

PARISHES OF
ST PIUS X, ALDERLEY EDGE, ST BENEDICT'S, HANDFORTH
AND
SACRED HEART & ST TERESA'S WILMSLOW
WEEKLY REFLECTION

Sunday 11th May 2025: Fourth Sunday of Easter
Marian Prayers: 3 The Holy Rosary

The Catechism of the Catholic Church tells us (para 2678) that medieval piety in the West developed the prayer of the Rosary as a popular substitute for the Liturgy of the Hours. The evolution of the Rosary as a devotion can be considered first in the context of multiple repetitive prayer and secondly, in the form of the modern rosary. It is said that even in ancient Nineveh there is a monument in which two winged females stood before a sacred (pagan) tree apparently in prayer and holding a garland (rosarius). Muslims and Buddhists have for many centuries used strings of prayer beads. Early Christians used other methods of counting prayer; for example St Paul the Hermit (c227-c341) would say 300 formulaic prayers a day by having 300 pebbles and throwing one away after each prayer. By the 11th century it seems that in the Western World pebbles, berries or pieces of bone threaded on a string were used as an aid to prayer. Lady Godiva of Coventry stated in her will that “*the circlet of precious stones which she had threaded on a cord in order that by fingering them one after the other she might count her prayers exactly*” should be placed on a statue of the Blessed Virgin Mary. However, at this time the Hail Mary had not developed into a prayer and strings of prayerbeads were called “Paternosters” since their principal use was to number repetitions of the Lord’s Prayer.

By the 12th century the practice of reciting 50 or 150 Hail Marys was widespread, though, at that time, the prayer finished with the words “*and blessed is the fruit of thy womb*”. This was before the time of St Dominic (1170-1221) who, according to a number of past Popes, was the author of the Rosary, inspired by Our Lady to preach the prayer to counter sin and heresy. However, there is good evidence that the recitation of the Rosary pre-dated St Dominic, and there is no evidence (e.g. in the numerous early Lives and manuscripts) that the saint was responsible for its propagation or had any particular devotion to it. Further, the practice of meditating on the mysteries appears not to have begun until some 200 years after his death.

The modern, Western church, Rosary dates from the 15th century and in 1569 Pope Pius V officially approved the 15-decade form which remained unchanged, albeit with some local variation, until 2002 when Pope St John Paul II published the Apostolic Letter “Rosarium Virginis Mariae”. This added the “Luminous Mysteries” to

the traditional Joyful, Sorrowful and Glorious Mysteries. The Apostolic Letter contains detailed and profound reflections on the Rosary beginning with a statement that this simple yet profound prayer was loved by countless saints and is encouraged by the Magisterium and that Pope Leo XIII in 1883 proposed the Rosary as an effective spiritual weapon against the evils afflicting society. It is recalled that Pope St John Paul II himself said just two weeks after his election as Pope: *“The Rosary is my favourite prayer.....Against the background of the words Ave Maria the principal events of the life of Jesus Christ pass before the eyes of the soul.our heart can embrace in the decades of the Rosary all the events that make up the lives of individuals, families, nations, the Church, and all mankind. Our personal concerns and those of our neighbour, especially those who are closest to us, who are dearest to us. Thus the simple prayer of the Rosary marks the rhythm of human life”*.

Stephen S.