

# Let's talk about the Rosary



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Many people are wondering why Catholics hold those beads called the Rosary in their hands and what's the real inspiration behind them. In this little booklet I'll attempt to give quick answers to some of the questions and doubts often raised by people.

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# Is the Rosary from paganism?

In answering this question, let's consider a bit of history about the Rosary.

The word Rosary comes from Latin *rosarium* which means “a garland/wreath/crown of roses.” The rose being one of the flowers used to symbolize the Blessed Virgin Mary. Although most people associate the origin of the Rosary to St. Dominic, the founder of the Dominicans, centuries before him, monks recited the 150 psalms on a regular basis.

Overtime, the lay brothers who because of illiteracy could not read and therefore recite the psalms with the monks were made to recite the ‘Pater noster’ (Our Father) 150 times according to the number of the Psalms. Later on, the practice of reciting one ‘Our Father’ after a decade of ‘Hail Marys’ developed. Until recently (2002) when Pope John Paul II added five more decades for the five Mysteries of Light, there were exactly 15 decades (15 X 10), in accord with the 150 Psalms. Thus, the modern Rosary consists of 20 decades of ‘Hail Marys’ said on beads, each decade preceded by an ‘Our Father’ and followed by a ‘Glory be to the Father’. During the recitation, the mind meditates on the principal mysteries of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ as found in the Gospel.

The answer to the above question is definitely No!

## Is the Rosary a Repetitious prayer?

Some Christians criticize various Catholic forms of prayer which repeat phrases, such as litanies and especially the Rosary. They usually cite Matthew chapter 6 and conclude that Jesus condemns repetitious prayer. This is ironically the same chapter which Jesus Christ teaches the Lord's Prayer.

**Consider this:** Would you be offended if your lover continually on a daily basis repeats the words, "I love you"?

Catholics in every moment of their lives also love to repeat those sweet words to their first love, Jesus and Mary whenever they say the Angelic Salutation "Hail Mary" and the Lord's Prayer "Our Father" which make up the prayers of the Rosary.

Let's investigate these allegations using the Scriptures.

And in praying do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do; for they think that they will be heard for their many words.  
(Matthew 6:7 RSV)

In the biblical Greek of the New Testament, the phrase translated as "do not heap up empty phrases" is *me battologe se te*, this means "babble" and not "repeat."

Note that Jesus Christ over here is focusing on the Gentiles (pagans) who pray to false gods and employ/use much babble. What sort of babbling did the pagans practice? A look at Elijah's encounter with the pagan prophets gives up a clearer picture.

And they took the bull which was given them, and they prepared it, and called on the name of Ba'al from morning until noon, saying, "O Ba'al, answer us!" But there was no voice, and no one answered. And they limped about the altar which they had made. And at noon Eli'jah

mocked them, saying, "Cry aloud, for he is a god; either he is musing, or he has gone aside, or he is on a journey, or perhaps he is asleep and must be awakened."

And they cried aloud, and cut themselves after their custom with swords and lances, until the blood gushed out upon them. And as midday passed, they raved on until the time of the offering of the oblation, but there was no voice; no one answered, no one heeded.

(1 Kings 18:26-29 RSV)

Once the pagan prophets had given up, Elijah came forward and called on the God of Israel, and immediately his prayer was answered. Here Jesus' point becomes clearer. The pagans, "heap up empty phrases" to their dead gods unlike Elijah and Christians who serve a Living God.

A strong proof that demonstrates that Jesus Christ does not condemn repetition in prayer is when he himself prayed three times in the garden of Gethsemane "saying the same words."

So, leaving them again, he went away and prayed for the third time, saying the same words. (Matthew 26:44 RSV)

Interestingly, the Psalms have a lot of repetitions without going contrary to the harmony of the Word of God. A good example is Psalm 136 with the phrase, "for his steadfast love endures for ever" repeating more than any Catholic prayer.

Psalms 136:1-26 RSV:

(1) O give thanks to the LORD, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures for ever.

(2) O give thanks to the God of gods, for his steadfast love endures for ever.

(3) O give thanks to the Lord of lords, for his steadfast love endures for ever;

(4) to him who alone does great wonders, for his steadfast love endures

- for ever;
- (5) to him who by understanding made the heavens, for his steadfast love endures for ever;
  - (6) to him who spread out the earth upon the waters, for his steadfast love endures for ever;
  - (7) to him who made the great lights, for his steadfast love endures for ever;
  - (8) the sun to rule over the day, for his steadfast love endures for ever;
  - (9) the moon and stars to rule over the night, for his steadfast love endures for ever;
  - (10) to him who smote the first-born of Egypt, for his steadfast love endures for ever;
  - (11) and brought Israel out from among them, for his steadfast love endures for ever;
  - (12) with a strong hand and an outstretched arm, for his steadfast love endures for ever;
  - (13) to him who divided the Red Sea in sunder, for his steadfast love endures for ever;
  - (14) and made Israel pass through the midst of it, for his steadfast love endures for ever;
  - (15) but overthrew Pharaoh and his host in the Red Sea, for his steadfast love endures for ever;
  - (16) to him who led his people through the wilderness, for his steadfast love endures for ever;
  - (17) to him who smote great kings, for his steadfast love endures for ever;
  - (18) and slew famous kings, for his steadfast love endures for ever;
  - (19) Sihon, king of the Amorites, for his steadfast love endures for ever;
  - (20) and Og, king of Bashan, for his steadfast love endures for ever;
  - (21) and gave their land as a heritage, for his steadfast love endures for ever;
  - (22) a heritage to Israel his servant, for his steadfast love endures for ever.
  - (23) It is he who remembered us in our low estate, for his steadfast love

endures for ever;

(24) and rescued us from our foes, for his steadfast love endures for ever;

(25) he who gives food to all flesh, for his steadfast love endures for ever.

(26) O give thanks to the God of heaven, for his steadfast love endures for ever.

Even the angels in the presence of God are repeating forever, “Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God Almighty, who was and who is and who is to come.”

(Revelation 4:8) This is most pleasing to God isn't it?

## **Is the Rosary all about Mary and not Jesus?**

The Rosary is more about the life of Jesus Christ than that of Mary. In other words, it is *Christocentric* (Christ centred). The Rosary also brings people to Jesus through Mary.

The Rosary utilizes the 3 major forms of Christian expressions of prayer, i.e. vocal as well as meditation and contemplative forms.

On the vocal and meditation forms of prayer, the Rosary uses the Apostles Creed (Credo), the Lord's Prayer (Pater Noster), Hail Mary (Ave Maria) and Glory Be (Gloria).

The Credo or the Apostles Creed comprises of all the major beliefs of the Christian faith as taught by the Apostles of Jesus Christ. It was first used in the second century and the current form was composed around the fifth century.

The Lord's Prayer was taught by Jesus Christ himself. There are two versions given in the Gospels. The shorter version in Luke 11:2-4 and the longer version which is used in praying the Rosary - Matthew 6:9-13.



## Is the Hail Mary Biblical?

The “Hail Mary” is the illuminative word ever spoken to a human being and it is through it that the Light (Jesus Christ) came into the midst of men to overcome darkness.

Let’s examine the Hail Mary prayer.

Hail Mary, full of Grace, the Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou amongst women, and blessed is the Fruit of thy womb, Jesus. Holy Mary, mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and in the hour of our death. Amen.

[Part 1] **Hail Mary, full of Grace, the Lord is with thee.** This is derived from the greeting of the angel Gabriel to Mary.

And he came to her and said, "Hail, O favoured one, the Lord is with you!" (Luke 1:28 RSV)

And the angel being come in, said unto her: Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women. (Luke 1:28 DRB)

The biblical Greek word used by the angel *kecharito mene* is rightly translated as “full of grace,” it is the perfect passive participle of the Greek word *charito* which means, “to grace.” Mary was “full of grace” because the Lord is united with her, “the Lord is with thee” as the angel added.

We should note that angels are messengers of their masters, in this case an angel of God. So, we can conclude for certain that God Almighty Himself was saying to Mary that she is “full of grace” and that He was with her. How sweet it is to imitate God by saying the “Hail Mary?” [Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. (Ephesians 5:1 RSV)]

In other passages of the New Testament, certain men are said to be “full of

the Spirit” and also “full of grace and power” according to Acts 6:3 and Acts 6:8 respectively. How much more grace do you expect to be contained in The Woman who is to bring forth the Son of the Living God?

The moon does not take away from the brightness of the sun, but reflects it. Likewise, Mary does not take away from the glory of her Son, Jesus, but reflects Him. Without the sun the moon is useless, so also, without Christ, Mary is nothing. She is “full of grace” because of Christ, the Source of grace.

[Part 2] **Blessed art thou amongst women, and blessed is the Fruit of thy womb, Jesus.** This is derived from the exclamation of Elizabeth (filled with the Holy Spirit) to Mary.

And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the babe leaped in her womb; and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and she exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb!" (Luke 1:41-42 RSV)

It is very interesting to note how the greeting of Mary “full of grace” had on Elizabeth. It moved her to become “filled with the Holy Spirit” and to exclaim with a loud cry, “Blessed are you [Mary] among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb [Jesus]!” It is also worth noting that it wasn’t Elizabeth who was saying these things but God the Holy Spirit.

[Part 3] **Holy Mary** - This is derived from the fact that Mary “full of grace” is holy.

**Consider this:** John the Baptist was said to be “a righteous and holy man.” (Mark 6:20 RSV) Scripture also says God spoke by “the mouth of his holy prophets from of old.” (Luke 1:70 and Acts 3:21 RSV)

The epistle to the Hebrews was directed to the “holy brethren, who share in a heavenly call.” (Hebrews 3:1 RSV) The children of believers are called

“holy.” (1 Corinthians 7:14 RSV)

The mystery of Christ is said to be “revealed to his holy apostles and prophets.” (Ephesians 3:5 RSV)

It is very clear from Scriptures that the closer one is to God, the holier one must be. For example:

Then he [God] said, "Do not come near; put off your shoes from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground." (Exodus 3:5 RSV)

Because the LORD your God walks in the midst of your camp, to save you and to give up your enemies before you, therefore your camp must be holy, that he may not see anything indecent among you, and turn away from you. (Deuteronomy 23:14 RSV)

Further, the presence of God imparts holiness:

If any one destroys God's temple, God will destroy him. For God's temple is holy, and that temple you are. (1 Corinthians 3:17 RSV)

The Ark of the Covenant was so holy only a few could touch it:

And when Aaron and his sons have finished covering the sanctuary and all the furnishings of the sanctuary, as the camp sets out, after that the sons of Kohath shall come to carry these, but they must not touch the holy things, lest they die. These are the things of the tent of meeting which the sons of Kohath are to carry. (Numbers 4:15 RSV)

And when they came to the threshing floor of Nacon, Uzzah put out his hand to the ark of God and took hold of it, for the oxen stumbled. And the anger of the LORD was kindled against Uzzah; and God smote him there because he put forth his hand to the ark; and he died there beside the ark of God. (2 Samuel 6:6-7 RSV)

If mere inanimate objects can be so "holy" due to closeness with God; how much more Our Lady who bore God the Son?

[Part 4] **Mother of God** - This is derived in part from the further remarks of Elizabeth (filled with the Holy Spirit) to Mary and other parts of Scriptures.

And why is this granted me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? (Luke 1:43 RSV)

The biblical Greek phrase used *hē mē tē r tou Kuriou mou* means “the mother of my Lord” indicating Elizabeth's knowledge about Mary being the mother of her *Kuriou* (Lord) as a proof of the Lord of lords (Christ Jesus) whom Mary was carrying in her womb. It is good to also note that as a Jewish woman, Elizabeth cannot pronounce the name of God (Yahweh) because it is forbidden, hence, she has to say Lord (Adonai).

Further proofs that Christ was truly God (the Son) and the Blessed Virgin Mary truly the mother of God include:

And the angel said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God." (Luke 1:35 RSV)

Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, a young woman shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Imman'uel. (Isaiah 7:14 RSV)

Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child of the Holy Spirit (Matthew 1:18 RSV)

But when the time had fully come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. (Galatians 4:4-5 RSV)

**[Part 5] Pray for us sinners, now and in the hour of our death. Amen.**

Perhaps this is the most problematic part of the “Hail Mary” prayer which is derived from the fact that the Church is the *Mystical Body of Christ* and there exists a living relationship with each member.

The Church as the Mystical Body of Christ:

For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptised into one body--Jews or Greeks, slaves or free--and all were made to drink of one Spirit. (1 Corinthians 12:12-13 RSV)

Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. (1 Corinthians 12:27 RSV)

There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all, who is above all and through all and in all. (Ephesians 4:4-6 RSV)

This fact, that the Church is the *Mystical Body of Christ*, was made clearer when Saul of Tarsus (St. Paul) was persecuting the Church and Christ Jesus revealed to him on his journey to Damascus that he was persecuting Him.

Now as he journeyed he approached Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven flashed about him. And he fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" And he said, "Who are you, Lord?" And he said, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting" (Acts 9:3-5 RSV)

Scripture says God is not the God of the dead indicating that the Saints are not dead but much alive.

'I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'? He is not God of the dead, but of the living. (Matthew 22:32 RSV see also Mark 12:27 and Luke 20:38)

The transfiguration account of Jesus Christ makes the case certain that the Saints are really and truly living with God, since Moses (who died according to Joshua 1:1) appeared together with Elijah (who never died but “went up by a whirlwind into heaven” according to 2 Kings 2:11). This fact is irrefutable!

And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his garments became white as light. And behold, there appeared to them Moses and Eli'jah, talking with him. (Matthew 17:2-3 RSV see also Mark 9:2-4)

# Can the Saints in heaven intercede for the saints on earth?

Well, In the Apocalypse, there is a vivid indication of this, where the prayers of the saints are presented to God by the angels.

And when he had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each holding a harp, and with golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints (Revelation 5:8 RSV)

And another angel came and stood at the altar with a golden censer; and he was given much incense to mingle with the prayers of all the saints upon the golden altar before the throne; and the smoke of the incense rose with the prayers of the saints from the hand of the angel before God. (Revelation 8:3-4 RSV)

Scripture shows the prayers of the Martyrs in heaven (c.f. Revelation 6:9-11) and their effect on earth (c.f. Revelation 6:12-17). One may sincerely inquire, “Why do you ask Mary to pray for you when you can go directly to Jesus?”

Well, this is because Mary “full of grace” has more influence on her Son, our Lord Jesus Christ (c.f. John 2:3-9), than anyone else as the Scripture itself indicates that the prayer of the righteous “has great power in its effects.” (James 5:16 RSV) It is just like asking a fellow Christian to pray for you, the only difference here is that Mary is closer to God, although we are all members of the same Body of Christ.

Asking Mary to “pray for us” neither takes away the sole mediatorship of Jesus Christ (c.f. 1 Timothy 2:1-5). Her intercessory prayer to Jesus on behalf of us is only possible because of Christ and her relationship to us through His Mystical Body, the Church.

It is written, “Honour thy father and thy mother” (Exodus 20:12, Leviticus 19:3, Deuteronomy 5:16, Matthew 15:4, Mark 7:10, Ephesians 6:2), this commandment was fulfilled perfectly by our Lord Jesus Christ. He honoured His heavenly Father and His earthly mother. We are told to be imitators of Christ. (cf. 1 Corinthians 11:1, Ephesians 5:1) If our Lord did honour His mother Mary perfectly, then what stops us from doing so? Mary herself prophesied saying,

“For behold, henceforth all generations will call me blessed”  
(Luke 1:48 RSV)

Why? Because “he who is mighty has done great things for me” she says. (Luke 1:49 RSV) Are you part of the generation that calls her blessed? Think about this.

In the Rosary this desire of St. Paul is fully fulfilled:

Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honourable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. (Philippians 4:8 RSV)



On the contemplative form of prayer, the Rosary uses the following “theological” Mysteries derived explicitly or implicitly from Scriptures:

“Joyful Mysteries” (Monday & Saturday)

**First Decade:** The Annunciation of Gabriel to Mary (Luke 1:26-38)

**Second Decade:** The Visitation of Mary to Elizabeth (Luke 1:39-56)

**Third Decade:** The Birth of Jesus (Luke 2:1-21)

**Fourth Decade:** The Presentation of Jesus (Luke 2:22-38)

**Fifth Decade:** The Finding of Jesus in the Temple (Luke 2:41-52)

“Luminous Mysteries” (Thursday)

**First Decade:** The Baptism of Jesus in the River Jordan (Mark 1:9-10)

**Second Decade:** The Wedding at Cana (John 2:1-11)

**Third Decade:** The Proclamation of the Kingdom of God (Mark 1:14-15)

**Fourth Decade:** The Transfiguration of Jesus (Matthew 17:2)

**Fifth Decade:** The Last Supper (Luke 22:19)

“Sorrowful Mysteries” (Tuesday & Friday)

**First Decade:** The Agony of Jesus in the Garden (Matthew 26:36-46)

**Second Decade:** Jesus is Scourged at the Pillar (Matthew 27:26)

**Third Decade:** Jesus is Crowned with Thorns (Matthew 27:28-29)

**Fourth Decade:** Jesus Carries the Cross to Calvary (John 19:17)

**Fifth Decade:** The Crucifixion of Jesus (Luke 23:33-46)

“Glorious Mysteries” (Wednesday & Sunday)

**First Decade:** The Glorious Resurrection of Jesus (Luke 24:1-12)

**Second Decade:** The Ascension of Jesus (Luke 24:50-51)

**Third Decade:** The Descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost (Acts 2:1-4)

**Fourth Decade:** The Assumption of Mary into Heaven (Revelation 12:1, c.f. Genesis 3:15, Psalm 16:10, Hebrews 11:5)

**Fifth Decade:** The Coronation of Mary as Queen of Heaven and Earth (Revelation 12:1)

The Rosary is indeed Christian and biblical and effective!

**Never be afraid of loving the Blessed Virgin Mary too much. You can never love her more than Jesus did and If anyone does not wish to have Mary Immaculate for his mother, he will not have Christ for his brother. ~ St. Maximilian Kolbe**

## About The Author



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Kindly remember him in your daily Rosary. God bless you.