

Rosary

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with the crowning of Mary as Queen of Heaven.

Thus, while the rosary is often associated with Marian devotion, it is actually a Christ-centered way of praying, Father Gaffney observed.

"The Hail Marys are really background music for meditating on the mysteries of the Gospel," Father Gaffney said. The focus is not so much on the prayers, he explained, but rather on the mysteries being contemplated — and how they relate to situations in our lives and in the world around us.

"When we say the rosary," the priest said, "we bring the events of our lives and enter into the mysteries of Christ. When we contemplate the agonies of Christ, we can bring in suffering we experience, or suffering in the world today, like Bosnia."

And the rosary also facilitates self-discovery, as Rosemary Haughton explained in her 1976 book, *Feminine Spirituality: Reflections on the Mysteries of the Rosary*.

"Every time I say the rosary I realize afresh how much I have to learn," Haughton wrote. "But I realize that even by holding these great symbolic mysteries in my mind for a little while, I am giving the symbols a chance to grow."

While saying the rosary, one can focus on just one of the 15 mysteries, or even consider other events in the life of Jesus, especially ones relating to events in one's own life, Father Gaffney continued. Thus, he has been meditating on the Marriage Feast of Cana while readying for the upcoming wedding of a nephew.

And even if the rosary is viewed as a Marian devotion, Father Gaffney added, "devotion to Mary always brings us back to a deeper, more intense relationship with our Lord."

The rosary developed in the Middle Ages out of an attempt to give illiterate people living outside monasteries a means to conduct private devotions and develop deeper relationships with God, Greg Dues observed in his 1989 book, *Catholic Customs and Traditions*.

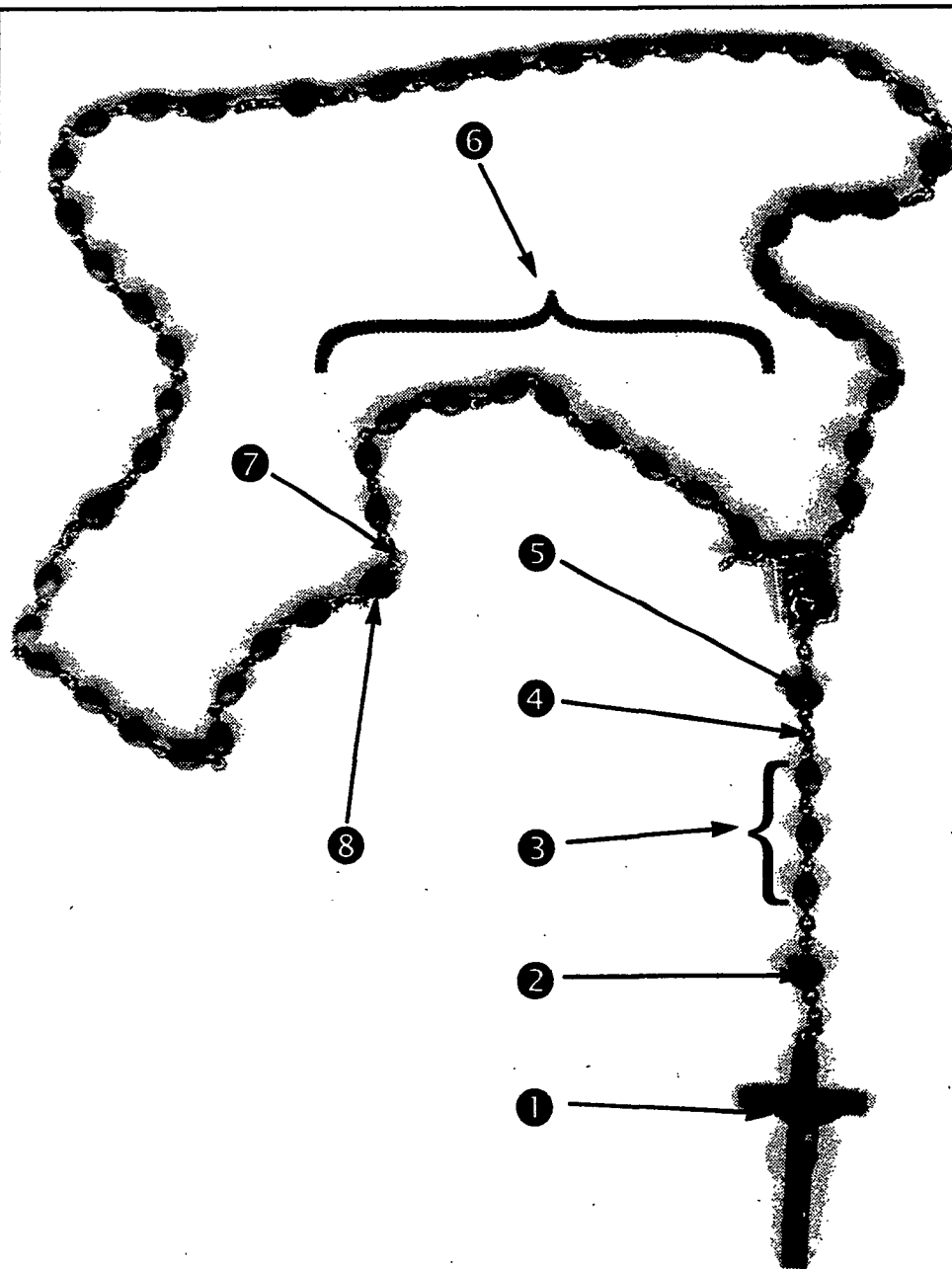
Originally, Dues explained, 150 Our Fathers were said — in substitution for the 150 Psalms the monks recited from their breviaries. Indeed, the rosary was sometimes called "the poor man's breviary."

Gradually, the Our Fathers were replaced by Hail Marys. The name "rosary" arose from a popular title for Mary: the "Mystical Rose."

The preaching of St. Dominic is credited with popularizing the practice of saying the rosary. Tradition holds that Mary, in an apparition in 1206, gave him the rosary as we know it.

During subsequent apparitions, Mary is reported to have repeatedly urged praying the rosary, and those who claim to have seen her often describe the Blessed Virgin as holding a rosary. During one of most celebrated of these apparitions — Fatima in Portugal — Mary urged daily recitation of the rosary.

The apparitions are part of what got Brown involved with reciting the rosary — which she had learned to say while attending religious-education classes as a child. She has visited Medjugorje, in the former Yugoslavia, site of reported ongoing appearances by Mary.



The popular way to say the rosary

Although the "complete" rosary involves reciting 15 decades of 10 Hail Marys each, the most common practice is to recite five decades a day while reflecting on the appropriate mysteries for the day (see box on this page).

In reciting the rosary, one first makes a sign of the cross. Then on the crucifix (1) pray the Apostles Creed. On the first large bead (2), say the Our Father. Pray a Hail Mary on each of the three small beads (3), then the Glory Be (4).

On the large bead following the three small beads (5), think about the first Mystery, then recite the Our Father. On each of the 10 small beads (6), say a Hail Mary while continuing to think about the First Mystery. Follow the Hail Marys with a Glory Be (7), then recite the Our Father on the next large bead (8) while thinking of the Second Mystery.

Continue through all five decades reflecting on the mysteries of the day.

Although the 15 mysteries are traditionally used, Father J. Patrick Gaffney, SMM, author of *The Rosary: A Gospel Prayer*, observed that people can spend all five decades reflecting on just one of the mysteries, or on a mystery that is appropriate to the current needs of the person praying.

Because his nephew will be married soon, Father Gaffney said, for example, he has been reflecting a great deal lately on the Marriage Feast in Cana while saying the rosary.

The Mysteries

These are the 15 mysteries traditionally reflected upon while reciting the rosary:

Joyful Mysteries

The Annunciation
The Visitation
The Nativity
The Presentation of Jesus in the Temple
The Finding of Jesus in the Temple

Sorrowful Mysteries

The Agony in the Garden
The Scourging
The Crowning with Thorns
The Carrying of the Cross
The Crucifixion

Glorious Mysteries

The Resurrection
The Ascension
The Descent of the Holy Spirit
The Assumption of Mary into Heaven
The Crowning of Mary as Queen of Heaven

The "full" rosary consists of 15 decades of prayer and reflection on all 15 mysteries.

The more common method, however, is to say just five decades per day, reflecting upon a set of mysteries for each day. The traditional pattern is to do the Joyful Mysteries on Mondays and Thursdays; the Sorrowful Mysteries on Tuesdays and Fridays; and the Glorious Mysteries on Wednesdays and Saturdays.

The pattern for Sundays is tied to the liturgical calendar. From the beginning of Advent to the third Sunday before Lent, meditation focuses on the Joyful Mysteries; from that point through Palm Sunday, the Sorrowful Mysteries; and from Easter Sunday until the beginning of Advent, the Glorious Mysteries.

cussing Fatima — which he visited that same year. Those programs led to "The Family Rosary For Peace."

Although the daily broadcasts are now handled by the Sisters of St. Joseph, Monsignor Cirrincione still oversees the overall operation — and handles the nearly 80,000 letters and contributions received annually.

Part of the beauty of the rosary is its simplicity, Monsignor Cirrincione argued.

"Sister Lucy (one of the three children who saw the apparition at Fatima) considers it a practical prayer," he observed. "She wrote me a letter saying the rosary is so easy for individuals to say. They can say it anywhere, anytime."

Monsignor Cirrincione noted that while the rosary seemed to fall out of favor following Vatican II, all the popes have urged devotion to it. Pope John Paul II has even visited Fatima twice.

As for objections that the rosary may be outdated, Monsignor Cirrincione commented, "Why should the church discard the beautiful things we have inherited from the church in the past? Should we demolish St. Patrick's Cathedral? We should cherish things that have been passed on to us."

Those who cherish the rosary also know that it is not "boring," as some people comment, Monsignor Cirrincione continued.

"I think people who honestly try to say the rosary, and meditate on the mysteries, are never bored," the monsignor observed. "I think people who object to it are people who don't say it, or don't try to say it." And, he noted, the rosary is especially needed today in light of the wars, violence, crime and immorality.

"When I ask myself, 'What can I do about it?' I say I can pray," the monsignor remarked. "I can ask God to bless us and not to abandon us."

In teaching her students to say the rosary, Brown observed that she is giving them a way to deal with the world.

"I think it helps the children later in life," Brown declared. "I think it gives them something to fall back on."

"The voice of conscience has always clearly recalled that there are truths and moral values for which one must be prepared to give up one's life."

—Pope John Paul II, *The Splendor of Truth*

Brown recalled that one of the predictions associated with Fatima was that Russia would be converted through people's prayers, and especially through saying the rosary. She credits the end of communist rule there to prayer. "You can't tell me otherwise," she stated.

Fatima also provided the impetus for Monsignor Cirrincione to begin his rosary ministry on radio. In 1948, he began a series of weekly programs dis-