

ROSES ARE THE SERUM

CORNELIUS D. KANE, O.P.



HE annals of history reveal that since the Middle Ages many an heretical assault against the Catholic Church has been repulsed not by the force of arms, but by a form of prayer.

This special form of prayer, which for seven centuries has not infrequently rooted out heresies and has survived the vicissitudes of so long a period, is a flourishing devotion in the Catholic world of the twentieth century. This universal devotion to Jesus, Our Redeemer, and the Virgin Mary, Our Co-Redemptrix, is Mary's Rosary. The efficacy of this union of mental and vocal prayer has been manifested on occasions, legion in number, publicly and privately. Following his predecessors' methods in times of heresy and error, our present pontiff, Pius XII, has often besought his flock to turn to Mary, Our Mother and Mediatrix, through this devotion so loved by her, so that true peace may reign in the souls of mankind and that reason may rule over this present war-torn world of sorrow and grief. The papal praises of this devotion are very numerous since its origin, and the sole principle permeating all these laudatory tributes is the efficaciousness of Mary's Roses as an antidote for heresy. To appreciate fully and truly understand the purpose of this spiritual weapon as a powerful force of Holy Mother the Church against inimical assaults, we must mentally go back to that medieval epoch in which was produced this form of prayer, sublime in its simplicity.

When the Albigensian heresy was attacking the Catholic Church, Saint Dominic, by assiduously preaching the Rosary devotion, saved the Church from serious injury.

In the latter part of the twelfth century this old heresy, garbed in new finery, made its debut in the amphitheatre of southern France. The populace was astonished at its newness and sought to learn about its novel doctrines. This heretical doctrine was disseminated in cities, towns and rural districts and seemed to fructify in a short time. This creed of fallacies, which Saint Paul himself had long ago refuted, now drew many followers to itself, as a magnet attracts pieces of iron and steel through its own peculiar properties. As time passed the harvest of the sect became abundant, for the membership rapidly increased, and opposition to the sound doctrines of the true Church became more adamant. Like an epidemic, it was no longer localized. It was spreading to the borders of the neighboring countries. An antidote was direly needed, for this disease was ravaging both civil

and ecclesiastical bodies. A serum was needed to combat this plague.

To comprehend how potent this serum had to be, let us dissect Albigenian doctrine and see just how poisonous and fatal this creed was to humanity. This sect professed the belief that the human body was under the direct control of the evil spirit who was its creator; they forgot what man is made of. For while Christians looked upon the body as an aid to attain the final goal, these Albigenians could see in it but an overwhelming weight chaining the spirit and impeding its flight to God. Next, they taught that Jesus Christ, Who was sent by the good spirit to liberate the souls of human beings incarcerated in their bodies, was only a creature; this is a repudiation of the Incarnation, a doctrine which is essentially necessary for the belief of all Catholics. Moreover, by this negation that Christ is both God and Man, they denied the debt of the human race was fully paid on Calvary. We know well that, because of the pride of Adam and Eve in the fall at Paradise, an infinite crime was committed. To appease for this "felix culpa," God, the Father sent the Word made Flesh into this world. Did not the centurion and those with Him at Calvary exclaim, while watching Jesus about the ninth hour, "Indeed this was the Son of God?"¹ The dignity of the Blessed Virgin was also attacked by this denial and Her Virginity impugned. See the diabolical assertions they made and promulgated! Their fallacious doctrines go on strongly to recommend the practice of suicide by starvation, thus taking life and death in their own hands and totally ignoring the Catholic teaching that our bodies are the living temples of the Holy Ghost, as Saint Paul says in his first epistle to Timothy, "every creature of God is good."² In this doctrine of starvation we find the very root of their theories, namely that the body is something evil and therefore should be mutilated and abused until death claims it. The last sophism we shall consider is that of abstention from marriage; in advocating this for all, they disregarded the holy sacrament of Matrimony. Did they think that man's heart was a stone? How was the human race to continue existing, if man and woman did not join in lawful wedlock? Thus we discover that they annihilated the idea of a family, the backbone and bulwark of true society. The family was a non-entity in their social program. They did not heed the advice of St. Paul to the unmarried, "but if they do not contain themselves, let them marry. For it is better to marry than to be burnt."³ With this compendium of

¹ Matthew XXVII, 54.

² I Timothy IV, 4.

³ I Corinthians, VII, 9.

their doctrines, we can easily discern how mortal an enemy and devastating a menace was their venomous doctrine both to the governments of the infected areas and the Church. Poisoned in every way, the condition of their victims became worse and the need of a serum more acute.

Rome thought it had discovered the cure. The reigning pope sent bishops to expose the falsities of the raging heresy, and in word they preached well, but in action they fell terribly amiss. They had parades through the streets with their long retinue of servants, and in this way they thought they would be effective preachers, but to these poor, misled people they were no more than "sounding brass and tinkling cymbal." This style of preaching was definitely not the cure. Finally, in 1220 came the crisis of the fever. Such a crisis usually occasions an ordinary doctor to become well-known, if he is able to produce an effective antidote for the malady. What kind of serum would this physician bring forth, not only to stop the infection from claiming its victims, but also to bring on a rapid cure and healing of the wounds?

Now, let us go to the laboratory of this heroic doctor and there visualize him at his work. His workshop and laboratory was a small chapel at Prouille. There the sturdy friar knelt silently in adoration before the tabernacle begging assistance from the Prisoner of Love. St. Dominic realized the precarious position of the Church and humbly sought a remedy for the heresy in divine succor. Praying day and night, he became all-powerful, as Saint Paul defiantly proclaims, "I can do all things in Him Who strengtheneth me."⁴ It seemed the more he prayed the greater became his thirst for conversation with God. The Lord was to be the Life of his works; his active life was to be only the overflow of his contemplation. At the same time this watchdog of the Lord was subduing the desires of the flesh by mortification, and studying the subtleties of the heresy, so as to be fully prepared for the great work that was to be done. Suddenly one evening while he lay prostrate on the cold chapel floor in converse with God, tradition says, he had a vision wherein the Blessed Virgin with the Infant Jesus in Her arms appeared to him. The Child presented St. Dominic with the Rosary, and at the same time the Virgin Mother exhorted him in a motherly way to preach this devotion, which is so cherished by Her and pleasing to Her Son, in order to combat the raging heresy and save souls from eternal perdition. His newly-founded Order was to make this a universal devotion and was to hold fast to its precious heritage. This special form of prayer

⁴ Philippians, IV, 13.

was to be the serum and the Dominican friars were to inject all the afflicted with it, so that vices should be rooted out and virtues infused. This was the ointment which was to heal all the injured tissues and repair all mutilated members of the body of both church and state. The Rosary is the prayer of healing. Now the cure had come. The friars began their mission of teaching this devotion to all.

So we picture the white-robed Dominicans, encouraged by the example of St. Dominic, setting out to preach this simple form of prayer in order that the lost sheep may come back into the true fold. These "true lights of the world" scattered to the cities and hamlets of the diseased areas teaching Mary's Roses to rich and poor, healthy and infirm, erudite and unlearned, friend and foe. Mary again was the real mother by giving us this prayer so sublime, but yet so simple. They instructed all the people that to pray the rosary it is necessary to have vocal intercourse with God and at the same time to think about the different events of the lives of Mary and Her Son. This prayer was the fusion of the vocal and mental elements. As these Dominicans chorally recited the psalter of the breviary, so too they taught the people how to chant properly the new psalter of Mary, containing one hundred fifty Aves and fifteen Paters. Thus the heresy gradually subsided, and this devotion has come down to us as a proof of Mary's love for her children.

Now we can see how the Albigenian heresy was defeated in its attempts to inflict a serious blow on the Catholic Church by a humble friar, who begged and received divine aid in order to rescue members of the Mystical Body from the whirlpool of sin which gradually drags souls into the abyss of eternal damnation. We naturally tend to correlate the name of an epidemic with its antidote; and so when saying the Rosary, we too can always think of the menacing heresy which the Serum of Roses conquered in the thirteenth century. If we look about us today at all the different "isms" which are adverse to the doctrines of the Church, we may reflect that they are very similar to the conditions which confronted Dominic. This holy man of God relied on prayer to Jesus and Mary to save the Church from harm. He did not ask God to come down and do as he willed, but he rather raised his mind up to God. That is true prayer. The modern "isms," most of which are really neo-Albigenian heresies, are infecting millions of souls. These souls need our prayers. A remedy is exigent to cure these maladies, and as history makes known to us the efficacy of the Roses of Mary in destroying heresy, let us again trust in Her goodness by praying Her favorite devotion which has proved to be the greatest power against the enemies of the Church.