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## Examining the Rosary of Francisco Marto

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### Examining the Rosary of Francisco Marto

It is reported that one day Saint Dominic was to preach to a highly reputable audience, the doctors of the University of Paris. Before he entered the pulpit, he prepared himself with deep prayer and recitation of the Rosary, and while in prayer, he entered into ecstasy. He later revealed that, while he was experiencing the sweetness of the Lord, the Mother of God appeared to him and said, "Dominic, your sermon for today may be very good indeed, but no matter how good it is I have brought you one that is very much better," (Montfort 11).

Saint Dominic who flourished in the late twelfth and early thirteenth century, was a Castilian priest and founder of a religious order. For our purposes, however, he is the saint to whom it is believed that Mary delivered the Rosary (Marshall). He was a zealous prophet for this Marian devotion who spread its practices far and wide. Yet, even saints are prone to human tendencies.

Recovering his senses, on that day at the University of Paris, the saint studied the sermon that Mary had given him. Then when it came time for him to speak to the intellectual crowd, he candidly stated that he was to speak to them not from human wisdom, but was to share with them the Spirit of God and His greatness. He proclaimed The Word of God with such simplicity and fiery zeal that not a single professor left the Church without being amazed at God's great glory. Dominic attributed his successful homily to his

Mother Mary and her Rosary. And this saint was not the only one to experience the power of the Rosary (11).

Alphonsus, King of Leon and Galicia, wanted all of his servants to honor the Blessed Virgin Mary by saying the Rosary. To set about promoting his goal, he would hang a large Rosary on his belt. Although he developed the custom of always wearing his Rosary, he sadly never prayer it himself. Later in his life, he fell extremely ill and was given up for dead. In a vision, he found himself before the Judgement Throne of Jesus. Devils and hideous beings all stood before the Lord pronouncing every evil the king had ever committed. These cruel creatures demanded that Christ send the king to hell on account of his sins. Immediately the Mother of God appeared and asked Her Son, Jesus, pardon for this man. She did so by placing the king's many sins on one side of a scale and on the other side of the scale she placed all of the Rosaries that were said by people being influenced by the Rosary hanging from his belt. And looking at the king with great kindness Mary said to him, "As a reward for this little honor that you paid me in wearing my Rosary, I have obtained a great grace for you from My Son. Your life will be spared for a few more years. See that you spend these years wisely, and do penance," (30). When the king exited the vision, it is said that he spent the rest of his earthly pilgrimage spreading devotion to the Holy Rosary and he himself adopted the custom of saying it daily.

The power of the Rosary also visited the small town of Latiano, Italy. There lived a man from 1841 to 1926 named Bartolo Longo. From his youth, he lived a very wicked and immoral youth: he committed sacrilege against the Catholic Church, he proclaimed and brought many to believe in the anti-Gospel of Satan, and he wrongfully achieved success by illegitimate means. He even chose to become an ordained satanic priest. However, later in

his life he was introduced to Father Alberto Radente who taught him devotion to the Rosary. Upon practicing this excellent prayer, Bartolo recognized the wayward path that he had chosen, and decided to change his lifestyle completely.

On October 7<sup>th</sup>, 1971, he became a third order Dominican and a member of the Catholic church. For the remainder of his life he promulgated the Holy Rosary, worked with serving the poor and those with incurable diseases, helped establish and build the grandeur Basilica of Our Lady of the Most Holy Rosary in Pompeii, and he even demonstrated to those in the occult that their ways were morally corrupt. He audaciously even attempted to lead many of his fellow Satanists to a more ethically sound life as he was known to barge into their séance's holding up a Rosary and proclaiming to those present to repent (Calloway 233-38)! Bartolo's conversion gives clear testimony that the most Holy Rosary has the power to convert even the most atrocious of sinners.

As these stories give witness, the origin of the Rosary remains vague at best; however, its broader history begins around the 12<sup>th</sup> century or the time at which Saint Dominic lived. Many Catholic pope's have attributed to Saint Dominic the great proclamation of the Rosary, but not its actual invention. Yet, the Catholic Church regards this issue as one left up to an individual's own pious belief: one may believe that Dominic was delivered the Rosary by the Blessed Virgin Herself in a vision or they may believe that Dominic was only a strong advocate for proclaiming and praying the Rosary and that he did not necessarily receive it from Mary.

Despite scholar's disagreement, it is agreed upon that "prayer beads" and the recitation of devotions to aid in meditation were both used in the ancient days of the Catholic Church and may have roots in pre-Christian times. Evidence supports that in the

Middle Ages Christians used a string of beads to count Our Father and Hail Mary prayers. This string of beads became known as “Paternosters,” the Latin for “Our Father.” This type of prayer further evolved between the 12<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries and eventually 50 Hail Mary prayers were recited and linked to psalms or other verses that evoked the person praying to meditate upon the lives of Jesus and Mary. It is here that this type of prayer became known as the Rosarium or “Rose Garden”, which is a common term to label a group of common materials, such as an anthology of stories about the same idea or concept. In the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the Rosary’s structure of five decades of Hail Mary prayers centered around the Joyful, Sorrowful, and Glorious mysteries of Mary and Christ’s life prevailed. Today, it consists of four sets of mysteries because Pope Saint John Paul II added the Luminous Mysterious in the year 2002 (Saunders).

How to pray the Rosary or what type of individual prayers make up the Rosary will not be discussed in length; however, the Rosary consists of an individual or group of persons reciting the Catholic Church’s Creed, the Angelic Salutation (the Hail Mary), the Our Father (see Matthew 6:9, Luke 11:2), and the Glory Be. While announcing these prayers the person(s) praying meditates upon the five decades or five “scenes” that make up each mystery of Christ and Mary’s lives.

The Joyful Mysteries consist of the Annunciation, the Visitation of Mary to Saint Elizabeth, the Nativity of Christ, the Presentation of Jesus, and the Finding of the Child Jesus in the Temple. The Sorrowful Mysteries consider Christ’s Agony in the Garden, the Scourging at the Pillar, the Crowning with Thorns, the Carrying of the Cross, and the Crucifixion. The new Luminous Mysteries celebrate the Baptism of Jesus, the Wedding Feast at Cana, the Proclamation of God’s Kingdom, the Transfiguration, and the Institution

of the Eucharist. Finally, the Glorious Mysterious recall the Resurrection of Christ, the Ascension of Jesus into Heaven, the Descent of the Holy Spirit, the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary, and the Coronation of Mary as Queen of Heaven and Earth. These are the typical decades or “scenes”. As Saint Pope John Paul II said of the mysteries, “They do bring to mind what is essential and they awaken in the soul a thirst for knowledge of Christ continually nourished by the pure source of the Gospel,” (24). There are also other verses from Scripture or “scenes,” so to speak, that can be used in meditation while praying the Rosary.

Probably the most well-known aids to performing the recitation of the Rosary are *The Secret of the Rosary* by Saint Louis De Montfort and *Rosarium Virginis Mariae* (Rosary of the Virgin Mary) by Pope Saint John Paul the Great. Each of these documents go into great depth on how one should practice this prayer. Furthermore, they highlight how this devotion is widely practiced by many Catholics and how it is strongly approved by the Catholic Church. Many Popes have given the Rosary their stamp of approval, especially John Paul II. This Saint said that the Rosary, also known as the Angelic Psalter, is “nothing other than to *contemplate with Mary the face of Christ*,” and “described by the Council (Second Vatican Council of the Catholic Church): [the Rosary] is a devotion directed to the Christological center of the Christian faith, in such a way that ‘when the Mother is honored, the Son ... is duly known, loved, and glorified’,” and “The Rosary, though clearly Marian in character, is at heart a Christocentric prayer,” and finally he has said, “The Rosary is my favorite prayer. A marvelous prayer!” (John Paul II, 3,4, 1). From these statements it is clear that not only does the Pope favor this devotion, but the Catholic Church at large does with its Second Vatican Council stamp of approval. If this does not persuade, then there are the

words of Mary, the Mother of God, herself as she proclaimed during her church approved apparitions in Fátima, Portugal in the year 1917: “Pray the Rosary every day, in order to obtain peace for the world” (Santos and Alonso 176).

In context, the Fátima apparitions of our Lady occurred in 1917, when the world was enduring significant stress. The disastrous World War I was taking countless lives daily, and it did not seem to be coming to an end. This background is essential to understanding Mary’s emphasis on praying the Rosary daily in Her Fátima appearances. The world was enduring chaos, and God sought fit to send His Mother with a healing solution for peace, which He deemed to be prayer, but of a specific kind: to pray the Rosary daily.

Whenever Mary appears in history with a message, such as that at Fátima in 1917 or at Lourdes, France in 1858, the faithful believe it is truly God’s message that she bares. The Catholic Church teaches that Mary is the perfect handmaid of the Lord; by God’s grace she was always such from the moment of her existence through her Immaculate Conception (CCC 490-493). Therefore, Mary has perfectly conformed herself to God’s will. This means that whenever Mary acts, she does so in order to bring about her Son’s will. She wishes only to draw souls into a deeper relationship with her Son, Jesus Christ. With this in mind, it is clear to see that Mary’s Fátima message of praying the Rosary daily is not only her message, but it is a message from God Himself. He desires that all individual’s heed Mary’s Fátima guidance of praying the Rosary daily to gain peace for the world and to grow in a deeper understanding of His Divine Essence.

An important development in the history of the Rosary happened at Fátima, where three shepherds were given the privilege of the appearance of Mary. One of them, Francisco

Marto, whose sister Jacinta and older cousin Lucia also witnessed the appearances, was only eight years old at the time. These three were just children. On the first appearance of Mary on May 13<sup>th</sup>, 1917 in the Cova da Iria, they asked her whether they would go to heaven. Is this request not a humble prayer of a child? They did not beg her for their salvation, but they simply wished to know if they would spend their eternity with Christ. It is as Jesus Himself said in the Gospels, "Amen, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will not enter the kingdom of Heaven" (Matthew 18:3).

From the beginning, Francisco retained this childlike trust in Mary. However, to the question they asked her answer was only unique regarding him. Mary said that Jacinta and Lucia would go to heaven, but to Francisco she said, "He will go there too, but *he must say many Rosaries*," (Lucia and Alonso 175). It was also unique to Francisco that he could only see Mary, but he could not hear her (141). These two points must be addressed. Why must he "*pray many Rosaries*" and why could he not hear the Mother of God?

Beginning with the latter, I believe Francisco could not hear Mary for many reasons, one being that Mary needed to have him remain humble. It is easy to imagine a young boy becoming inflated with pride. He could have easily boasted of this holy privilege God had given him, "Oh, look at me! Mary loves me the most and tells me everything! I even know that old grumpy grandpa is not going to heaven!" Surely this is not outside the scope of possibilities and it is quite imaginable to anyone who has worked with young boys. This may be the most plausible cause for his lack of hearing: to increase his humility.

After every appearance of the Blessed Virgin, Francisco had to ask his two companions what she had said. He had to content himself with the designs that God had in



store for him. He had to recognize that being able to glance upon the Mother of God was blessing enough for his soul.

This humility that Francisco retained continued when he heard that he must “*pray many Rosaries*” to gain entrance into heaven. What does this mean? Surely the Catholic Church recognizes that salvation comes through the merits of Jesus Christ and a soul professing their faith in Him as their Savior (CCC 1992). What then does Mary mean by saying Francisco must “*pray many Rosaries,*” to obtain heaven.

Throughout the apparitions, Francisco developed the deepest and most urgent love to console God. When asked by his companion Lucia what he would like to do, he would respond, “I would rather console Our Lord. Didn’t you notice how sad Our Lady was that last month, when she said that people must not offend Our Lord any more, for He is already much offended? I would like to console Our Lord,” (Santos and Alonso 156). It is clear in this excerpt that the Rosary for Francisco was a tool to draw him into a deeper understanding of Christ. The Rosary did not pull Francisco away from God, rather, it brought him into a deeper relationship with God.

So much so, Francisco developed an ardent desire to spend all his time with Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament of the Eucharist, which the faithful believe to be the true Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity of Christ (CCC 1374). Instead of attending school he would stay behind and pray in the Church as he often said, “It is not worth my while learning to read, as I’ll be going to Heaven very soon,” (Santos and Alonso 156). Francisco boldly even tried to encourage his older cousin, Lucia, to skip school and spend time with the “hidden Jesus”, as he would often call the Eucharist (156-157).

Francisco's truly believed that it was more valuable for him to learn the science of Christ and the love Jesus taught just as Thérèse of Lisieux once said, "Love is the one thing I long for. The science of love is the only science I desire," (Chapter 11). So too, did Francisco have such a deep longing for God.

Many times Francisco courageously would go alone to some isolated place to pray. He could not be without his Savior. His companions would then go looking for him and upon finding him he would say, "I prefer praying by myself so that I can think and console Our Lord, Who is so sad!" (156).

This love that Francisco had for Christ concretely began to show itself as the little saint displayed the heroic virtue of courage. This boy only feared God Alone. When it came to worldly anxieties such as snakes, spiders, or the like his cousin Lucia remarked that, "He was anything but fearful. He'd go anywhere in the dark alone in the night, without the slightest hesitation. He played with lizards, and when he came across any snakes he got them to entwine themselves round a stick, and even poured sheep's milk into the holes in the rocks for them to drink" (158). With this previous example, some may argue that he was a typical intrepid boy. However, this was not the case, and can be seen in his true heroism when he and his visionary companions were placed in prison.

The government took the three into custody based on their suspicions of the children's alleged "Marian apparitions." The officials threatened to boil the children to death, lest they tell the truth (52)! Jacinta was terrified and exclaimed, "We are going to die without ever seeing our parents again, not even our mothers!" (52). Likewise, Lucia was also fretful. Still, to their credit, both girls fixedly chose to offer this suffering they were enduring as a sacrifice to God for the conversion of sinners. Francisco's actions, on the

other hand, were quite different. Instead of being drawn to tears, he was drawn to pray as with boundless joy and peace he exclaimed to Lucia, "If they kill us as they say, we'll soon be in Heaven! How wonderful! Nothing else matters!" (148).

His prayer extended forth from himself as he encouraged everyone else within the prison cell, even the other criminals, to pray the Rosary! His courage was so profound that while they all were praying the Rosary, he noticed a fellow was still wearing his hat. Francisco went up to the grown man and said, "If you wish to pray, you should take your cap off," (148). The man did so.

This moral courage displayed by Francisco was unlike his two other companions, which further lent itself to his extreme offering of sacrifices and sufferings. On one occasion Lucia's godmother offered the children a glass of mead to drink. She offered the beverage first to Francisco, however, he handed it on to his companions to let them drink first. Then he once more disappeared. When they found him, he said, "When I took the glass, I suddenly remembered I could offer that sacrifice to console Our Lord, so while you two were taking a drink, I ran over here" (150).

Even when Francisco was enduring true agony while he laid upon his deathbed, he continued to offer it to the Lord. Lucia described his emotional state during these last hours of his life as joyful and content (163). All he focused upon was consoling Jesus. When asked whether he was experiencing a lot of pain he would respond, "Quite a lot, but never mind! I am suffering to console Our Lord, and afterwards, within a short time, I am going to Heaven!" (163). Francisco's example of great sacrifice given unto God exemplifies what Saint Louis de Montfort explained about the youth as he said, "Young children performed incredible penances!" as a result of praying the Rosary (Montfort 112).

This young boy acquired all these ideals—the true virtue of humility, ardent prayer and love for God, heroic courage, a pure heart, and a sacrificial nature— as a result of his devotion to praying his beads as Mary advised him. Every grace that Francisco acquired came to him through his Rosary. God allowed this boy to reach such heights of sanctity because he followed the Blessed Virgin’s guidance to pray. His life example is a true testament of how remarkable the Rosary of Mary may be if practiced within one’s life.

This is exactly the point. Any devotional, be it Marian or other, is only meant to draw a soul into a deeper union with Christ. Mary herself desires this more than any other being. Therefore, by developing a daily recitation of the Rosary a person not only honors the Mother of God, but it is as if to say that person is taken by the hand of Mary to walk along and meditate upon the life of Christ. In the Rosary a soul finds Jesus in the most profound way. Mary is taking that soul into the recesses deep within Jesus’ sacred heart. Mary is showing that individual how best to love and comfort her Son. It seems that this is the reason that Francisco developed such a love for consoling and spending time with the Lord through praying his “*many Rosaries.*” The words of Saint John Paul the Great echo here, “The Rosary, though clearly Marian in character, is at heart a Christocentric prayer.”

What a gift the Rosary was, is, and continues to be. Today this devotion continues to protect souls from harm’s way, draw the faithful into a more intimate union with Christ through Mary, and supply the graces necessary for souls to reach heaven. This is specifically highlighted within this last concluding example of the powerful World War II Rosary miracle.

During World War II, the United States of America dropped one of two atomic bombs on Hiroshima, Japan on August 6<sup>th</sup>, 1945. This catastrophic bomb killed 80,000

people instantly and is said to have caused an estimated 130,000 deaths total; most of which were civilians. Despite its tragic measures, four men seemed to have survived the blast of the bomb even though they happened to be at ground zero at the time of the detonation. These men were all Catholic Jesuit priests and they were inside Our Lady of the Assumption Church when the explosion occurred. The Church as well as their physical bodies did not withstand any signs of injury from the blast. So much so that these men lived well into their late years and were even unaffected by the radiation given off by the nuclear flare. Countless doctors examined them and could find no explanation for such miraculous happenings. Yet, every single priest who survived knew the cause of this miracle as they would together say, "We were living the message of Fátima and we prayed the Rosary daily" ("The Miracle").

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