particular mystery of the Rosary. Using the Rosary as a foundation, Tyranowski taught the young men to model their lives on Christ.<sup>3</sup> The pope may have had this early experience in mind as he addressed the members of the Living Rosary (April, 1987): "As you recite your 'mystery' or 'decade,' you are following the inspiration of the Holy Spirit who, by means of interior instruction, is leading you to ever closer imitation of Jesus, making you pray with Mary, and above all, like Mary."<sup>4</sup>

John Paul II is recognized as a "Marian pope." At the end of his papal documents and his Wednesday audiences, he always makes reference to Mary. More than a request for Mary's intercession, these references point to the place that Mary has in the life of the Church and her role in the economy of salvation. His encyclical *On the Eucharist in the Church* includes a chapter: "At the School of Mary: Woman of the Eucharist." This should not come as a surprise because this pope believes that, "Never in human history did so much depend, as it did [at the Annunciation], upon the

<sup>2</sup>John Paul II, *Crossing the Threshold of Hope* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1994), 212-213.

<sup>3</sup>Robert Feeney, *The Rosary: The Little Summa* (Aquinas Press, 1991, 2001), 74.

<sup>4</sup>Feeney, *The Rosary*, 76 (citing *L'Osservatore Romano*, Vatican City, May 18, 1987, p. 24).

consent of one human creature.”<sup>5</sup> Let us now take a look at John Paul’s letter.

### **The Rosary—Beloved Prayer of the Church**

The pope describes the Rosary as a prayer of great significance, formed under the guidance of the Spirit of God and loved by countless Saints. His predecessors, including Leo XIII (the Pope of the Rosary), John XXIII, and Paul VI spoke of its importance. It is a prayer form in harmony with the spiritual journey of the Christian life and, while it is Marian in character, it is at heart a “Christocentric” prayer (RVM 1). Contained within the Rosary, one finds a “compendium” of the Gospel message in its entirety. While praying the Rosary, two things happen: one sits at the “school of Mary” (a term also found in the *Eucharist in the Church*), led by her to contemplate the beauty in the face of Christ, while experiencing at the same time the depths of his love and receiving abundant grace, “as though from the very hands of the Mother of the Redeemer” (RVM 1). Here, John Paul repeats what he said two weeks after being chosen pope: “The principal events of the life of Jesus pass before the eyes of the soul. They take shape in the joyful, sorrowful, and glorious mysteries, and they put us in living communion with Jesus through—we might say—the heart of his Mother” (RVM 2). In the Rosary’s decades, one finds the events of the life of Christ, and also intertwined with those mysteries are the events that make up the lives of all peoples, the Church and nations. “The simple prayer of the Rosary marks the rhythm of human life” (RVM 2).

The Apostolic Letter *On the Most Holy Rosary* was written as a “Marian compliment” to the Jubilee letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte* to exhort people to contemplate the face of Christ in union with, and at the school of, Mary—“to contemplate with Mary the face of Christ” (RVM 3). The pope issued his letter during the twenty-fifth year of his pontificate. In addition to presenting the many positive values of the Rosary, he wished

<sup>5</sup>John Paul II, “Apostolic Letter *Tertio Millennio Adveniente* . . . to the Bishops, Clergy, and Lay Faithful, On Preparation for the Jubilee of the Year 2000” (Boston: Pauline Books & Media, 1994), 2. Hereafter TMA.

to address two factors which may have contributed to a certain crisis of the Rosary.

His first concern is that the Rosary continues to be devalued because of a misunderstanding of the Second Vatican's Council's proper emphasis on the centrality of the liturgy. This of course is regrettable, for he believes that "the Second Vatican Council made great strides forward with regard to both Marian doctrine and devotion."<sup>6</sup> John Paul repeats the teaching in Paul VI's *Marialis Cultus*<sup>7</sup> that the Rosary does not contradict the liturgy, but sustains it, serving as an excellent introduction and faithful recapitulation of the liturgy. Thus, those who pray the Rosary will more fully participate in the liturgy and harvest its fruit in their lives. A second concern which the letter addresses is whether, because of its Marian character, the Rosary is contrary to the ecumenical spirit. The response is that the Rosary is directed to Christ, the "center of the Christian faith, in such a way that 'when the Mother is honored, the Son . . . is duly known, loved and glorified'" (RVM 4).<sup>8</sup> Properly revitalized and understood, the Rosary would be an aid and not a hindrance to ecumenism. The Rosary goes to the very heart of the Christian life by offering a fruitful way leading to personal contemplation and evangelization.

The letter also addresses those (and there are many) who allege that the Rosary is a dry, repetitious, boring exercise. In effect, it depends on how you look at it . . . as is true with all prayer for that matter. John Paul cites a familiar exchange between Jesus and Peter to support his position. After all, it was Jesus who asked Peter three times (almost as if he wanted to hear it over and over again) whether he loved Him. Three times he replied: "Lord, you know that I love you" (Jn. 21:15-17). A repetitious prayer can be seen "as an outpouring of that love which tirelessly returns to the person loved with expressions similar in their content but ever fresh in terms of the feeling

<sup>6</sup>John Paul II, *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*, 213.

<sup>7</sup>Paul VI, "Apostolic Exhortation for the Right Ordering and Development of Devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary: *Marialis Cultus*" (Boston: Daughters of St. Paul, 1974); hereafter MC.

<sup>8</sup>See also *Lumen Gentium*, 66. (Hereafter LG.)

pervading them" (RVM 26). Thus, the Rosary can only be understood if one enters into the psychological dynamic proper to love. First and foremost, there is or should be, a desire among those who pray the Rosary, while repeating the same prayers, to be conformed more completely to Christ. Paul expressed this project with words that the Pope describes as "fire": "For me to live is Christ and to die is gain" (Phil. 1:21). Also: "It is no longer I that live, but Christ lives in me" (Gal. 2:20).

The Hail Mary, though addressed to Mary, is ultimately directed to her Son . . . with and through her: "The center of gravity in the Hail Mary, the hinge as it were which joins its two parts, is the name of Jesus" (RVM 33). The Rosary helps us to be conformed ever more closely to Christ until we attain true holiness and "when we repeat the name of Jesus—the only name given to us by which we may hope for salvation (cf. Acts 4:12)—in close association with the name of his Blessed Mother, almost as if it were done at her suggestion, we set out on a path of assimilation meant to help us enter more deeply into the life of Christ" (RVM 33).

At the beginning of the new millennium, the Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte* asked Christians to approach prayer as "training in holiness" and to become familiarized with the art of prayer (NMI 32). Christian communities should become "genuine schools of prayer." The pope believes that the Rosary necessarily must be included in the "curriculum" of any school of prayer for the following reasons: First among the reasons for praying the Rosary is that it represents a "most effective means of fostering among the faithful that *commitment to the contemplation of the Christian mystery*" (RVM 5).

The Rosary is especially necessary for our troubled times. In the face of violent attacks at the beginning of our millennium, God should be implored for the gift of peace. The Rosary itself is a prayer for peace since it contemplates the Prince of Peace; in addition, the one who prays for peace must also be committed to advancing peace in the world. The Rosary, because it is a prayer to the One who is "our peace" (Eph. 2:14), can have a tranquil effect on those who pray it. The difficult "battle" for peace, as the Pope calls it, can be won because, just as peace is threatened now, the Church when threatened at other

times, down through the centuries, was delivered through the intercession of Our Lady. After the terrorist attack on the United States on September 11, 2001, the pope appealed "to all individuals and families and communities to pray the Rosary for peace, even daily, so that the world will be preserved from the dreadful scourge of terrorism."<sup>9</sup>

The revival of the Rosary in Christian families will serve to strengthen families to counteract the devastating influences which threaten this fundamental and indispensable institution. The pope repeats the words made famous by the Servant of God Father Patrick Peyton: "The family that prays together stays together" (RVM 41).

### **Contemplating Christ with Mary**

"To look upon the face of Christ, to recognize its mystery amid the daily events and the sufferings of his human life, and then to grasp the divine splendor definitively revealed in the Risen Lord, seated in glory at the right hand of the Father: this is the task of every follower of Christ and therefore the task of each one of us. In contemplating Christ's face we become open to receiving the mystery of Trinitarian life, experiencing ever anew the love of the Father and delighting in the joy of the Holy Spirit" (RVM 9).

The letter continues that the Blessed Mother is unique when considering what it means to contemplate the face of Christ—because the face of the Son first belonged to Mary. No one has ever been so devoted to the contemplation of the face of Christ as faithfully as Mary because, not only was He formed in her womb, but also her gaze, from the Annunciation to the Ascension, "would never leave him" (RVM 10). As Luke relates in his Gospel (Lk. 2:19; cf. 2:51), she was present to Him, her heart was filled with memories of him. As we pray the Rosary, remembering the life of Christ, we imitate Mary whose memory served as a Rosary which she recited uninterruptedly throughout her life here and now in heaven. In imitating her,

<sup>9</sup>Feeney, *The Rosary*, 91 (citing *L'Osservatore Romano*, October 3, 2001, p. 2).

we enter into contact with those memories and the contemplative gaze of Mary.

If the Rosary is not a contemplative prayer, it has no meaning. Recall the words of Paul VI: "Without contemplation, the Rosary is a body without a soul, and its recitation runs the risk of becoming a mechanical repetition of formulas, in violation of the admonition of Christ: 'In praying do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do; for they think they will be heard for their many words'" (Mt. 6:7) (RVM 12, citing MC 47). "By its nature the recitation of the Rosary calls for a quiet rhythm and a lingering pace, helping the individual to meditate on the mysteries of the Lord's life as seen through the eyes of her who was closest to the Lord. In this way," as Paul VI stated, "the unfathomable riches of these mysteries are disclosed." (RVM 12, citing MC 47).

When praying the Rosary, the believer contemplates Christ in union with Mary! Mary would not have it any other way. In an address given at St. Mary Major in Rome in 1980, John Paul said: "No one in the history of the world has been more Christocentric and Christophoric than she. And no one has been more like Him, not only with the natural likeness of mother and son, but with the likeness of the Spirit and holiness."<sup>10</sup>

John Paul's Christological position has been explained by John Saward: "The Pope's Christocentricity is Marian, and his Mariology is Christocentric. He looks on Jesus through Mary, but he looks on Mary through Jesus."<sup>11</sup> Professor Saward also believes that John Paul would concur with Hans Urs von Balthasar: "Without Mariology, Christianity threatens imperceptibly to become inhuman. The Church becomes functionalistic, soulless, a hectic enterprise without any point of rest, estranged from its true nature by the planners, and because, in this manly-masculine world, all that we have is one ideology replacing another, everything becomes polemical, critical, bit-

<sup>10</sup>John Saward, *Christ Is the Answer: The Christ-centered Teaching of Pope John Paul II* (New York: Alba House, 1995), 27 (citing papal address at St. Mary Major, August 12, 1980).

<sup>11</sup>Saward, *Christ Is the Answer*, 28. For a synopsis of the Pope's Christocentric teaching on Mary, see Chap. 5, "The Christocentric Mary"



ter, humorless and ultimately boring, and people in their masses run away from such a Church."<sup>12</sup>

### Remembering Christ with Mary

Mary's contemplation is defined as *a remembering*, but understood in a biblical sense. Remembrance (*zakar*) is the "making present of the works brought about by God in the history of salvation." The events that Mary remembers and contemplates belong to and are part of the present, even though they occurred yesterday; "they are also part of the 'today' of salvation" (RVM 13). They are especially present in the liturgy. At the Mass, we remember and contemplate what took place at that first Last Supper and at Calvary. That first Mass and Good Friday affects all future generations every bit as much as it affected those who first participated at and witnessed the event. So too the praying of the Rosary, as well as every devout approach to the events of redemption, opens one to "the grace which Christ won for us by the mysteries of his life, death and resurrection" (RVM 13). Here, the letter cites the teaching of Vatican II's *Sacrosanctum Concilium*: "It is also necessary to recall that the spiritual life 'is not limited solely to participation in the liturgy. Christians, while they are called to prayer in common, must also go to their own rooms to pray to their Father in secret (cf. Mt 6:6); indeed, according to the teaching of the Apostle, they must pray without ceasing (cf. 1 Thes 5:17)'" (RVM 13, citing SC 10). Meditating on the mystery of Christ with Mary has its role in that ceaseless prayer of the Church.

### Learning Christ from Mary

No earthly creature knows Christ better than Mary. No one could better teach us to learn Him, *not just about Him*, better than Mary. At Cana, she urges the servants to do what Jesus tells them. It is also possible to imagine that Mary did the same with the Apostles gathered in the Upper Room after the Ascension. Just as she taught the first Apostles by her presence

<sup>12</sup>Saward, *Christ Is the Answer*, 42-43 (citing Balthasar, *Elucidations* [Eng. trans.; London: S.P.C.K., 1975], 72).

and encouragement, so too, can she direct the followers of her Son. "Contemplating the scenes of the Rosary in union with Mary is a means of learning from her to 'read' Christ, to discover his secrets and to understand his message" (RVM 14).

The distinguishing aspect of a Christians spirituality is the desire to be conformed to Christ. The life of the disciple calls for a growing assimilation into Christ, shaping the conduct of the disciple with that of Christ or as St. Paul said; "putting on the mind of Christ" (Phil 2:5). To pray the Rosary is to take a spiritual journey, along with Mary, in contemplation of the face of Christ. In doing so we become friends with Him and the best of friends share their deepest feelings. Blessed Bartolo Longo, whom John Paul calls "a true apostle of the Rosary" wrote: "Just as two friends, frequently in each other's company, tend to develop similar habits, so too, by holding familiar converse with Jesus and the Blessed Virgin, by meditating on the mysteries of the Rosary and by living the same life in Holy Communion, we can become, to the extent of our lowliness, similar to them and can learn from these supreme models a life of humility, poverty, hiddenness, patience and perfection" (RVM 15, n. 18).

Contemplating Christ in the Rosary, the believer entrusts oneself to the maternal care of Mary who is Mother of Christ, the Church, and a "preeminent and altogether singular member" of that Church (RVM 15, citing LG 53). As Mary busied herself with the care for her young Son at Nazareth, we are transported to Mary's side all the while being trained and molded with the same care she gave to her Son until Christ is "fully formed" in us (Gal 4:19). The pope cites the words of his spiritual mentor, St. Louis Marie Grignon de Montfort: "*Our entire perfection consists in being conformed, united and consecrated to Jesus Christ.* Hence the most perfect of all devotions is undoubtedly that which conforms, unites and consecrates us most perfectly to Jesus Christ." Now, Mary is the one most conformed to Jesus Christ, and "among all devotions that which most consecrates and conforms a soul to our Lord is devotion to Mary, his Holy Mother, and that the more a soul is consecrated to her the more will it be consecrated to Jesus Christ" (RVM 15, n. 22). The pope's firm belief and confidence in this teaching of St. Louis, from whom he took *Totus Tuus* as

his episcopal motto,<sup>13</sup> led him to conclude that, "Never as in the Rosary do the life of Jesus and that of Mary appear so deeply joined. Mary lives only in Christ and for Christ" (RVM 15).

### **Mysteries of Christ—Mysteries of His Mother**

Of the many scenes from Christ's life, only a few are in the present form of the rosary, in the traditional fifteen decades which deal mostly with the birth, sufferings, death, resurrection and ascension of Christ. John Paul II wished to broaden the Christological dimension of the Rosary with a new set of mysteries. These new mysteries would be centered on the period of the public ministry of Christ—between his baptism and his passion. "During the years of his public ministry, . . . the mystery of Christ is most evidently a mystery of light: 'While I am in the world, I am the light of the world' (Jn 9:5)" (RVM 19). So, John Paul proposes what he calls the "luminous mysteries" or mysteries of light.

In these mysteries, the Incarnation and the hidden life of Christ, the sufferings of His passion and the triumph of His resurrection will be joined by the significant moments of His public ministry. These new mysteries of the Rosary will enable the prayer to become more fully a "compendium of the Gospel." It is also the hope of the Pope that these new mysteries will give fresh life to the Rosary and "enkindle renewed interest in the Rosary . . . as a true doorway to the depths of the Heart of Christ, ocean of joy and of light, of suffering and of glory" (RVM 19).

The joyful mysteries, are described as "marked by *the joy radiating from the event of the Incarnation*. Gabriel's greeting to the Virgin of Nazareth is linked to an invitation to messianic joy: 'Rejoice, Mary.'" The Pope cites Saint Paul who said that it is the Father's plan to unite all things in Christ (Eph 1:10), "then the whole of the universe is in some way touched by the divine favor with which the Father looks upon Mary and makes her the Mother of his Son. The whole of humanity, in turn, is embraced by the *fiat* with which she readily agrees to the will of God" (RVM 20).

<sup>13</sup>Antoine Nacheff, *Mary's Pope: John Paul II, Mary, and the Church since Vatican II* (Franklin, Wis.: Sheed and Ward, 2000), 3. Also, see RVM 15, n. 21.

At the Visitation, where the sound of Mary's voice and the presence of Christ in her womb caused John to "leap for joy" (Lk 1:44) in his mother's womb, there was exaltation. In Bethlehem, gladness enters in because of the birth of the Savior which is announced by the song of the angels and proclaimed to the shepherds as "news of great joy" (Lk 2:10). The last two mysteries, the Presentation and the Finding of the Child Jesus in the Temple, while truly joyful events, point to what awaits Jesus. "Mary leads us to discover the secret of Christian joy." It is she who reminds us that "Christianity is, first and foremost, *euangelion*, "good news," which has as its heart and its whole content the person of Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh, the one Savior of the world" (RVM 20).

In between the Joyful and Sorrowful Mysteries, the Pope inserts the Mysteries of Light. Columnist Peggy Noonan had a keen insight into the Pope's reason for introducing the new mysteries. In *The Wall Street Journal* she wrote that: "The most startling thing about his announcement is that it doesn't seem so much an addition to a tradition as the filling of a gap. The new mysteries seem like something that had originally been there but was somehow lost to time."<sup>14</sup> The whole mystery of Christ is described by the Pope as a mystery of light, because He is the "light of the world" (Jn 8:12). It comes to the fore, however, in the years of His public life when He proclaims the Gospel. The five new mysteries are: 1) the Baptism in the Jordan, 2) the Manifestation at the Wedding in Cana, 3) the Proclamation of the Kingdom of God with the Call to Conversion, 4) the Transfiguration and 5) the Institution of the Eucharist. "Each of these mysteries is *a revelation of the Kingdom now present in the very person of Jesus*" (RVM 21). These five mysteries all have a Marian foundation simply because of the role Mary assumed at Cana. The words uttered by Mary at the wedding to the servants, namely, "Do whatever He tells you" (Jn 2:5) were the Father's words at the Son's baptism in the Jordan and were echoed by John the Baptist. Those words by Mary accompanied Jesus all during His ministry and became

<sup>14</sup>Peggy Noonan, "Man of Mystery: The Pope Changes the Rosary," *The Wall Street Journal*, October 18, 2002., Op. Ed.

"the great maternal counsel which Mary addresses to the Church of every age" (RVM 21).

The five sorrowful mysteries, drawn from the Gospel, focus the person on the individual moments of Christ's passion because it is "*the culmination of the revelation of God's love*" (RVM 22). "The 'Yes' of Christ reverses the 'No' of our first parents in the Garden of Eden." The faithfulness and suffering of the Son reveal not only the love of the Godhead for His creation but also the man himself. *Ecce Homo!* Thus, "the meaning, origin and fulfilment of man is to be found in Christ, the God who humbles himself out of love 'even unto death, death on a cross' (Phil 2:8)" (RVM 22). It is in the sorrowful mysteries that the believer is helped to "relive the death of Jesus, to stand at the foot of the Cross beside Mary, to enter with her into the depths of God's love for man and to experience all its life-giving power" (RVM 22).

However, "the contemplation of the Christ's face cannot stop at the image of the Crucified One. He is the Risen One!" (RVM 23). The Rosary invites the believer to go beyond the "darkness of the Passion." One finds the glory of Christ's Resurrection and Ascension. One can relive the joy of the Apostles, Mary Magdalene and the disciples on the road to Emmaus but most especially the joy of Mary, who experienced in a more intense way the new life of her glorified Son (RVM 23). Contemplating the Glorious Mysteries—the Resurrection, the Ascension, the Descent of the Holy Spirit, the Assumption and the Crowning of Mary as Queen of Heaven and Earth—will "lead the faithful to *greater hope for the eschatological goal*" (RVM 23) as they journey through life as the pilgrim People of God.

### **Mary's Way: From "Mysteries" to the "Mystery"**

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* speaks of the "Mystery" of Christ: "Everything in the life of Jesus is a sign of his Mystery" (RVM 24). The "*duc in altum*" of the Church of the third millennium will be determined by the ability of Christians to enter into what St. Paul calls the 'perfect knowledge of God's mystery, of Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge' (Col 2:2-3)." St. Paul's letter to the Ephesians makes a heartfelt prayer for all the baptized: "May

Christ dwell in your hearts through faith, so that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have power . . . to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God" (3:17-19) (RVM 24). "The Rosary is at the service of this ideal; it offers the 'secret' which leads easily to a profound and inward knowledge of Christ"—Mary's Way. Marian devotion should be, first and foremost, inspired by knowledge of the inseparable bond between Christ and his Blessed Mother. This inseparable bond between the Son and His Mother is why "*the mysteries of Christ* are also in some sense *the mysteries of his Mother*, even when they do not involve her directly, for she lives from him and through him" (RVM 24).

### **Mystery of Christ, Mystery of Man**

The Rosary, the pope repeats, is his favorite prayer and this "simple prayer . . . marks the rhythm of human life" (RVM 25). It has anthropological significance. Anyone who contemplates the mysteries of Jesus should discover in Him "*the truth about man*...: 'it is only in the mystery of the Word made flesh that the mystery of man is seen in its true light'" (RVM 25, n. 32). The Rosary helps one to see the truth of this teaching. Following in Christ's path, "in whom man's path is 'recapitulated' [as St. Irenaeus said], revealed and redeemed, believers come face to face with the image of the true man." (RVM 25). Among the ways the Rosary reveals the meaning of human life are the following: contemplating Christ's birth, we learn of the sanctity of life; seeing the household of Nazareth, we learn the original truth of the family according to God's plan; listening to the Master in the mysteries of his public ministry, we find the light which leads to the Kingdom of God; following Christ on the way to Calvary, we learn the meaning of salvific suffering; finally, contemplating Christ and his Blessed Mother in glory, we "see the goal towards which each of us is called, if we allow ourselves to be healed and transformed by the Holy Spirit" (RVM 25).

Thus, each mystery of the Rosary, carefully meditated upon, including now . . . the Mysteries of Light, sheds light on the mystery of man—all his problems, anxieties, labors and endeavors which are part and parcel to life. The Pope exhorts the faithful, with a warm invitation, to experience personally how

the Rosary can "mark the rhythm of human life' and bring it into, as he says, the 'rhythm' of God's own life" (RVM 25).

Over the years, I have found that the Rosary is not just one of the many "tools" to help people come closer to the Lord and His mother. Other than the Mass and the sacraments, the Rosary, in my experience, is *the* tool given the Church to foster in both young and old a desire to come to, as many of us were taught at a young age, know, love and serve God in this life and in doing so be happy with Him in the life to come. My own pastoral experience is evidence that the Rosary can be a "tool" in helping others, including non-Catholics, to know the Lord and Mary better. In our parish school, I often pray the Rosary with our children, many of whom are not Catholic. The non-Catholics are just as excited, just as happy to pray and have as many questions about Jesus, Mary and the Rosary as our Catholic children do. For thirteen years this has been my practice and not once have I had a problem with a child or parents as to whether or not they should pray the Rosary.

Let us, therefore, as those committed to Jesus and Mary, take careful note of the Letter's final exhortation: The rosary is a prayer of peace, a "sweet chain" linking us to God, a treasury to be rediscovered (RVM 43). We conclude with a prayer of Pope John Paul:

O Virgin full of courage, may your spiritual strength and trust in God inspire us, so that we might know how to overcome all the obstacles that we encounter in accomplishing our mission. . . . You who were gathered in prayer with the Apostles in the Cenacle, awaiting the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost, implore his renewed outpouring on all the faithful, men and women alike, so that they might more fully respond to their vocation and mission, as branches engrafted to the true vine, called to bear much fruit for the life of the world.

O Virgin Mother, guide and sustain us so that might always live as true sons and daughters of the Church of your Son. Enable us to do our part in helping to establish on earth the civilization of truth and love, as God wills it, for His glory. Amen.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>15</sup>John Paul II, *The Lay Members of Christ's Faithful People* (Boston: Pauline Books & Media, 1988), 166-167.