

Alter Christus

*“As an **alter Christus** (another Christ) the priest is in Christ, for Christ and with Christ... Because he belongs to Christ, the priest is radically at the service of all people: he is the minister of their salvation” (Pope Benedict XVI)*

Monthly bulletin dedicated to all the Priests of Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands

Meaning of the Rosary

By Servant of God Romano Guardini

[From the Book *The Rosary of Our Lady*]

1- Objections and Justification

Oppressive events move through our time and lay a heavy hand on the lives of us all. Questions regarding our own fate and the destiny of those close to us, and above all, the destiny of humanity, engage our minds and our souls. In religious life the effect is noted in many ways. One person may discard prayer entirely because he is surfeited or

shaken. He must see that he regains his inner balance; he must try to hear and recognize again the quiet voices next to the loud, that God always remains God, no matter how powerful earthly influences may be.... With another it is the opposite, and the vicissitudes of life remind him of the Eternal. He feels that things can not be carried out in a purely worldly way, but must be laid before God, and this is all the more necessary the more decisive they are. So he longs for a place of quiet in which he can meditate and gather strength, to

return later to his new tasks with fresh assurance. He needs a prayer that gives him a lingering chance to pause, to collect and strengthen himself. Such a prayer is the Rosary. It has done many a good service. It is this of which we shall speak.

What I write will come into various hands. First of all into the hands of those to whom the Rosary is familiar. To them I need not explain its justification and meaning, but might simply say what I consider important. But the little book may also reach those who regard the

Rosary as something foreign, or others who reject it. For the benefit of these I must clarify certain things right at the start.

Above all, this little book does not try to persuade anybody. The Rosary is a very old devotion which has exercised an immeasurable influence. It is, above all, dear to pious people and belongs to their lives like the work they do and the bread they eat. But when man is faced by the restlessness of his intellect and is caught in the whirl of modern life, he loses all relation to the Rosary. Then

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He is considered one of the most important figures in Catholic intellectual life in the 20th century. Father Guardini was born in 1885 in Verona. His conventional Catholic upbringing left him unprepared for the virulent atheism he encountered as a student at the University of Munich.

Over the course of his career, Father Guardini taught at various German universities, wrote seventy-five books, and influenced such noted fellow theologians as Cardinal Ratzinger. His thought is widely credited as an influence on the Second Vatican Council. He taught at the University of Berlin as a professor of Catholic Philosophy starting in 1923 and was forced to resign from his university position in 1939 for criticizing Nazi ideology. After the war, he taught at the University of Tübingen and the University of Munich.

He declined a cardinalship offered by Pope Paul VI in 1965. Awarded the German Publishing Industry's Peace Prize in 1952 and the Erasmus Prize in 1962. The Archdiocese of Munich and Freising opened the Cause for his Canonization in 2017.



it has at first no message for him, and it would be foolhardy if one tried to convince him.

The Rosary is also the subject of misunderstandings and abuses. The Sermon on the Mount says: "But in praying, do not multiply words, as the

Gentiles do; for they think that by saying a great deal, they will be heard. So do not be like them; for your Father knows what you need before you ask him" (Matt. 6:7-8). The Gospel is the source and summation of all Christian teaching about prayer; one might think that if there is a contradiction to what is said there it is the Rosary, for it is

the very essence of repetition. Also it is often prayed so hurriedly and externally that one is reminded of the words of the prophet: "This people draw near me with their mouth, and with their lips glorify me, but their heart is far from me" (Isa. 29:13). And we must add to this the exaggerations of some who recommend the Rosary. At times one has the impression that those

who praise it lose all sense of measure when they begin speaking of it. And then one needs only to hear that there are similar forms of prayer outside of Christendom--perhaps in Buddhism--for one's aversion or at least suspicion to be aroused.

One might object that this repetition leads to an exteriorization of prayer. That may happen, of course; but then one has made a mistake and we are using the Rosary in the wrong way. But this must not happen, for such repetition has a real meaning.

Certainly all of this must not be treated lightly; but it does not say anything about the substance and value of the Rosary. To start with the latter: Prayer is an ancient human act, and contains substantial and ever-recurring laws. If we find in such a serious religion as Buddhism, six hundred years before Christ, a form of prayer resembling

the Rosary in certain aspects, it should speak for it rather than against it. The exaggerations of uninspired eulogists are bad, but they must not darken the view of the thing itself, and, even less should one react to them with an equally uninspired rejection. As far as the abuses are concerned, they should surely not be defended. But did an abuse ever mean an actual protest

against that which suffered it? Where do we find anything good and noble that is protected against abuses? I fear that whatever is not exposed to abuses has not much value. Man has always maltreated what was important to him, for his love does not have a tender hand.

Should it not make us think deeply, on the other hand, when we remember that this prayer has been used in Christendom for almost six centuries? Innumerable people have prayed it and loved it. Have they all been chatterboxes and unchristian? And would one consider such a judgment Christian, which means dictated by justice and reverence toward the religious convictions of our neighbor who also believes in Christ? If one knows people whose Christian conviction can not be questioned, and sees how firmly the Rosary has become a part of their lives, one will be very cautious with his judgment.

So in every way, if we meditate on the meaning of the Rosary, we are doing something sensible. He who knows and loves it will gain a deeper understanding; another who saw it in a false light will recognize its true stature; the third will at least have the feeling that he is dealing with something serious, and that to judge it carelessly would be an injustice against truth and humanity.

2- Mary

Within this room built by the sacred Word, the figure of Mary appears as the immediate content of the Rosary prayer.

She has been dear to Christian hearts from the beginning. Already the disciples of Jesus surrounded her with special love and respect. One is conscious of this in following the occasional but quite numerous places in the Gospels and the Acts that speak of her. The Christian people have always loved Mary with a love especially reserved for her, and it was not a good omen when Christians thought of severing their bond to Mary in order to honor the Son.

Who is she? Let us say it as simply as it can possibly be said: she is the woman for whom Jesus Christ, the Son of God and our Redeemer, became the main purpose of life. This fact is as simple and at the same time as far beyond all human comprehension as is the Mystery of Our Lord's Incarnation.

There are two possibilities of greatness. One is to be great oneself: a creator, a hero, a herald, a man of special destiny. The other is to love such a great person, and this possibility seems of equal value. In order to comprehend the life of someone else, one's own heart should measure up to the image of the beloved.



What do we mean, then, if we say that Jesus Christ was the substance of Mary's life?

Of course, we have to be on guard. The heart of man, even the most profound, can never bear the same relation to Christ as it has to a loved fellow creature. The limits of the incomparable rise up here, for He, though our brother, still has the deepest roots of his being on the side of God. All that was just said about dimension and greatness becomes oblique, and must now be discarded. And yet the fact remains that Mary was his mother. Wherever the Gospel speaks of her, not only does she appear as the one who bore and reared the Savior Child, but she stands living, knowing, and loving in this holiest of spheres.

The lesson alone of the Angel's message should suffice for every one of the

faithful who reads aright; it is not the announcement that the divine decree was to be consummated in her, but the question of whether she agreed that it be so. This instant was an abyss before which one's head reels, because here stood Mary in her freedom before the first decision of all that meant salvation. But what does it mean if the question, "Will you help the Savior's coming?" coincided with the other question, "Will you become a mother?" What does it mean that she received the Son of God and the Savior; that she carried and bore him? That she feared for his life and wandered into exile for him? That he grew up beside her in the tranquillity of the home in Nazareth, then left her on his mission, while she, as the Gospel hints, followed him with her love, standing, at the end, beneath the Cross?

That she knew of the Resurrection and waited after the Ascension in the midst of the Apostles for the descent of the Holy Ghost whose power overshadowed her? That she continued to live on in the care of the Apostle “who was loved by Jesus” and to whom he himself entrusted her until her Son and Master called her?

Scripture says little about this, but for those who wish to understand, the texts are eloquent; all the more so because it is Mary’s own voice we hear. For where else should the disciples have learned about the mystery of the Incarnation, about the first happenings of the Childhood, and the pilgrimage to Jerusalem? If we do not want to look upon the first chapters of the

Gospels as legends (we have to know what we are doing in this case, for we are daring to decide which of the

Gospel words are words of God and setting aside Revelation), we can but say that Mary’s recollections, her testimony, her whole life are the foundation of all accounts of Christ’s childhood. And not

only the foundation; for how could she have lived with the Master for thirty years and not spoken about him after his departure? No one can gauge the effect of her narrative on the understanding of Christ and the spread of Christian teaching.

The figure of Mary appears as the immediate content of the Rosary prayer. She has been dear to Christian hearts from the beginning. Already the disciples of Jesus surrounded her with special love and respect. The Christian people have always loved Mary with a love especially reserved for her, and it was not a good omen when Christians thought of severing their bond to Mary in order to honor the Son.

tales, but often impair and weaken the meaning of something that is much more beautiful, much more devout and

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much more wonderful than all legends, namely reality. The life of Mary, as the Gospel tells it, is as humanly true as it can possibly be, but in this human quality it is filled with a mystery of divine communion and love the depth of which is unfathomable. The Rosary points in this direction.

Jesus is the substance of Mary's life, just as the child is the life blood of its mother, for whom it is the one and all. But, at the same time, He is also her redeemer, and that another child cannot be for its mother. Speaking of child and mother in such a manner is like "making conversation": as soon as the speech takes a serious turn, it borders on blasphemy. Not only was Mary's existence as a human mother achieved in her relation to Jesus, but also her redemption. Becoming a mother, she became a Christian. By living with

her child, she lived with the God whose living revelation he is. Growing humanly along with the child, as do all mothers who really love; releasing him on the road of life with so much resignation and pain, she ripened in God's divine grace and truth.

For this reason, Mary is not only a great Christian, one among a number of saints, but she is unique. No one is like her, because what happened to her happened to no other human being. Here lies the authentic root of all exaggeration about her. If people cannot be extravagant enough in their praises of Mary, and even say reckless and foolish things, they are still right in one respect: even though the means are faulty they seek to express a fact the tremendous depth of which must overwhelm everyone who realizes it. But exaggerations are useless and harmful,

because the simpler the word expressing a truth, the more tremendous and at the same time the more deeply realized do the facts become.

It is Mary on whom the Rosary is centered in a focus ever new. This prayer means a lingering in the world of Mary, whose essence was Christ. In this way, the Rosary is, in its deepest sense, a prayer of Christ. The first part of the Hail Mary ends with his name: “and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus.” After this name follow the so-called “mysteries.” For example: “whom thou, O Virgin, didst conceive of the Holy Ghost”—“whom thou didst bear with thee to Elizabeth”—“who was born to thee in Bethlehem.” Every decade of the Rosary contains such a mystery. The whole, as expressed in the chain of beads, includes five decades and thus forms a cycle of five mysteries. There are three such cycles. The first is the Joyful Rosary: its mysteries deal with the sweetly serene and yet overshadowed youth of Jesus. The second, the Sorrowful Rosary, comprises his passion from the hour of Gethsemane to his death on the Cross. The third, the Glorious Rosary, deals with the glory of his Resurrection and Ascension, the Descent of the Holy Ghost, and Mary’s fulfillment.

We see how, in this prayer, the figure and life of Jesus occupies the foreground; not as in the Stations of the Cross, immediate and in itself, but through Mary: as the tenor of his life seen and sensed by her, “keeping all these things carefully in her heart” (Luke 2:51). The essence of the Rosary is a steady incitement to holy sympathy. If a person becomes very important to us, we are happy to meet someone who is attached to him. We see his image mirrored in another life and we see it anew. Our eyes meet two eyes that also love and see. They add their range of vision to ours, and our gaze may now go beyond the narrowness of our own ego and embrace the beloved being, previously seen only from one side. The joys that the other person experienced, and also the pains he suffered, become as many strings whose vibrations draw from our heart new notes, new understanding, and new responses. It is intrinsic in the virtue of sympathy that the other person puts his life at our disposal, which enables us to see and to love not only with our own senses but also with his. Something of this sort, only on a higher plane, happens with the Rosary.