

“Contemplating Jesus with Mary in the Bible”

Talk given at the Archdiocesan Annual Rosary Rally

October 11, 2014

Introduction

It is always a joy for us to contemplate the mysteries of our faith in praying the Holy Rosary of our Blessed Mother. We see these mysteries of our faith unfold in the lives of our Lord and our Lady as we read about them in the Sacred Scriptures.

Meaning of Mystery

But before we can understand what it means to meditate on the mysteries of our faith, we first need to understand what a “mystery” is. In popular thought and language, a mystery is considered nothing more than a question to which no one can figure out the answer. In the Bible, though, and in the language of faith, a mystery is something quite different: a mystery is something hidden by God, to be revealed later. God reveals these mysteries to us in His own way and according to His own timeframe. One way we see this is in the development of our understanding of the depth and richness of the faith Christ revealed to his apostles and entrusted to them to safeguard and to teach. Throughout the course of these 2,000 years of Church history, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit whom Christ bestowed upon his Church at Pentecost, the Church has been able to explain in greater depth and clarity the truths of our faith as these truths have been questioned and challenged in the different cultural, political and social circumstances in which the Church has found herself.

Yet another way that the Spirit guides us in the way of all truth is in the great grace and privilege of private revelations he has granted to a very few believers, revelations which have later been approved and welcomed by the universal Church as a means of deepening our faith and devotion. We can think, for example, of Saint Margaret Mary Alacoque and the devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, or Saint Maria Faustina Kowalska and the Divine Mercy devotion. Indeed, what we are about today, praying the rosary and promoting our people’s understanding of the power of this prayer, comes originally from a private revelation: it was our Lady herself who revealed the rosary to Saint Dominic, making known to him that it would be one of the most powerful weapons against future errors and difficulties.

Ultimately, though, those good things that God has hidden from us will be fully revealed only at the end of time, when He will bring all of history to its consummation. Meanwhile, as the Church makes her pilgrim way through the time of this world to that great, final, eternal encounter, God uses these means of revelation to keep her on the path of truth and to give help and motivation to her children to make progress in the way of holiness, even in the face of the temptations and obstacles that the evil one and the world place before us. Really, though, God has already spoken His final word of revelation to us: the Word made flesh, His Son Jesus Christ, who took on

our human flesh in the womb of his Virgin Mother, in order to communicate God's final word of love and forgiveness to us.

A Biblical Prayer

He is the one who fulfills all of the prayers and aspirations of the children of Israel. That is why the Church, from the beginning, has joined her ancestors in faith in praying that most precious treasure of prayers that the ancient Jewish people has bequeathed to the world: the Psalms. And so it is that the traditional three sets of mysteries – Joyful, Sorrowful and Glorious – are prayed with ten Hail Mary's for each one, totaling 150 Hail Mary's. The traditional complete rosary corresponds to the 150 Psalms in the Psalter, and takes us through a meditation on the complete Paschal Mystery – our Lord's Incarnation, Passion and Death, and Glorification. It is, in fact, this biblical meditation that is the basis of the prayer that is the rosary, such that the rosary is, in essence, a biblical prayer. While this took on special importance in ages past when illiteracy was much more common than it is now, the rosary nonetheless retains this value for us today. Let us remember, after all, that the Bible is the record of revelation that God gave to our Jewish ancestors of old and to the first generation of Christians who began the proclamation of the Good News to all the world.

As we know, in his Apostolic Letter on the rosary, *Rosarium Virginis Mariae*, Saint John Paul II gave us an additional set of mysteries, the "Mysteries of Light" or "Luminous Mysteries," which focus our attention on significant moments in the life of our Lord during his public ministry. Whereas in the classic form of praying the rosary our meditation takes us from the time of our Lord's infancy and hidden life in Nazareth to his passion and death at the end of his earthly life, Saint John Paul has offered us this new set of mysteries as a way of including in the rhythm of our meditation certain privileged moments during the time our Lord spent preparing the world for that definitive Word of forgiveness and hope his Father would speak through His Son's death and Resurrection. As he says, "[e]ach of these mysteries is a *revelation of the Kingdom now present in the very person of Jesus*" (RVM 21).

And so we can see something even more in the mysteries that are the object of our meditation in praying the rosary: they have a certain sacramental character. That is, more than wonders and miracles, even more than opening a window we can peer through to see divine truth, they make that truth present to us. God's love becomes incarnate to us in these moments of revelation that are the mysteries in the lives of our Lord and our Lady.

Conclusion

It was through her, our Lady, the Blessed Virgin Mary, that God's love became incarnate in human flesh in the world: his Son Jesus Christ. She, beyond all others, is His child *par excellence* to whom He granted the privilege of a private revelation, one that would change the world, not for all of history, but for all eternity. In this very biblical prayer that is the rosary, then, we turn to Mary, so that she might direct us to her Son;

we do so by contemplating with her the mystery of our salvation as it unfolds in the mysteries of their lives. As such, the rosary is also, as Saint John Paul teaches us, a “school of Mary,” a school in which “the Christian people ... is led to contemplate the beauty on the face of Christ and to experience the depths of his love” (RVM, 1).

We contemplate with her the mysteries unfolding in the life of her Son and her own, with her who “kept all these things, pondering them in her heart” (*Lk* 2:19; cf. 2:51). Let us then take to heart the words with which Saint John Paul exhorts us, as we look to her to bring us closer to her Son in praying that biblical prayer that is the rosary, which in her love she has given to us, her children:

This school of Mary is all the more effective if we consider that she teaches by obtaining for us in abundance the gifts of the Holy Spirit, even as she offers us the incomparable example of her own ‘pilgrimage of faith’. As we contemplate each mystery of her Son’s life, she invites us to do as she did at the Annunciation: to ask humbly the questions which open us to the light, in order to end with the obedience of faith: ‘Behold I am the handmaid of the Lord; be it done to me according to your word’ (*Lk* 1:38) [RVM, 14].