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Intro to World Religions

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10/22/2015

The History of the Rosary and Notable Marian Apparitions

The rosary has had great significance within the Catholic Church for centuries; ranging from its first inception to the documented appearances of Marian apparitions, as such, the rosary is a vital part of the Catholic faith. It has taken centuries for the rosary to become the beacon of dedication towards Jesus Christ and Mary, the Mother of God. Saint Francis de Sales said, “The greatest method of praying is to pray the Rosary,” it is a form of devotion that combines both prayer and meditation to help a person become closer to God. In a time where technology is seeping into every aspect of a person’s life, it has driven people to search for a way to achieve a higher form of connection that can be gleaned from the rosary.

Around the ninth century, before the printing press had been invented, books were written painstakingly by hand, making them incredibly valuable and hard to come by. This posed a problem for the general public who could not afford the cost of these valued books. The Church decided to make it common practice to recite the 150 Psalms, which they quickly realized was not realistic. The Psalms turned into reciting the Our Father 150 times, “though the psalms were no longer being recited, the canonical numbers (150 or 100 or 50) gave this exercise the name *the Pater Noster psalter*, and it was later called *the Pater Noster rosary*” (Willis, page 4). To recite something that many times it only

makes sense that they would need something to keep count; it became common practice to use 50 beads on a string.

Later during the 15th century the Hail Mary, as we see it today, became another form of prayers that the people could pray that was called the *Ave Maria rosary*. It was not until later that same century that, “Medieval theologians began to interpret the 150 psalms as veiled mysteries about the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ” (Rudden). Today these “mysteries” are: the Joyful Mysteries, the Sorrowful Mysteries, the Glorious Mysteries, and the most recently added, by Blessed Pope John Paul II, is the Luminous Mysteries. Today the rosary is still constructed of beads but is now divided into five ‘decades’ for five sets of ‘Hail Mary’s’, each decade has a bead in between them for the ‘Our Father’. Another part of the rosary is attached to this circle of beads; it consists of four beads and ends with a crucifix. The simplicity of the rosary makes it extremely easy for a person to pray whenever and wherever they chose.

It is amazing to find out that the multiple appearances of Mary to three young children, more commonly referred as the story of Our Lady of Fatima, happened less than a century ago. These three children that were chosen by Mary were named, Lucia Dos Santos, and her cousins, Francisco and Jacinta. Despite common belief it was not Mary who first appeared to them but the Angel of Peace, who visited them three times to prepare them for the coming of Mary. “Between May and October 1917, Our Lady appeared six times... in a field called the *Cova de Iria*, near the small village of Fatima, about seventy miles north of Lisbon” (Mauriello). During these visits Mary asked much of these young children, “Mary asked the children to pray the Rosary daily for the

conversion of sinners and asked for devotion to her Immaculate Heart. She asked for prayer, penance and the consecration of Russia to her Immaculate Heart. She also spoke of observing the first Saturdays of each month by going to confession and receiving Holy Communion to make reparation to the Hearts of Jesus and Mary” (Mauriello). It is even said that at one of these many visits Mary opened up the earth and showed the children what the fires of hell looked like.

On Mary’s sixth and final visit to the children on October 13th, 1917 she called herself “Our Lady of the Rosary” with a crown of over 70,000 people to bare witness. In the year 1930 after a thorough investigation of these apparitions the Bishop of Leiria formally approved the devotion of Our Lady of Fatima. Sadly Francisco and Jacinta died just a few years after these visits occurred; however, Lucia Dos Santos lived until the year 2005 and died at the age of 98. Lucia lived the rest of her life as a nun devoting her the rest of her days completely to God. “The rosary is a form of vocal prayer which, in general, suits all of us, for which we should have the highest regard, and which we should make the greatest effort never to abandon”- Sister Lucia Dos Santos.



(Photo credit: forums.catholic.com)

At the tender age of fourteen, on Thursday 11 February 1858, Bernadette Soubirous came across a young girl, while she was out walking one day, slightly hidden within a niche. At that time Bernadette took out her rosary beads and began to pray. Once she finished saying the rosary the young girl stretched out her hands towards Bernadette, but before Bernadette could move the beautiful girl disappeared. For most of the next year Bernadette had a total of eighteen different apparitions of this beautiful young girl, who was Mary.

On February 25, 1858 a miraculous spring was discovered within the niche that Bernadette had first seen Mary, eventually this healing spring would make Lourdes a popular destination to travel to for healing. It is said that during these countless apparitions that Mary requesting both a chapel and for processions. Bernadette decided to take this to her local priest, Fr. Peyramale, who insisted to know the name of this Lady before anything would be done. "Early on March 25, the feast of the Annunciation, Bernadette made her way to the grotto, where the beautiful Lady was already waiting for her. Bernadette asked the Lady her name she said, 'I am the Immaculate Conception.'" (Deery). Bernadette raced to tell the news to Fr. Peyramale; who quickly realized the significance of this revelation and hurried to do her bidding.

Bernadette was highly criticized for speaking out about her experiences with Mary. However, in January of 1862, after an extensive investigation into Bernadette's claims Bishop Laurence conveyed his verdict on Lourdes via a Pastoral letter: "We adjudge that the Immaculate Mary, Mother of God, really appeared to Bernadette Soubirous on February 11th, 1858, and subsequent days, eighteen times in all, in the

Grotto of Massabielle, near the town of Lourdes.”

The use of the rosary has survived through the centuries as a way for a person to achieve solace with the help of Jesus and Mary, which millions of people around the world have been able to experience. One story that is a great example of all that the rosary is meant to symbolize is John F. Butler’s story, an officer in the U.S. Navy’s Judge Advocate General Corps. Butler received a rosary from his father before he was shipped to Afghanistan. This particular rosary had been given to Butler’s godfather who in turn was gifted the rosary by his mother when he was shipped off to fight during World War II.



(Photo credit: The Catholic Company)

“As a symbol of faith, this rosary, with its unique history, is a source of grace and empowerment to me in the daily challenges I face in Kandahar, Afghanistan. Everywhere I walk I keep that rosary with me...I was comforted by its presence in the shoulder pocket of my uniform. While I silently recite its prayers as we hold our breath along winding roads laced with improvised explosive devices, this palpable connection to my

family's past represents a deep longing and trust I have for God and his protection” (Butler). Butler’s story is just one amongst millions of examples of how the rosary can bring a sense of protection and peace to those who choose to pray it.

As technology continues to cause people to disconnect from what is really important in the world, it is imperative to take a step back these distracting material goods to see clearly. For the idea of the rosary to have lasted for more than a thousand years, it is obvious that it signifies something that can help anyone become more in tune with a higher power and those around him or her. The beauty of praying rosary is that it is not a material good that a person can really show off, but a practice that a person will do in solitude as an act of faith for themselves and no one else. As John F. Butler exhibited the rosary can give peace and protection to those who choose to pray and carry one. Dan Rudden, the President and Founder of The Rosary Foundation, sums up the rosary exquisitely, “Although the manner in which the rosary is recited has changed, the results of praying the rosary are still the same. Countless interventions still occur today, and the power and divine graces the rosary offers are available to everyone who is willing to give it a chance.”

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