

THE ROSARY IS IRREPLACEABLE

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Aggiornamento is the cry of the day. It is intended to mean a bringing up to date, a renewal of youth. It has been given to us as a watchword by that revered man, Pope John XXIII. But as interpreted by a hot-headed section among us, it has been given meanings which were not intended. For instance, we are to change for the sake of change! The past is primitive - so overboard with it! Yesterday is old! Revolution is the thing!

Such talk as that would be folly, and to put it into practice would be madness. For we stand on the past in every sense. If the past growth of our bodies were to be cancelled out, we would not be here at all. If our mental development was erased, we would be left lower even than the animals because we would be unhelped even by instinct. Blot out our inheritance of ideas and man would be back in the jungle contending with the wild beasts and making ready to start again the slow climb to knowledge and civilisation. This applies not only in general but in detail. We truly stand on the shoulders of the past.

We must always move forward. To be progressive is a duty. We must fulfil it in a sensible way. Not all that glitters is gold; nor is all that is new good. While plunging adventurously into the unfamiliar and unknown we must maintain touch with what we have.

In the first place, our existing knowledge is the only test of the new. Without experience how can we even judge what we can safely eat?

In the second place, we may have to return to the old. To lay aside the present prematurely might mean being left without anything. As exemplifying the wisdom of the world in this regard, see the careful little steps being made towards putting man on the moon. As a culmination of that orderly, reasonable process it is certain that one day man will take possession of that portion of Christ's domain, and come back here to render an account.

So I presume to add on to the watchword of that noble man John: While reaching out to the alluring future keep one hand tightly on what we have. Let us ascend as we would climb a stairs, one step at a time. Seek to evolve methodically; avoid revolution.

This preamble leads up to my topic which is the Rosary. Why must I approach it with those words of caution and warning? It is because the Rosary has become a victim of the false aggiornamento. Outside the Legion, for we have not felt it, there is a campaign against the Rosary, suggesting that it be abandoned. Actually this has been put into effect in many places. A Gospel phrase against vain repetition is improperly applied to it, as if to repeat is always vain, and as if no prayer is to be repeated! If this argument were to be insisted upon, would it be right to say a prayer even twice? Our Lord in teaching us the Pater Noster certainly meant it to be repeated often.

Another affectation is that the Rosary is a prayer for ignorant people, and that as these are days of enlightenment there is no room for the Rosary. I will deal with this later.

Another attack, which is a justified one, is caused by the manner of saying the Rosary. Frequently it is said too rapidly. Agreed! Such can truly be a disedifying performance. Incidentally, the more the Rosary is rushed, the longer it seems to be.

It is a pity and an anomaly that the Rosary having established itself as special communal prayer, should be abused in such a way as to menace its existence. We cannot afford to be deprived of one of the few communal prayers which we have. The remedy is obvious. The Rosary should be recited reverently. What difficulty is there in the way of this? In the main the Legion says the Rosary properly; so why not everyone else?

The Rosary is not the only prayer which is open to that same objection. Every prayer tends to be said at a speed which would not be used in conversation, and presumably this means that it is being said too fast. If so, it can be disedifying, and disrespectful to the person to whom it is addressed.

Another objection sometimes heard is what we might call a mathematical one, i.e., that it is not right to give only one Pater to God and ten Aves to Mary - as if that proportion meant the amount of attention given to the respective persons. Presumably this would mean that if there were no Paters at all then God would get nothing out of the Rosary. This would be an absurd point of view.

Every word of the Rosary is a prayer to God. We pray to God when we do anything for God. Our daily work is done for Him although it may be of a character which does not admit of giving Him one thought directly. It would be wrong to pray to Him if it interfered with the proper doing of that work. Likewise it would be wrong to pray to God directly if at the moment He wanted us to address ourselves to Mary. If we refuse to address ourselves at all to Mary on the grounds that to do so is to take away from God, that would be incorrect. It might be seriously incorrect, even heretical.

In the first place, when giving to Mary, we give to God because attention to her is definitely His will. In the second place, a refusal to pray to her indicates that we do not understand Catholic doctrine in which Mary has so significantly a place, one entitling her to a part in our worship. It would be wrong if we were to say: "I go direct to God. I have no need of Jesus." It would be similarly wrong in a minor key to say the same of Mary: "I have no need to go to her."

There is more in prayer than a presentation to God of our praises, thanks, petitions. Prayer has to be an attitude, a raising of the mind to God, and not exclusively a matter of words. Prayer has also to be an expression of our belief. Our worship has to take in and acknowledge all that has been done for us and by whom. It must likewise serve the purpose of constantly reminding us of those different considerations. In a word our prayer is in part a little catechism lesson for ourselves. This means that our prayers, taken all together, should be teaching us the Christian mysteries as well as declaring our belief in them.

Every prayer, when backed by correct faith, is an act of worship of God. But not every prayer is an expression of doctrine. There are many prayers in which there is no suggestion of doctrine. For example the Psalms are hymns to God, and special inasmuch as they are the voice of the Church. This is emphasised to Legionaries in connection with Praetorian and Adjutorian membership. But it could not be contended that the Psalms either teach us the Catholic doctrines or express those doctrines. How could they? They are taken from the Old Testament and they are prior to the coming of Our Lord. If taken by themselves, how much of the Catechism would they teach us?

The same could be said of certain other forms of prayer, but it could not be said of our present subject, the Rosary. The Rosary is a prayer of particular value from that point of view. It is an instruction in Christian doctrine, as it was originally designed to be. Indeed it is difficult to imagine how this purpose could be better fulfilled without asking too much of the individual or putting a burden on the mind. Never let us forget that prayer must be essentially a simple exercise. If it is not, it will not be resorted to. We should also be hesitant about differentiating as between prayer for simple persons and for an alleged intellectual elite. In the spiritual order those roles are often totally reversed. In my own time I have found many intellectuals without the slightest spiritual sense in them.

Moreover, the Rosary having taught us the Christian details and subsequently reminded us of them, then reflects them all to God again as our worship, coupled with our love, our praise, our thanks and our petitions; all of which forms a comprehensive and invaluable approach to God. Perhaps for certain persons the Rosary is surpassed by other forms of prayer, for instance the Divine Office in the case of priests for whom it is imperative. But we would want to be sure in recommending the Psalms that certain other educative and devotional ingredients (including Our Blessed Lady) are otherwise adequately provided for. Because the Psalms do not contain those elements. The Legion in its Praetorian and Adjutorian membership provides both the Rosary and the Psalms, basing the latter on the fact that they are the official voice of the Mystical Body. But I would venture to say that to present the Psalms to the ordinary people without a foundation would be a mistake.

Part of the foundation which the Rosary infallibly supplies is Our Blessed Lady. It mixes her up with the Holy Trinity and with Our Lord and with all the circumstances of His Life. And that is what God Himself has done. He mixes her up with everything. The Rosary counteracts any tendency to relegate her to a sub-compartment in the Christian life. The Rosary casts a comprehensive picture on the mind. It shows the purpose of Redemption and all its phases from beginning to end. It does not show

Jesus alone as if no one else counted, but gives the settings and circumstances and persons, turning all into a vivid image, a living drama. And all fashioned into a prayer.

In that process of Redemption from beginning to end, Mary played a vital part, such that all who benefited by it must not separate her from it. She must figure prominently in the tribute of gratitude which we offer to Heaven. All generations must call her "blessed".

This brings me to something which is really terribly serious. How much of that hostile attitude towards the Rosary is really due to a lack of conviction in regard to Mary's role? If people think her to be no more than a trimming, then the Rosary would seem to them to be a grave excess, and we are supposed to get rid of excesses and extravagances. But Mary is no mere ornament or sentiment in the Christian religion. Her position is unique. Whatever room for error or temptation against her may have existed before the 21st November, 1964, there is no excuse today. The *De Ecclesia* decree has promulgated as *de fide*, that is as something which must be received by Catholics as part of their faith, that she has an essential part in all the Christian mysteries. She is styled Mother of the Church and of every soul in the whole world. She is our Advocate. She is the Co-worker in salvation. She is our helper from the cradle to the grave. She is the Mediatrix of all graces. She is to be explained to all those outside the Church. Being their Mother, they must be told her story and her function as their Mother. This new promulgation should be meekly and gladly accepted by those whose objection to the Rosary has been that it makes Mary too prominent in our worship.

The Rosary was established about the year 1200 and it took on from the first minute. It was proposed to people and they were encouraged to use it. It proved itself to have an affinity for the people. Ever since it has been intertwined with Catholic life. It has been prominent in devotional literature; an element in the lives of the holy ones of the Church; the subject of the teachings of the Popes and the Doctors. The Rosary has been carried by Our Lady in many of the accepted apparitions. It has entered into many of the recorded miraculous events; some of which have saved the world. It is believed to have been responsible for innumerable favours. I wonder has there been any saint since the 13th Century who did not use it?

The suggestion that only childlike minds avail of it is not justified. I could give you a list of remarkable people who have been devoted to the Rosary. Just take a few: Cardinal Newman was a great lover of it in spite of his Protestant origins. Marconi, Michelangelo, Mozart, Joseph Haydn, were some of the geniuses who loved it and who believed that it brought inspiration to them in their mental searchings, Leo XIII taught that it contained all the cult due to Mary.

It has been wrapped up with the Legion since its first day. It is the official prayer of the Legion, zealously propagated by it. It is shown as the border of the Tessera picture and is carried by the Legionaries in that picture. It is taken for granted as the ideal prayer for our meetings, supplying the right atmosphere in every way. Therefore it was no small shock at a certain stage in our progress to find that it did not figure in the Eastern Church, not even in that section of it, called the Uniates, which is united to the Papacy. The great Schism which separated the Eastern from the Western Church took place in the year 1054, that is about 150 years before the introduction of the Rosary, so that the Eastern Church could not carry it with them into their voluntary exile.

When the Legion began to grow among the Uniates, and after that among the Orthodox or non-united section, the problem of replacing the Rosary by some other prayer had to be faced up to. Why not, you might say, press the Rosary upon them? Well, Rome had asked us not to do that, not to Latinise them. So we had to seek a substitute. The efforts which were made in that direction have important bearing. The tale is too long to tell here. It suffices to say that every expedient was tried and failed until at last the Uniate Greeks helped us out by a compromise. I give you the solution.

They adopted a sort of Rosary which contained 7 of our 15 Mysteries. Each of those Mysteries was preluded by a little introduction or meditation, followed by one Pater, three Aves and one Gloria. In other words, the whole contained 7 preludes, 7 Paters, 21 Aves, 7 Glorias; these being followed by the remainder of the Legion prayers. It has been a success. It produces the same conditions and tone as our Rosary, thus endorsing the Rosary and also showing how hard it is to replace it.

This is a profound lesson. It warns us that approach to the Rosary must be a respectful one, and mindful of its ancient and universal position in the Church and also of an undoubted psychological

status which it has. It fits in with the human mind, as indeed we would expect if both come from God. It suits the learned and the unlearned and all types except the proud. The beads themselves as a counting apparatus have an important mental value. They are jeered at in some quarters as being like an abacus, on which a child is taught to count. Another kindred reproach is that it is like a Buddhist praying-wheel! But just do away with the beads and it will be found that a powerful incentive towards saying the Rosary has gone. Try counting the prayers on the fingers; the sequel will be that a complete Rosary will not be said! I repeat: the Rosary is irreplaceable. We have only partially succeeded in that process by an expedient which goes very close to the Rosary itself.

Therefore those moderns, moved by false *Aggiornamento*, who want to supplant the Rosary should take heed lest they be guilty of a mere vandalism. The latter is definable as a destroying without a thought as to what is thereby entailed. What will be put in the place of what is destroyed? Vandalism can be performed without a physical knocking down. Precisely the same thing can be effected by standing passively, doing nothing where helpful action is called for. It is vandalism to withhold a protection which is strictly necessary. It would be the same intolerable kind of behaviour to withdraw necessary stimulation from the Rosary by keeping silent about it. If Christianity itself ceased to be taught, it would necessarily wither away.

There is another way to which the Rosary can be hurt, and that is in the over-emphasising of the perfection with which it must be said. Of course we are supposed according to our capacity to meditate on the Mysteries. But here let there be moderation. The Rosary is not a formal meditation, and is not entirely a meditation. We must not impart too much mental strain to it lest we turn it into something that it was not originally intended to be. In it we are saying certain prayers which must have their place and meaning. It would be a very extraordinary proceeding to keep on saying those prayers, but never giving them a thought, while the mind goes off on excursions into completely different fields.

No more solemn words exist than the Scriptural phrases of the Ave. They furnish a compressed meditation on the incarnation of the Son of God. We could not dwell too often on that central event of time, so that to speak of those words as vain repetition is both disrespectful and dangerous. If we can but impress the fact of the Incarnation upon our minds, we have become rich and privileged even though all other comfort is lacking in us. And on the other hand, if we do not appreciate that event we are in misery though we may have gained the whole world.

So precious, therefore, are those words that we must often return to them and not allow them to be totally submerged by any other meditation.

The Rosary is a prayer which fits itself to changing circumstances. At times of sickness or of exhaustion, there is no other so useful. It comes within our reach. What we then want is restfulness in the spirit of prayer. So let the beads slip through the fingers without concern as to what particular accompaniment the mind is playing, because it is truly resting in God and is attentive to Mary. This is the essence of prayer. Prayer is a state more than it is a recital.

As we say the Rosary, we try, now as a background and another time as a foreground, to stage the Mysteries before our minds. However meagre our powers to meditate, we cannot help learning all those Mysteries. They expand into so many "photographic" situations, linking themselves up with the various pictures we have seen or the accounts which we have heard or read of those events. We may be sure too that grace takes hold of that "picturisation", intensifies it and renders it fruitful.

We must not make this operation too involved for ourselves. The Rosary must be left essentially simple. Its main idea is a chat with our Mother about her Son, herself, and about all the elements of Salvation. We say the Pater with her in absolute union. Then we have our little mixed meditation with her, frequently falling back on the actual words which we speak to her. Then at the end of each decade she says the Gloria with us as she did with St. Bernadette at Lourdes, you will recall that episode. Any one who says the Rosary will have a reasonably complete and vivid idea of the Christian narrative, and I repeat that this is a necessary foundation for all prayer. Indeed what good are any prayers if they do not rest on that foundation of knowing what they are all about?

As an example of what can follow from straining too far, I mention what has been called the German Rosary. For the pious purpose of trying to make people meditate all the time, the subject of the particular Mystery has been inserted into each Ave. The result has been that the five decades occupy 35

minutes. As a consequence the Rosary is no longer said in Germany except by the Legion which uses our ordinary method. This admirably exemplifies the saying that the perfect is often the enemy of the good.

So there is my contention: the Rosary is a treasure which must be cherished. It combines in itself a host of ingredients, among them being Mary the Mother of the Church and of every soul in it and outside it. It acknowledges her position. It teaches us the Christian religion and it induces us to pray. If the Rosary be hurt, Mary's place will be diminished and so will the quantity of prayer in our lives. In practice nothing will be inserted in substitution for that which has been taken out. That is where the vandalism would enter in. Something is knocked down and nothing is put in its place. The Rosary is irreplaceable.

I have only one little complaint in my own mind regarding that treasure. It is that it does not go far enough. Instead of abolishing it I would wish to see it extended. How? I would like to see a few more Mysteries included for the purpose of directing the minds of the people to them. For they are no less important than those which are comprised.

In the first place, it is an astonishing thought that the Immaculate Conception does not form one of the fifteen Mysteries, although it is the foundation of all the privileges of Our Lady, the special fashioning of her for the Incarnation. Presumably the reason why it was not incorporated was that at that time the Immaculate Conception was the subject of disputation and that only subjects were chosen which were not in any sense in question.

Secondly, the birth of Mary which might be regarded as the first dawning of salvation on earth.

Thirdly, the marriage of Mary, because it meant the constitution of the Holy Family, the immediate preparation for the Incarnation, and because it gives prominence to St. Joseph, enhancing devotion to him.

Fourthly, the marriage feast of Cana which represented the opening of Our Lord's mission which terminated on Calvary.

Fifthly, the institution of the crowning Mystery of the Eucharist.

That would be four fives instead of three fives. This would utilise still more than at present this marvellously psychological and effective method of teaching doctrine, of working it into people's minds, and then of reflecting it back to God as worship.