



DOMINICANA

Vol. XXXV

SEPTEMBER, 1950

No. 3

A LOOK AT THE RECORD

FRANCIS CONNOLLY, O.P.



IN THIS SCIENTIFIC AGE, the all-important question asked when something is put up for discussion is: Does it work? If it can be shown that the efficiency of an object can be measured, and if the measurement is visible, then assent can be commanded. When the late Al Smith wanted to put across a point to his audience, he would introduce his argument with the invitation: Let's look at the record. And that is what can be done with Mary's Rosary in order to show that "it works." Just look at the record and read what is there. Whenever this special and beloved devotion of the Blessed Mother was recited, there followed conversions of heretics, salvation of Christians and victories in battle. To people of this day, war is no novelty; we have had many in various parts of the world in the last fifty years, two of which have ensnared the whole civilized world. How can the Rosary bring victories in war? The beginning of the record is in the 13th century, when the Rosary was first popularized. A jet-like leap over the pages of history to the 16th century for the next stop and a final look at our own times will complete the record and justify the statement that the Rosary works.

When the Blessed Virgin travelled to the temple to make her offerings shortly after the birth of her Divine Son, she met there the prophet Simeon and heard his words: "And thy own soul a sword shall pierce" (Luke 2, 35). From that day till this, his words have held true, for men have never ceased to sin against her Son nor heretics and infidels to attack her special prerogatives. In the 13th century a notorious sect of heretics attacked both Mary's Divine Maternity and her Virginitly. Denying the divinity of Christ, they deprived Mary of her unique rôle as Mother of God. By such claims

these Albigenses cast aside the divine mysteries so closely linked with the lives of Jesus and Mary, and by such false teaching robbed souls of the grace Christ had won in the agony and pain of the Passion.

Not only were these heretics attacking the true Church with their impieties, but they brought about great internal rifts in the civil life and peace of Southern France by their seditions. Pope Innocent III was becoming worried over this danger to Christianity; in fact, he felt the heretics more of a threat than the Saracens, for an enemy within the ranks is far more dangerous than one from without. In 1210 he set the machinery in motion for a crusade against this spiritual disease growing within the midst of his subjects. He sought for the brilliant man of God to whom the burden of this war could be entrusted—for had not God raised up great saints to combat the great heresies of the past centuries? His wait was not long, for soon out of Old Castile came a Spanish priest with the preaching ability, personal sanctity and grace of God to spearhead the spiritual army against the Church outlaws. He was Dominic of Guzman lending prayers and presence to the military forces under Simon de Montfort in the war against the Albigenses.

St. Dominic had as his main purpose to promote the true religion—to keep before the eyes of all the real and infinite God, Jesus Christ, and the honor of Mary, His mother. He preached wherever the opportunity arose and backed up his preaching with the kind of holiness that men call real. Even God wished to give further proof of Dominic's unimpeachable character by granting many miracles under the very noses of the heretics. Still, with all this, Dominic was not succeeding; the obstinacy of his enemies was too deeply rooted for a widespread conversion. He needed some other principal weapon—he needed the Rosary.

What is the Rosary? It is not a human invention. It was presented to St. Dominic by the Blessed Virgin in a vision as the means of overcoming the stubbornness of his foes. This vision meant that the Mother of God had come from heaven to speak to a weak creature of her Son, that the weak creature was so pleasing to her Son and God that he was worthy of this visit. No amount of money or earthly influence could merit such a favor, but only unselfish holiness of life. The purpose of the mission was to bring the Rosary to men, and Mary was the heavenly angel of this gift. In the Rosary are contained fifteen mysteries on which the mind thinks while the lips send out a background music of Our Fathers and Hail Marys. These Aves, which the Angel Gabriel spoke to Mary in preparation for her reception of Jesus, are the same that Mary now gives to Dominic to

sustain the hearts of faltering and even fallen Christians.

Dominic's preaching now took a different shape: now he explained the manner of reciting the Rosary and how the mysteries were to be meditated. For both of these he set the concrete example by his daily acts and conversation; for any of his biographers will tell that he always spoke "to God or about God." When the results began to become visible, when large numbers of the heretics softened their hearts to make peace with the Church, the Rosary was given the credit. *Virgin Most Faithful!*

Someone once said that most of our saints were ex-soldiers. Regardless of the truth of that statement, it is noticeable that the highlights of the Rosary's history has been linked with battles and wars. A striking example of this took place during the troubled times in the 15th and 16th centuries under the aggression of the Turks. The infidels of the south of Christian Europe were the warlike Turks. The sultans attacked the Christian kingdoms with religious enthusiasm, determined to wipe out Christians and Christianity. The Christians formed forces to meet the enemy, but always ended in the same way—defeat and retreat. In the 16th century, the victory at the Isle of Cyprus gave Sultan Selim his opportunity to conquer Europe. His infidel sword would now pierce further into the heart of Mary with intent to destroy the belief in the divinity of her Son and to put Mohammed in His place. It was to be Turk over Christian.

Innocent III thought the Albigensians more dangerous than the Saracens, so with the aid of the Rosary and St. Dominic and Simon de Montfort, he silenced the heretics. But in the time of Pope Pius V, the Moslems, under the Turks, were the greatest threat to Christendom. Though Pius could not call upon Dominic for prayer and preaching, he had inherited the weapon given to Dominic by Mary. As Pope of the true and only Church of Christ, Pius united a strong zeal for the faith required by the Master with an unwavering trust in Mary's help to provide a spiritual defense against the Moslem. The Venetians and Spaniards, united in the hatred for the common enemy, served as his material and military power. The Christian army marched southward from all parts of Europe to meet the invading Turk.

At Messina, King Philip of Spain and the Venetians formed their army and fleet, the task force of their day, in preparation for the assault against Selim. The Christian fleet was overwhelmingly outnumbered, and Pius V knew this. He blessed the ships and the warriors and turned to the Christian people with the plea to pray to Mary, to pray the Rosary, as never before. There was no way to

avoid the battle, no way to match the Turkish power, but the fleet sailed out confidently under the protection of Mary.

Lepanto is a small bay on the southern coast of Europe. Here the famous battle, one of the world's truly great conflicts, was waged. It started on October 7th, 1571, with crashings of ships, smoke, smell of gunpowder, the screams of dying men. The superiority of the Turks gave them great confidence in the victory, but the Christians, though numerically weaker, struggled courageously. As the Christians reeled from the opening clashes, the first few rounds went to the Turks. But it is the power of God that decides battles. More and more often it was the Turkish galley that sank; the Christian floated and fought again. The Turkish lines dissolved, their reserves were exhausted, thirty thousand fell that day. When the final count was taken, the Turks had suffered a decisive defeat. Their power was broken, not to be restored again. But what was the source of the Christian victory?

At Rome, while the fierce struggle was going on at Lepanto, Pius V was in conference with his cardinals. Suddenly he rose to his feet. It was the moment of the victory at Lepanto. His voice trembled as he said: "It is enough for today. At present we have nothing better to do than to give thanks to God for the victory He has given to the Christian arms." Later, messengers confirmed his revelation. Nor did the Pope loudly proclaim the virtues of his generals, admirals, and fighting men until after he had ascribed the full victory to the intercession of the Mother of God. In her litany he added the invocation: "Help of Christians, pray for us." A special feast day was established in honor of Mary, which Pope Gregory XIII later extended throughout the whole Church. This feast, Rosary Sunday, is celebrated on the first Sunday of October.

For those who think the 16th century too remote, another look at the record will show more recent entries. In 1917 World War I had been raging for three years. Pope Benedict XV, saddened by the widespread misery, had asked all Christians to pray for peace. Some distance from St. Peter's in Rome, a beautiful woman broke in one day on the play of three Portuguese shepherd children. Mary, Queen of the Rosary and Helper of the Afflicted, had come to instruct the children to pray for the end of the war. It is interesting to recall that heaven's first invitation to the stable at Bethlehem was extended to shepherds. Now three little shepherd children, innocent and simple, are asked to champion her devotion for our times.

The children, Francisco, Jacinta, and Lucia were accustomed to run briskly over their beads with the recitation of only the names

"Hail Mary" and "Our Father," in place of the complete prayers. They were children, after all, and they wanted to play. Mary's appearance to them came as a startling surprise. Lucia, finding her voice at last, asked:

"Who are you? Where did you come from? What do you want?"

"I come from heaven. I want you children to come here at this hour on the 13th of each month until October. Then I will tell you who I am."

"You come from heaven! Shall I go there?" Lucia asked.

"Yes," replied the Lady, "but you must say the Rosary, and say it properly."

That was the theme of Fátima—say the Rosary and get to heaven; pray and sacrifice for peace now on earth and forever in heaven.

Peace came finally in November of 1918. There should have been tremendous storms of Rosaries in thanksgiving for Mary's help. Although there were many who spared nothing in showing the Virgin their gratitude for family and country, there was, in the overall view, very little evidence of a world turning to its protectress with thanks. Almost immediately the seeds of the second world conflict began to fall on ground on which the blood was scarcely dry. Smoldering embers glowed brighter and brighter until they burst into a white-hot flame. Mary's warning and counsel were ignored, and all hope of peace was fading. There followed six bitter years of war, a war which ended officially in 1945, but which has been continued without actual combat until our own day. Even now the threat of widespread military action has begun again. Why has there been no real peace? There has not been enough real prayer. Our Holy Father, Pius XII, can be heard today pleading for the prayers of Christians everywhere, pleading for that peace which the world cannot give.

It was during the final apparition at Fátima on October 13, 1917, that the Blessed Virgin revealed her identity to the three children:

"I am the Lady of the Rosary, and I have come to warn the faithful to amend their lives and ask pardon for their sins. They must not continue to offend our Lord, already so deeply offended. They must say the Rosary."

Add to this the promise Mary made to the Dominican, Blessed Alan de La Roche: "He who calls upon me through the Rosary shall not perish."

Can the Rosary bring peace? Look at the record. It has done so in the past; it will do so in the future—if it is used.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Blunt, Rev. Hugh F., LL.D., *Mary's Garden of Roses*, P. J. Kenedy & Sons, New York, 1939.
- Haugg, Donatus, *The Rosary and the Soul of Women*. Trans. by Sister Mary Aloysi Kiener, S.N.D., F. Pustet, New York, 1941.
- Kenrick, Most Rev. P.R., D.D., *Month of Mary*. The Encyclopedia Press, New York, 1919.
- Rosarian's Handbook, The*, Edited by Rev. D. Dolan, O.P., Marchbanks Press, New York, 1942.