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Renaissance for rosary

New mysteries put renewed emphasis on longstanding Catholic devotion

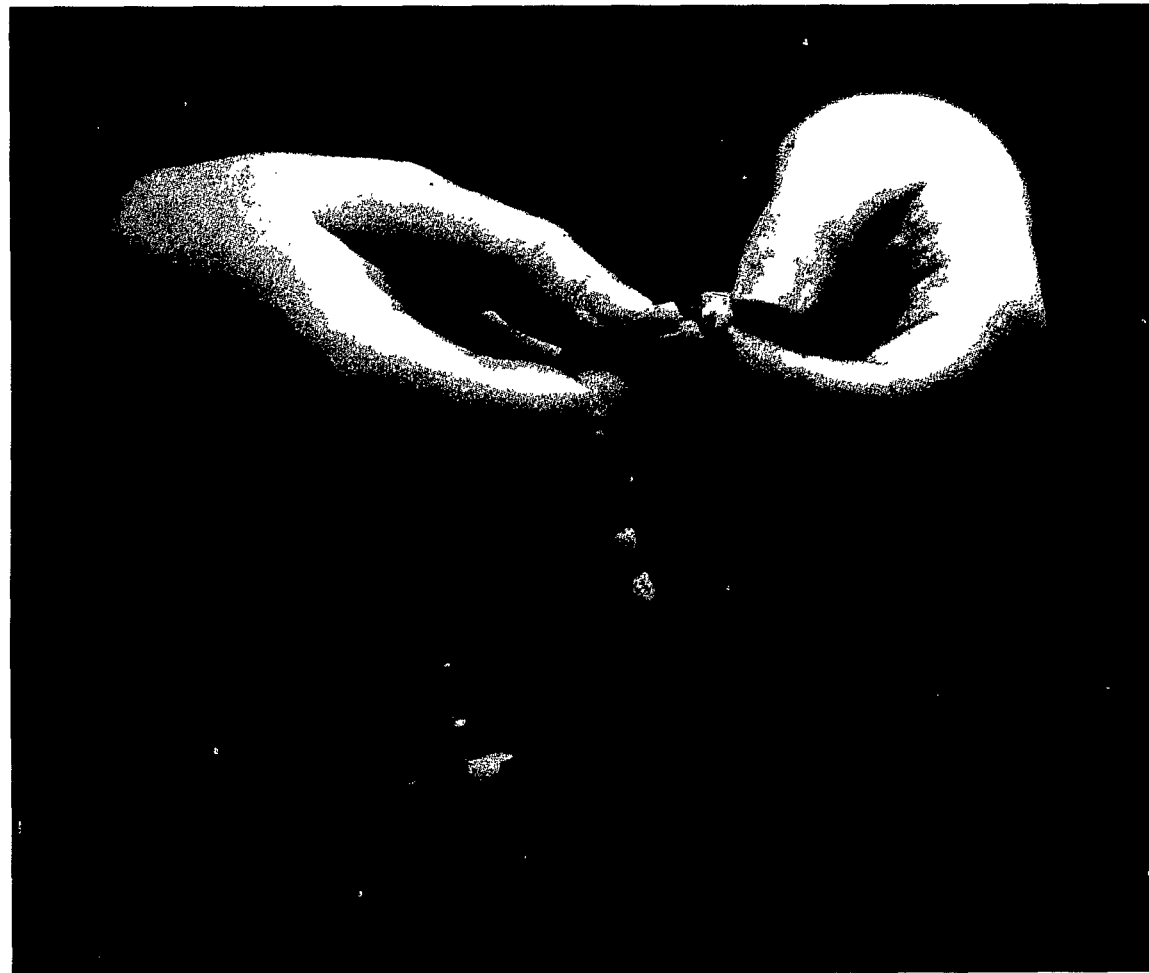
In October, Pope John Paul II surprised the Catholic faithful by tweaking a tradition that is held dearly by many. He added five mysteries to the rosary.

The new "Mysteries of Light" focus on the public life of Christ — his baptism, the wedding feast at Cana, his announcement of the kingdom of God, his transfiguration, and his institution of the Eucharist at the Last Supper. They fill in the blanks of the current cycle of 15 mysteries, which focus on the birth and death of Christ and the life of Mary.

John Paul II also declared a "Year of the Rosary" from October 2002 to October 2003 in which he hopes Catholics will place renewed emphasis on the rosary as a spiritual exercise that educates about the faith and helps people meditate and grow into a more intimate relationship with Christ.

"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," the pope wrote in his apostolic letter, *Rosarium Virginis Mariae*, released Oct. 16.

The rosary has become a primary image of the Catholic Church, which has long promoted private and group recitation of the rosary. Rosaries are commonly said at wakes. You can find people praying them in front of abortion clinics or at youth retreats. And in each diocese, you can find small teams of



Robert Bunch/Texas Catholic

rosary makers.

Terry Ziegler of Catholic Arts & Gifts in the Dallas-Fort Worth area of Texas reported that since the release of *Rosarium Virginis Mariae*, rosary sales have increased, particularly among people who have not prayed it in a while or are just learning about it.

The increase may also be due as much to rough economic times and a search for faith during the church's abuse crisis as the pope's introduction of new mysteries.

"People go back to the basics when times are bad," Ziegler said.

Over the past few decades, rosaries have been seen draped around the necks of music and movie stars, and hung from rear-view mirrors of cars. Rosary costs range from pennies for a plastic or string rosary to a few dollars for rosaries made of rose petals and seeds to several hundred dollars for rosaries made from jewels and precious stones.

The roots of rosary history are hard to trace, but there is no doubt that it has become an important part of the Catholic tradition.

"The rosary, reclaimed in its full meaning, goes to the

very heart of Christian life," the pope wrote. "It offers a familiar yet fruitful spiritual and educational opportunity for personal contemplation, the formation of the people of God and the new evangelization."

BEADS' HISTORY

By the time the beads of the rosary became a regular part of Catholic prayer, prayer beads had long been a part of religions such as Buddhism, Hinduism and Islam — even other prayers within Christianity. There is evidence of prayer beads in ancient Egypt, too.

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Story by Bill Howard/Texas Catholic

