

Pope adds rosary mysteries

Cindy Wooden/CNS

VATICAN CITY — Pope John Paul II marked the 24th anniversary of his election by proclaiming a “a year of the rosary” and suggesting a new set of mysteries for the Marian prayer.

Inviting Catholics to rediscover the rosary during the special October 2002-October 2003 observance, he said the prayer is especially powerful as a petition for peace and for the health of the family.

During his Oct. 16 weekly general audience, the pope signed his new apostolic letter, “The Rosary of the Virgin Mary,” which included the suggested addition of five optional “mysteries of light” that focus on episodes from Christ’s public ministry.

The pope said he offered the new mysteries to “broaden the rosary’s horizon” and make it possible for those who recite it “with devotion and not mechanically” to explore more deeply the Gospel’s content.

The new mysteries are:

- Christ’s baptism in the Jordan.
- His self-manifestation at the wedding of Cana.
- His proclamation of the kingdom of God with his call to conversion.
- His Transfiguration.
- His institution of the Eucharist.

In the letter, the pope shared his own affection for the Marian prayer and offered suggestions for how people can pray the rosary better.

“The rosary is my favorite prayer,” he said, adding that it has “accompanied me in moments of joy and in moments of difficulty.”

The pope asked everyone’s help in countering “a certain crisis of the rosary” marked by a failure to teach the prayer to children and by a suspicion — supported by some theologians — that it is outdated, superstitious or anti-ecumenical.

Especially after “the terrifying attacks” of Sept. 11, 2001, he said, the revival of the rosary can be a valuable part of Catholics’ efforts for peace.



Reuters/CNS

Enrique Archila, 72, prays the rosary during the Corpus Christi Mass at the Guatemala City cathedral May 30. To celebrate the 24th anniversary of his election, Pope John Paul II signed an apostolic letter Oct. 16 that suggested five new “mysteries of light” for the rosary.

Pope John Paul said the rosary has “a peaceful effect on those who pray it,” leading them to see the face of Christ in others, to recognize other’s grief and suffering and to yearn to make the world “more beautiful, more just, more closely conformed to God’s plan.”

Reciting the rosary draws families together with the Holy Family, bringing their hopes and concerns to God and focusing their attention on images from the life of Christ, rather than from television, he said.

Focusing on the practical, Pope John Paul said that while reciting the rosary involves repetition, its goal is contemplation and concentration, not boredom.

Silence is essential for contemplation, he said, as is the discipline of dwelling on the mysteries in order to focus on Christ.

The beads, he said, mark “the unending path of contemplation and of Christian perfection” and can “remind us of our many relationships (and) of the bond of communion and

fraternity which unites us with Christ.”

Because the rosary’s standard pattern of five joyful, sorrowful and glorious mysteries, set by Pope Pius V in 1569, skip over most of Jesus’ public life and ministry, others have suggested a new set of mysteries similar to those proposed by Pope John Paul.

A decade ago the late Bishop Edward W. O’Rourke of Peoria, Ill., offered the “mysteries of Jesus the divine teacher,” a set that included three of the five events suggested by the pope.

The U.S. bishops made a similar suggestion in their 1973 pastoral letter on Mary, “Behold Your Mother: Woman of Faith.”

Pointing out that the prayers and mysteries of the rosary are based on the Bible, the bishops suggested that Catholics “can freely experiment” with new forms of the rosary, including new sets of mysteries such as ones dealing with the public life of Christ.

Laymen likely started rosary

VATICAN CITY (CNS) — When Pope John Paul II suggested adding five “mysteries of light” to the rosary Oct. 16, he changed a formula that had been more or less set for four centuries.

In his Oct. 16 letter, the pope said he hoped the change would underline more clearly the prayer’s connection to Christ and generate a renewed interest in what is generally seen as the most Catholic of prayers.

The rosary has undergone its greatest changes at times of peril for the church or society.

Much of the rosary’s promotion involves the Dominican order which wrote down what it did. Its origin as a prayer of the laity leaves key moments in its development uncertain.

Many scholars believe it began as a lay person’s alternative to reading the 150 psalms of the *Book of Hours*.

It likely began by saying the Lord’s Prayer 150 times, counting with stones or on a knotted cord. The addition of the biblical first half of the Hail Mary appears to have been gradual, taking over in the 12th century.

The most popular tradition says the Blessed Virgin Mary gave the rosary to St. Dominic de Guzman, the 12th-century founder of the Dominicans, and urged him to preach devotion to it as a way of fighting heresy.

The legend was popularized by Dominican Father Alain de la Roche in the 15th century as he established rosary confraternity chapters throughout Europe.

Still the number of prayers, and especially the number of events from the life of Mary and of Christ that were mediated upon, varied widely.

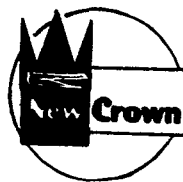
In 1569 Pope Pius V, a Dominican, stabilized the formula of three sets of five mysteries recited with a “decade” of 10 Hail Marys, an Our Father and the Glory Be to the Father.

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