

Mary is assumed into heaven (Lk 1:48-49)

Mary is crowned Queen of Heaven and Earth (2 Tm 2:12)

Jeannette De Beauvoir does marketing copywriting for Pauline Books & Media, the publishing house of the Daughters of St. Paul. She writes and gives workshops about topics connecting the Church's past to its present.

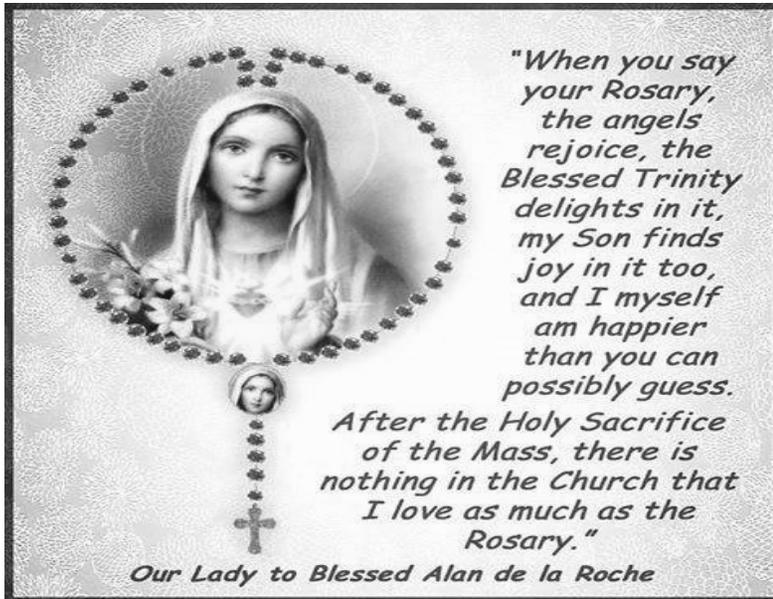
### HOW TO SAVE YOUR CHILDREN THROUGH THE ROSARY

\* Pray the Rosary

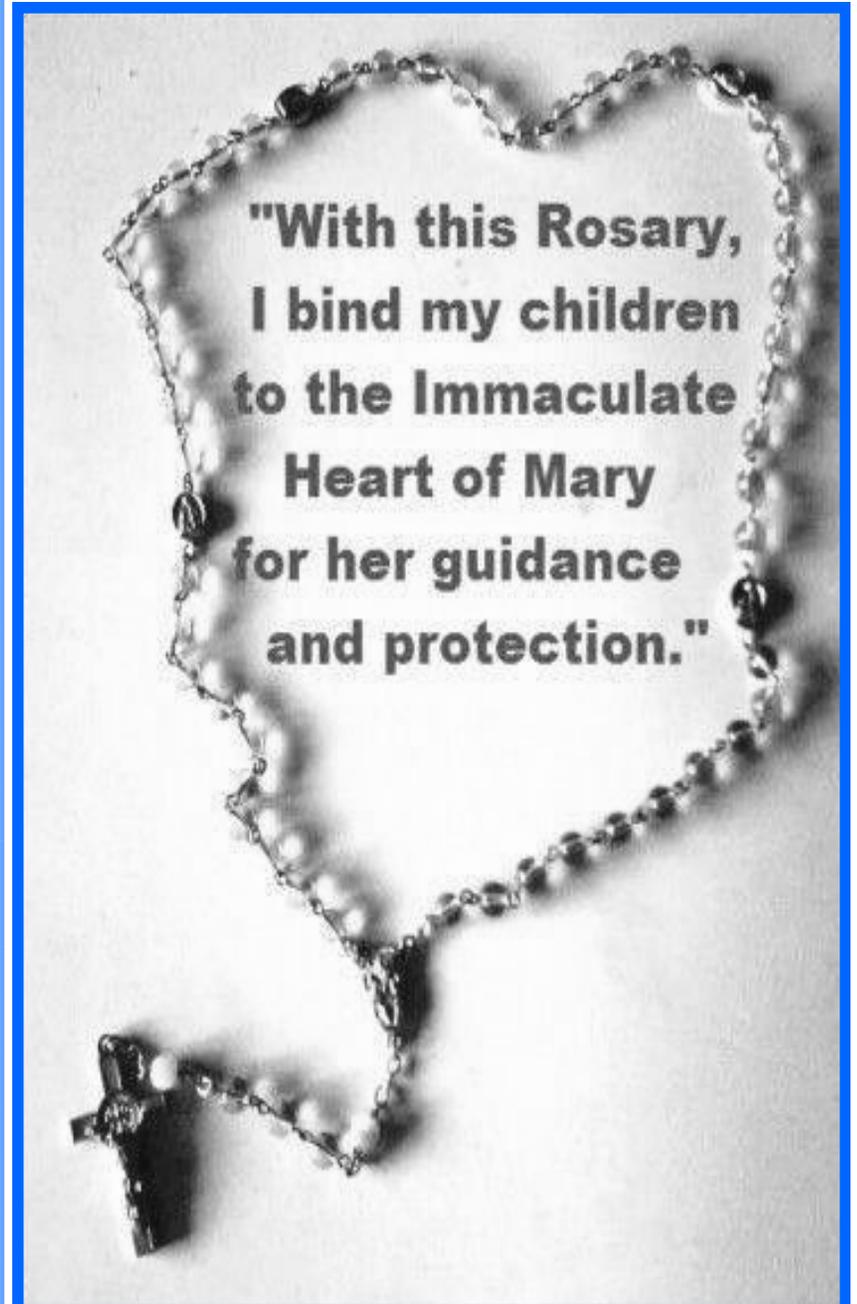
\* Everytime you pray the Rosary, say:  
"With this Rosary, I bind all my children to the Immaculate Heart of Mary for her guidance and protection."

\* In doing so, Our Lady promised "to see to their souls."

Mother Mary to Fr. Gobbi.



## Why We Pray the Rosary



# Why We Pray the Rosary

You've probably heard the expression knock on wood. But what you might not know is that one derivation of this popular saying refers to one of our own Catholic traditions—the recitation of the rosary.

The rosary was a physical representation of inner faith, and it was natural to touch it when you were in distress or pain. “Knocking” rosary beads together, people said, was a sure means to get an answer to your prayer!

It comes from a Latin word, *rosarium*, meaning “a garden of roses,” which doesn't sound as if it has very much to do with praying. But in the 13th century, a garland of roses was used as a crown for a secular lady, and that practice was extended to statues of Mary; so the devotion to her took on the name of that garland.

## A Brief History of the Rosary

Using prayer beads as a counting device is common in many religions. The Church's use of beads to count the number of times a prayer is spoken may have come from earlier Buddhist or Hindu sources. In fact, some sort of physical prayer aid seems to be fundamental to the spiritual lives of many people: when you have a number of prayers that need to be counted, you also need a method for counting them!

Although it is popularly attributed to the founder of the Dominican Order, the 13th-century Saint Domingo (Dominic) de Guzman, the rosary, in fact, comes from much older traditions. Several different threads came together to give us the rosary we use today. One of the first threads was the Church's wish to encourage people to pray the Our Father. Cyprian, bishop of Carthage, was clear in AD 248 about the need to use the Our Father in personal as well as communal prayer. The early Church was already fighting numerous heretical factions, and there was some concern that people would make up their own prayers that might or might not conform to the Church's teachings.

In fourth-century Egypt, Paul the Hermit imposed on himself the recitation of 300 prayers every day, which he counted by collecting and tossing away 300 pebbles. Celtic monks in the seventh century prayed the Book of Psalms (150 psalms), keeping count of each psalm by tying knots in the cords used as belts

The transfiguration of Jesus (Lk 9:35)

Jesus gives the Eucharist (Jn 6:54)

The sorrowful mysteries are generally prayed on Tuesdays and Fridays. They include:

Jesus prays in the Garden of Gethsemane (Lk 22:44)

Jesus is scourged at the pillar (Jn 19:1)

Jesus is crowned with thorns (Mk 15:17)

Jesus carries the cross to Calvary (Jn 19:17)

Jesus dies for our sins (Jn 19:26-27)

The glorious mysteries are generally prayed on Wednesdays and Sundays. They include:

Jesus rises from the dead (Jn 20:19)

Jesus ascends into heaven (Mk 16:19)

The Holy Spirit descends on the apostles (Acts 2:4)

## Meditating on the Mysteries

The joyful mysteries are generally prayed on Mondays and Saturdays.

They include:

The annunciation to the Blessed Virgin Mary (Lk 1:38)

Mary visits her cousin Elizabeth (Lk 1:45)

The birth of Jesus at Bethlehem (Lk 2:7)

The presentation of Jesus in the temple (Lk 2:22)

The finding of the child Jesus in the temple (Lk 2:49)

The luminous mysteries are generally prayed on Thursdays.

They include:

John baptizes Jesus in the Jordan (Mt 3:17)

Jesus performs a miracle at a wedding in Cana (Jn 2:5)

Jesus proclaims the kingdom of God and calls us to conversion (Mk 1:15)

for their habits. (Throughout the Middle Ages—and still continuing in some communities today—members of religious orders wore large rosaries attached to their belts as a continuation of this practice.)

At the same time, in the 12th century, the side the Our Father. It was another easily memorized prayer that came to be associated with popular piety. In the area of personal devotion, these prayers leveled the playing field: everyone could participate.

By the 13th century, the term rosary started describing a string of beads that was then beginning to be used to recite 150 Hail Mary's. As rosaries gained in popularity, so too did their manufacture, resulting in Paternoster Row in London, once the site of a thriving guild that made more and more elaborate beads—monks were even cautioned against the use of excessively beautiful or expensive beads.

In fact, in France, royal inventories for the year 1380 listed enameled gold rosaries encrusted with jewels, amber, and coral. The following century saw mass production of less expensive rosaries, and rosaries made of wood, bone, and lead, once again linking the practice back to popular piety.

### The Dominican Influence

Dominic de Guzman is a saint of uneven appeal. While the founder of an important order in the Church that elevated preaching, study, and education to a new height, he also was a strong supporter of the Crusades, at one point traveling around in the wake of Simon de Monfort's crusader knights and converting what was left of the vanquished "enemy."

On the other hand, the Church was fighting Hail Mary started gaining in popularity along-for its life on another front altogether. The popularity of medieval heresies was splitting it apart, particularly in the important Languedoc region of France. One of the prevalent nonorthodox beliefs, the Albigensian heresy, took the view that the spiritual world is good and the material world is evil. Christ, Albigensians believed, was never truly human; and Christ's

crucifixion, death, and resurrection were only illusions. Mary belonged to the material world of sin, and therefore could not be seen as the mother of God.

Sent to preach in the south of France, Dominic immediately encountered the heresy, and was by all accounts extremely eloquent in refuting it, even once arranging for a sort of preach-off, a competition between himself and a local heretic priest. (Dominic won.)

One day, Dominic was said to have encountered Mary in a vision, and she gave him the “Marian Psalter” that would later develop into the rosary. It was a gift that made sense to his time and situation, since the prayers of the rosary emphasize the mysteries of the life, passion, death, and resurrection of Christ, as well as underlining Mary’s role as the mother of God—all orthodox refutations of the heretical Albigensian claims.

In fact, while the apparition is a nice story, that’s really all it is: there’s no evidence connecting Dominic with the rosary. The customs of carrying and praying with a Paternoster, and even the addition of the Hail Mary to the Paternoster beads, precede Dominic by more than a century, while the practice of meditating on the mysteries didn’t begin until two centuries after his death.

As for Dominic, he was silent on the subject of the apparition. It was a later Dominican, Alain de Rupe, who in the late 15th century spread the story of the saint’s connection with the rosary. In 1470, Alain divided the rosary into three groups of 50 beads and three groups of mysteries—the Incarnation, the Passion, and the Resurrection—and, perhaps more importantly, encouraged the practice of praying the rosary in groups.

### Changes through the Centuries

Nothing in life is static. Much of what many Catholics think is “the way it’s always been done” is, in fact, relatively recent in practice. In the 13th century, for example, the Hail Mary sounded very different from what we say today. The word Jesus didn’t appear as part of the prayer until the 14th century; and the last line, “Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death,” wasn’t added until after a famous sermon preached by Saint Bernardine of Siena in 1487 captured pious peoples’ imaginations and got transferred to their daily devotions.

The Glory Be was not part of the rosary in its earliest stages; and the pendant (composed of the cross and the five extra beads) was also a later addition. The most recent change was in 2002, when Pope John Paul II commemorated the 25th anniversary of his pontificate by adding the mysteries of light, or luminous mysteries, to the saying of the rosary. In his apostolic letter, the pontiff spoke specifically of using the rosary as a path to contemplation. In that sense, we can see the rosary as a unique pairing of both prayer and contemplation, connecting us back to the roots of our tradition and to the practices of the earliest Christians—our ancestors in the faith.

### Praying the Rosary Today

One could argue that there is less need for the rosary now than in the past. During the Middle Ages and beyond, people were required to attend a liturgy celebrated in a language that they did not understand, often in places where they were unable to even see what was happening.

They could, however, continue their private devotions through praying the rosary and feel as though they had been spiritually uplifted by the experience. But the Second Vatican Council brought the liturgy into the languages of the world, and these days, everyone can understand what the priest is saying.

So why the rosary now? Part of the answer has to do with its very intimacy. The rhythm of the prayers, coupled with the fact that many Catholics have been reciting them since early childhood, makes the rosary a familiar touchstone in a world that often feels very unfamiliar and chaotic indeed.

Moreover, one of the truths of the Catholic Church is that it is an incarnational Church, concerned with articles of daily life: with bread, wine, homes, and relationships. The fact that the rosary is an object, part of the material world, can help to celebrate the incarnational side of our religion—and remind us all of where we started, and who we are.