

IUCUNDA SEMPER
EXPECTATIONE
ENCYCLICAL OF POPE LEO XIII
ON THE ROSARY

September 8, 1894

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

Venerable Brethren, Greeting and Apostolic Benediction.

It is always with joyful expectation and inspired hope that We look forward to the return of the month of October. At Our exhortation and by Our express order this month has been consecrated to the Blessed Virgin, during which for some years now the devotion of her Rosary has been practised by Catholic nations throughout the world with sedulous earnestness. Our reasons for making this exhortation We have made known more than once. For as the disastrous condition of the Church and of Society proved to Us the extreme necessity for signal aid from God, it was manifest to Us that aid should be sought through the intercession of His Mother, and by the express means of the Rosary, which Christians have ever found to be of marvellous avail. This indeed has been well proved since the very institution of the devotion, both in the vindication of Holy Faith against the furious attacks of heresy, and in restoring to honour the virtues, which by reason of the Age's corruption, required to be rekindled and sustained. And this same proof was continued in all succeeding ages, by a never failing series of private and public benefits, whereof the illustrious remembrance is everywhere perpetuated and immortalized by monuments and existing institutions. Likewise in Our age, afflicted with that tempest of various evils, it is a joy to Our soul to relate the beneficent influence of the Rosary. Notwithstanding all this, you yourselves, Venerable Brethren, behold with your own eyes the persistence - nay, the increase - of the reasons for renewing again this year Our summons to the Faithful to turn with increased ardour in prayer to Mary, the Queen of Heaven. Besides, the more We fix Our thoughts upon the character of the Rosary, the clearer its excellence and power appear to Us. Hence, while Our wish increases that it may flourish, Our hope grows also that through Our recommendation it may come to be more greatly prized, its holy use become more extended and flourish abundantly. But We shall not now return to the various instructions which in past years We have given upon this subject. We shall take instead the opportunity of pointing out the particular ruling and designs of Providence which ordains that the Rosary should have new power to instill confidence into the hearts of those who pray, and new influence to move the compassionate heart of Our Mother to comfort and succour Us with the utmost bounty.

2. The recourse we have to Mary in prayer follows upon the office she continuously fills by the side of the throne of God as Mediatrix of Divine grace; being by worthiness and by merit most acceptable to Him, and, therefore, surpassing in power all the angels and saints in Heaven. Now, this merciful office of hers, perhaps, appears in no other form of prayer so manifestly as it does

in the Rosary. For in the Rosary all the part that Mary took as our co-Redemptress comes to us, as it were, set forth, and in such wise as though the facts were even then taking place; and this with much profit to our piety, whether in the contemplation of the succeeding sacred mysteries, or in the prayers which we speak and repeat with the lips. First come the Joyful Mysteries. The Eternal Son of God stoops to mankind, putting on its nature; but with the assent of Mary, who conceives Him by the Holy Ghost. Then St. John the Baptist, by a singular privilege, is sanctified in his mother's womb and favoured with special graces that he might prepare the way of the Lord; and this comes to pass by the greeting of Mary who had been inspired to visit her cousin. At last the expected of nations comes to light, Christ the Saviour. The Virgin bears Him. And when the Shepherds and the wise men, first-fruits of the Christian faith, come with longing to His cradle, they find there the young Child, with Mary, His Mother. Then, that He might before men offer Himself as a victim to His Heavenly Father, He desires to be taken to the Temple; and by the hands of Mary He is there presented to the Lord. It is Mary who, in the mysterious losing of her Son, seeks Him sorrowing, and finds Him again with joy. And the same truth is told again in the sorrowful mysteries.

3. In the Garden of Gethsemane, where Jesus is in an agony; in the judgment-hall, where He is scourged, crowned with thorns, condemned to death, not there do we find Mary. But she knew beforehand all these agonies; she knew and saw them. When she professed herself the handmaid of the Lord for the mother's office, and when, at the foot of the altar, she offered up her whole self with her Child Jesus-then and thereafter she took her part in the laborious expiation made by her Son for the sins of the world. It is certain, therefore, that she suffered in the very depths of her soul with His most bitter sufferings and with His torments. Moreover, it was before the eyes of Mary that was to be finished the Divine Sacrifice for which she had borne and brought up the Victim. As we contemplate Him in the last and most piteous of those Mysteries, there stood by the Cross of Jesus His Mother, who, in a miracle of charity, so that she might receive us as her sons, offered generously to Divine Justice her own Son, and died in her heart with Him, stabbed with the sword of sorrow.

4. Thence the Rosary takes us on to the Glorious Mysteries, wherein likewise is revealed the mediation of the great Virgin, still more abundant in fruitfulness. She rejoices in heart over the glory of her Son triumphant over death, and follows Him with a mother's love in His Ascension to His eternal kingdom; but, though worthy of Heaven, she abides a while on earth, so that the infant Church may be directed and comforted by her "who penetrated, beyond all belief, into the deep secrets of Divine wisdom" (St. Bernard). Nevertheless, for the fulfilment of the task of human redemption there remains still the coming of the Holy Ghost, promised by Christ. And behold, Mary is in the room, and there, praying with the Apostles and entreating for them with sobs and tears, she hastens for the Church the coming of the Spirit, the Comforter, the supreme gift of Christ, the treasure that will never fail. And later, without measure and without end will she be able to plead our cause, passing upon a day to the life immortal. Therefore we behold her taken up from this valley of tears into the heavenly Jerusalem, amid choirs of Angels. And we honour her, glorified above all the Saints, crowned with stars by her Divine Son and seated at His side the sovereign Queen of the universe.

5. If in all this series of Mysteries, Venerable Brethren, are developed the counsels of God in regard to us - "counsels of wisdom and of tenderness" (St. Bernard) - not less apparent is the greatness of the benefits for which we are debtors to the Virgin Mother. No man can meditate upon these without feeling a new awakening in his heart of confidence that he will certainly obtain through Mary the fulness of the mercies of God. And to this end vocal prayer chimes well with the Mysteries. First, as is meet and right, comes the Lord's Prayer, addressed to Our Father in Heaven: and having, with the elect petitions dictated by Our Divine Master, called upon the Father, from the throne of His Majesty we turn our prayerful voices to Mary. Thus is confirmed that law of merciful meditation of which We have spoken, and which St. Bernardine of Siena thus expresses: "Every grace granted to man has three degrees in order; for by God it is communicated to Christ, from Christ it passes to the Virgin, and from the Virgin it descends to us." And we, by the very form of the Rosary, do linger longest, and, as it were, by preference upon the last and lowest of these steps, repeating by decades the Angelic Salutation, so that with greater confidence we may thence attain to the higher degrees-that is, may rise, by means of Christ, to the Divine Father. For if thus we again and again greet Mary, it is precisely that our failing and defective prayers may be strengthened with the necessary confidence; as though we pledged her to pray for us, and as it were in our name, to God.

6. Nor can our prayers fail to ascend to Him as a sweet savour, commended by the prayers of the Virgin. And He it is who, all-benign, invites her: "Let thy voice sound in My ears, for thy voice is sweet." For this cause do we repeatedly celebrate those glorious titles of her ministry as Mediatrix. Her do we greet who found favour with God, and who was in a signal manner filled with grace by Him so that the superabundance thereof might overflow upon all men; her, united with the Lord by the most intimate of all conjunction; her who was blessed among women, and who "alone took away the curse and bore the blessing" (St. Thomas)-that fruit of her womb, that happy fruit, in which all the nations of the earth are blessed. Her do we invoke, finally, as Mother of God; and in virtue of a dignity so sublime what graces from her may we not promise to ourselves, sinners, in life and in the agonies of the end?

7. A soul that shall devoutly repeat these prayers, that shall ponder with faith these mysteries, will, without doubt, be filled with wonder at the Divine purposes in this great Virgin and in the work of the restoration of mankind. Doubtless, this soul, moved by the warmth of love for her and of confidence, will desire to take refuge upon her breast, as was the sweet feeling of St. Bernard: "Remember, O most pious Virgin Mary, that never was it heard that any who fled to thy protection, called upon thy help, and sought thy intercession, was left forsaken." But the fruits of the Rosary appear likewise, and with equal greatness, in the turning with mercy of the heart of the Mother of God towards us. How sweet a happiness must it be for her to see us all intent upon the task of weaving crowns for her of righteous prayers and lovely praises! And if, indeed, by those prayers we desire to render to God the glory which is His due; if we protest that we seek nothing whatsoever except the fulfilment in us of His holy will; if we magnify His goodness and graciousness; if we call Him Our Father; if we, being most unworthy, yet entreat of Him His best blessings - Oh, how shall Mary in all these things rejoice! How shall she magnify the Lord! There is no language so fit to lead us to the majesty of God as the language of the Lord's Prayer. Furthermore, to each of these things for which we pray, things that are righteous and are ordered, and are in harmony with Christian faith, hope, and charity, is added a special joy for the Blessed

Virgin. With our voices she seems to hear also the voice of her Divine Son, Who with His own mouth taught us this prayer, and by His own authority commanded it, saying: "You shall pray thus." And seeing how we observe that command, saying our Rosary, she will bend towards us with the more loving solicitude; and the mystical crowns we offer her will be to her welcome, and to us fruitful of graces. And of this generosity of Mary to our supplications we have no slight pledge in the very nature of a practice that has the power to help us in praying well. In many ways, indeed, is man apt, by his frailty, to allow his thoughts to wander from God and to let his purpose go astray. But the Rosary, if rightly considered, will be found to have in itself special virtues, whether for producing and continuing a state of recollection, or for touching the conscience for its healing, or for lifting up the soul. As all men know, it is composed of two parts, distinct but inseparable—the meditation of the Mysteries and the recitation of the prayers. It is thus a kind of prayer that requires not only some raising of the soul to God, but also a particular and explicit attention, so that by reflection upon the things to be contemplated, impulses and resolutions may follow for the reformation and sanctification of life.

8. Those same things are, in fact, the most important and the most admirable of Christianity, the things through which the world was renewed and filled with the fruits of truth, justice, and peace. And it is remarkable how well adapted to every kind of mind, however unskilled, is the manner in which these things are proposed to us in the Rosary. They are proposed less as truths or doctrines to be speculated upon than as present facts to be seen and perceived. Thus presented, with the circumstances of place, time, and persons, these Mysteries produce the most living effect; and this without the slightest effort of imagination; for they are treated as things learnt and engraven in the heart from infancy. Thus, hardly is a Mystery named but the pious soul goes through it with ease of thought and quickness of feeling, and gathers therefrom, by the gift of Mary, abundance of the food of Heaven. And yet another title of joy and of acceptance in her eyes do our crowns of prayer acquire. For every time that we look once more with devotional remembrance upon these Mysteries we give her a sign of the gratitude of our hearts; we prove to her that we cannot often enough call to mind the blessings of her unwearied charity in the work of our salvation. At such recollections, practised by us with the frequency of love in her presence, who may express, who may even conceive, whatever new joys overflow her ever-blessed soul, and what tender affections arise therein, of mercy and of a mother's love! Besides these recollections, moreover, as the sacred Mysteries pass by they cause our prayers to be transformed into impulses of entreaty that have an indescribable power over the heart of Mary. Yes, we fly to thee, we miserable children of Eve, O holy Mother of God. To thee we lift our prayers, for thou art the Mediatrix, powerful at once and pitiful, of our salvation. Oh, by the sweetness of the joys that came to thee from thy Son Jesus, by thy participation in His ineffable sorrows, by the splendours of His glory shining in thee, we instantly beseech thee, listen, be pitiful, hear us, unworthy though we be!

9. Thus the excellence of the Rosary; considered under the double aspect We have here set forth, will convince you, Venerable Brethren, of the reasons We have for an incessant eagerness to commend and to promote it. At the present day - and on this We have already touched there is a signal necessity of special help from Heaven, particularly manifest in the many tribulations suffered by the Church as to her liberties and her rights, as also in the perils whereby the prosperity and peace of Christian society are fundamentally threatened. So it is that it belongs to

Our office to assert once again that We place the best of Our hopes in the holy Rosary, inasmuch as more than any other means it can impetrate from God the succour which We need. It is Our ardent wish that this devotion shall be restored to the place of honour; in the city and in the village, in the family and in the workshop, in the noble's house and in the peasant's; that it should be to all a dear devotion and a noble sign of their faith; that it may be a sure way to the gaining of the favour of pardon. To this end it is indispensable that zeal should be redoubled, while impiety daily redoubles its efforts and labours to move the justice of God and to provoke, for the general ruin, His terrible vengeance. Amongst so many causes of grief to all good men, and to Ourselves, not the least is this, that in the very midst of Catholic nations there exist persons who are ever ready to rejoice in that which insults and outrages our august religion; and that they themselves, with incredible effrontery and with all publicity, seize every opportunity of teaching the multitude to hold reverend things in contempt and of persuading them from their old confidence in the intercession of the Blessed Virgin. During the last months the very person of Our Divine Redeemer has not been spared. Such a depth of shameless indignity has been reached that Jesus Christ Himself has been dragged upon the stage of a theatre often contaminated with corruptions, and has been represented there discrowned of that Divinity upon which rests the whole work of human salvation. And the last touch of shame was added in an attempt to rescue from the execration of ages the guilty name of him who was the very sign of perfidy, the betrayer of Christ. At the consummation of such excesses in the cities of Italy there arose a general cry of indignation, and energetic protest against the violation and trampling under foot of the inviolable rights of religion, and this in a nation that has for its greatest and most righteous boast that it is Catholic. The Bishops rose at once, on fire with holy zeal. And first they made their vigorous appeal to those whose sacred duty it is to safeguard the decorum of the religion of the country. Next, they informed their people of the gravity of the scandal, and exhorted them to special acts of reparation towards our most loving Saviour exposed to such slanders.

10. We have pleasure, however, in rendering praise to the free and fruitful faith manifested by men of good will; and this has brought Us comfort in the bitterness inflicted upon the very quick of Our heart. And having regard to the duties of Our supreme ministry, We take this occasion to lift up Our voice and to unite Our complaints and protests to those of the Bishops and of their people, authenticated by Our Apostolic authority. And with a like ardour to that wherewith we condemned this sacrilegious offence, do We preach faith to all Catholics, and particularly to the Italians. Let them with jealous care guard this inestimable inheritance received from their fathers, let them defend it with courage, let them not cease from magnifying it with good actions of which their faith is the inspiring motive. This is a motive the more for the enkindling, in private and in common prayer, throughout the coming month of October, of a holy emulation in celebrating and honouring the Mother of God, the mighty succourer of the Christian people, the most glorious Queen of Heaven. For Our own part, We confirm with all Our heart the favours and indulgences We have already awarded upon this point.

11. Now may God, "Who in His most merciful Providence gave us this Mediatrix," and "decreed that all good should come to us by the hands of Mary" (St. Bernard), receive propitiously our common prayers and fulfil our common hopes. May you receive a pledge thereof in the Apostolic Benediction which We give to you, to your clergy, and to your people, with all affection in Our Lord.

Given in Rome at St. Peter's, on September 8, 1894, in the seventeenth year of our Pontificate.

LEO XIII

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