

THE GRANDEUR OF THE ROSARY

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HE PROPHET Isaias invites us to make known to the people the works of God. "Make his works known among the people." [Isaias, XII, 4.] The works of God! Human language is at times ineffective in extolling the masterpieces of a genius, but, when it concerns the divine works, enthusiasm remains silent, a cold sword runs through to the soul. We admire and we are silent. Among these works of God, three are ineffable: the Incarnation, the divine Maternity, the Eucharist. The God-Man, the Mother of God, the Blessed Sacrament. Before these three wonders, the dumbfounded intellect can only cry out: Silence! The divine is there!

After the works of God come those of Mary. These are all sublime, for they are works of love; they are innumerable, for they extend to every epoch and to every country. Among all of these, one of the most excellent is assuredly the Rosary. . . .

The institution of the Rosary is more than a work of genius. We find therein that supernatural wisdom which the theologians admire in the institution of the Sacraments.

Far be it from us to consider the Rosary as equal to the Sacraments, but it is possible to find more than one striking analogy concerning this subject. The Sacraments are in perfect harmony with human nature, which is at one and the same time sensible and spiritual. To wish to apply man to purely intellectual acts would be to wean him, as it were, from a milk indispensable to his happiness. His religion and his cult need an exterior food; his Sacraments ought to be, like himself, composed of a soul and a body. The Sacraments have a body, for they are sensible signs; they have a soul, for they contain the insensible power of the Almighty. A few words are pronounced. Suddenly the sign is invaded by the Divine Majesty; God comes in the Sacraments, since grace comes therein, and at the same time that grace touches the soul, the soul touches God.

The true prayer is, likewise, the one which entirely embraces

man. But the Rosary has a soul and a body. The body is vocal prayer; the soul is the meditation on the mystery, it is the heavenly power which flows from this meditation. Like the Sacraments, the Rosary has its matter and its form; the sensible part of the Rosary represents the Holy Humanity of the Saviour, and speaks to our corporeal nature; the invisible power and the sublime mysteries of the Rosary represent the divinity of Christ, and appeal to our superior nature, by which we come in contact with the Angels and with God.

In the Sacraments the sensible sign and the power of the words form a single whole, as in Christ the human nature and the divine nature are united in a single person. In the Rosary the vocal prayer and the meditation on the mystery form an indivisible whole. To separate the form from the matter is to destroy the Sacrament; to separate the mystery from the recitation is to destroy the essence of the Rosary.

The Sacraments are like the prolongation and the continuation of the Incarnation. They are, so to speak, the relics of Our Lord. In the Sacraments Jesus comes to bless and to save. He lets escape, as in the past, that power which heals: "*Power went forth from him and healed all.*" [Luke, VI, 19.] Jesus also comes in the Rosary. In stating each mystery, we could say: The Son of David is coming. Jesus, son of David, have pity on me.

The Sacraments are the exterior symbols which distinguish the Christians from the Infidels; the Rosary is the devotion distinctive of true Catholics. The Sacraments are the pleasant and strong ties which unite the children of Christ. Through participation in the same Sacraments, the faithful show that they live in communion with the same faith, with the same hope, with the same charity. Through the Rosary the Knights of Mary are united from every part of the earth and join their voices in the same love and the same hope. The Rosary is like the flag which God raises over nations to gather them from the four corners of the world. "*And he shall set up a standard unto the nations . . . and shall gather together the dispersed . . . from the four quarters of the earth.*" [Isaias, XI, 12.]

It would be easy to go on with this parallel between the Sacraments, the work of Jesus, and the Rosary, the work of Mary. But we shall sum it up in a few words: Man needs the sensible; the Sacraments and the Rosary are signs which elevate the soul to the summits whence it contemplates the celestial horizons. God, eternity. Man wishes to nourish himself with the spiritual; the Sacraments and the Rosary facilitate its understanding for him. Man thirsts for the infinite; the Sacraments and the Rosary give him God.

But this is only a particular point of view; the Rosary has an extension, in a sense, unlimited.

Man perceives time with his body and his weakness; with the summits of his soul, with his supernatural destiny, he comes in contact with eternity. Now then! The Rosary is vast enough to embrace time and eternity itself. It enshrines all time, since it contains those unfathomable mysteries which are the central point of all the centuries and whose realization constitutes what St. Paul calls *the fullness of time*. [Gal., IV, 4.] The Rosary embraces eternity. In fact, the Rosary begins in heaven and in eternity with the mystery of the Incarnation; it ends in heaven and in eternity with the Ascension of Jesus and the Coronation of Mary. We begin the Rosary in the Heart of the adorable Trinity, we end it in the Heart of the Blessed Virgin. From heaven to heaven, from eternity to eternity, that is the extent of the Rosary.

Hence, the Rosary is the summary of the whole of Christianity. Dogma is completely reduced to the Rosary. We come upon the treatise on the divine Persons, and upon that of the Incarnation in the first mystery; the treatise on the Sacraments has already been touched lightly; as for the treatise on the Eucharist, everybody knows that the Rosary is, like the Blessed Sacrament and the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, the memorial of the life, passion, death and resurrection of our Lord. The Treatise on the last things is contained in a startling and practical way in the Glorious Mysteries. The Rosary is, therefore, theology, but a prayerful, adoring theology, which says through each of its dogmas: *Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost.*

Moral science, which treats of sins and virtues, is reduced to this great devotion. The infinite malice of mortal sin is really appreciated only when we see, in the Sorrowful Mysteries, the divine justice working unceasingly on the innocent Christ, exacting from Him that tremendous ransom of the cross, and when we hear Jesus crying out under the burden of our crimes: *My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?* [Matt., XXVII, 46] Each of the mysteries is a sublime lesson of virtue; there is more than heroism in such examples. These are the highest summits of the mystical life. The Rosary is also the prayerful, tearful, atoning moral science, which ascends toward heroism while saying to Christ: *Thou hast redeemed us for God with thy blood. . . and hast made us for our God a kingdom and priests.* [Apoc., V, 9-10.]

History is summarized in the Rosary, since this devotion contains Him Who is the first and the last word of all events, Him

Whose radiant figure dominates all of history, both the Old and the New Testaments. Once again, the Rosary is the prayerful history, which leads all nations to Christ, saying: Thou art the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end.

The social question itself is resolved by the Rosary, as Leo XIII eloquently proves in his Encyclical of 1893 on the Rosary. Why have nations trembled, why these commotions which disturb the peace of societies? There are three causes for this, says the Sovereign Pontiff. The first is the aversion for a humble and laborious life, and the remedy for this evil is found in the Joyful Mysteries; the second is the horror for everything which causes suffering, and the remedy for this evil is found in the Sorrowful Mysteries; the third is the forgetfulness of the future goods, object of our hope, and the remedy for this evil is found in the Glorious Mysteries. Yes, once again, the social question is resolved by the Rosary with this triumphant shout: *Christus vincit, Christus regnat, Christus imperat!*

Consequently, we see what marvelous versatility there is in the Rosary. It adapts itself to all subjects, to all times, to all persons. Through the material, sensible aspects of its mysteries, the Rosary is adapted to any intellect, it becomes the Psalter of the ignorant; by its divine depths, it is the inexhaustible *Summa* of the theologian. It is, then, the great synthesis of Christianity, everything is included within the beginning and the end of the Rosary, just as all of time is included between the two edges of eternity.

It would be interesting to compare the Rosary and the *Summa* of St. Thomas, the Rosary and the Christian temples of the Middle Ages.

All three, the Rosary, the *Summa* of St. Thomas, and the Christian temples of the Middle Ages, are, each in its own way, a summary of Christianity; all three are a poem in which unfold the marvels of the divine plan; all three are an imposing pedestal which elevates the soul to the infinite; all three are vivified by the same divine Breath. In the *Summa*, in the ancient cathedral, in the Rosary, the soul experiences an indefinable well-being. The soul feels closer to its native land, it is closer to heaven, it is closer to God. Finally, all three are directed toward the same Christ. Jesus dominates the *Summa* of St. Thomas, Jesus dominates the Gothic cathedral, Jesus dominates the Rosary. A triple synthesis, a triple teaching, a triple song of love and of gratitude to the same God-Saviour.

The first two, the *Summa* and the Gothic cathedral, are the work of genius, but the Rosary is more than an invention of genius. It is a supernatural wisdom; in a word, it is the work of Mary.

The divine work may be summarized in two words: creation and salvation. To create and to save, to create worlds and to save the elect, this is where all the marvels of the real and the ideal lead. After having accomplished these two masterpieces God could rest. He rested after six days, not that His Omnipotence was fatigued, but in order to contemplate that His work was beautiful. *And God saw that it was good.* [Gen., I, 25.] Alas! For the work of salvation the Giant of Eternity had, as it were, to get tired. He had to walk a long time and He sat down as if overwhelmed with weariness.

To save an elect, and even only to give grace to a soul, is a work greater in a sense, according to St. Augustine and St. Thomas, than the creation of heaven and earth. This great marvel of grace and of sanctity is summarized in the Rosary. This devotion reveals to us the *Author* of sanctity, the *models* of sanctity. The Author of sanctity is Jesus; but to have knowledge of the God-Man, it is necessary to study His Heart, His Soul and His Divinity. The Rosary makes this revelation to us. The models of sanctity after Jesus, are Mary and Joseph who have coöperated with the work of redemption. And the Rosary makes us appreciate their rôle. The practice of sanctity embraces the whole of Christian perfection from common charity to heroic charity. The Rosary invites us to all these degrees of the spiritual life.

It would be necessary to study the details of this vast synthesis, but we have only given here a general outline. . . . We wished simply to show, in a general way, how the Rosary is the summary of all the works of God.