

WHY IS OCTOBER THE MONTH OF THE ROSARY?

And where did the rosary come from?

Q: Why is October referred to as the Month of the Rosary?

A: The answer to your question is relatively simple but needs a historical context in order to be fully appreciated. The short answer is this: October is dedicated as the Month of the Rosary because we celebrate the memorial of Our Lady of the Rosary each year on October 7.

To understand this feast, we need to go back in time. In the 16th century, the Islamic Ottoman Empire presented a serious military threat to western Europe and sent a fleet of ships to attack Christian defenses in southern Europe. Pope Pius V recognized the grave danger and organized a fleet called the Holy League to confront the navy of the Ottoman Turks.

On October 7, 1571, the two navies engaged in a pivotal battle that would determine who controlled maritime traffic in the Mediterranean, Adriatic and Aegean seas. The fate of western Europe depended upon the success of Christians in this navy battle, which involved more than 400 warships (it was the largest naval battle in Western history for centuries).

Pius V knew he needed more than just military strength to defend Christian Europe, so he asked that all the faithful pray the rosary, requesting the intercession of the Blessed Mother. At the end of the Battle of Lepanto, the Holy League was victorious and the maritime expansion of the Ottoman Empire was permanently prevented.

The next year, Pius V established a feast on October 7 in honor of the Blessed Mother, originally called Our Lady of Victory. After a few centuries, the name was changed to Our Lady of the Rosary to more clearly recognize that prayer was the greatest power at work that day on the seas.

In 1571, the rosary was still a relatively new prayer form for the universal church. Pope Pius V had issued a decree formally establishing devotion to the rosary in the papal bull *Consueverunt Romani Pontifices* just two years before the Battle of Lepanto. The Holy Father's universal promulgation recognized the growing devotion to the Blessed Mother throughout Europe, as well as the increased prayer of the rosary in various locations. Devotion to the rosary was especially promoted in the 13th century by St. Dominic and in the 16th century by St. Peter Canisius (who, according to tradition, added the final verse to the Hail Mary, in which we pray, "Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death" — printed officially in the Catechism of the Council of Trent in 1566; the first two verses of the Hail Mary are adapted from Luke 1:28 and 1:42).

The origins of the rosary are complex. The use of knotted ropes to count prayers or scriptural verses (including the Lord's Prayer and the Jesus Prayer) is an ancient practice and is even found in non-Christian cultures. Most probably, the Christian recitation of 150 such prayers was intended to mirror the monastic prayer of the Liturgy of the Hours in which monks prayed all 150 psalms each day.

The structure of the rosary as we know it today developed significantly from the 12th to the 14th centuries as the larger collection of 150 prayers was further divided into groups of 50 and separated by biblical verses or themes (now referred to as mysteries). It is these mysteries, like a grouping of common roses in a garden, that gave the name *rosary* to this prayer form.

The rosary is a living prayer form and continues to develop even in recent times. An invocation known as the Fatima Prayer was commonly added in the early 20th century. In 2002 Pope John Paul II added a new set of five reflections called the Luminous Mysteries which encourage additional meditations on the life of Jesus. The rosary is an invitation to experience the grace of Mary's spiritual motherhood as she leads us to her Son, Jesus. For this reason, it has been an invaluable source of countless spiritual graces for the saints. Remember, every time you pray the rosary you are given the privilege and honor of pronouncing the holy name of Jesus more than 50 times.

The wealth of spiritual graces offered through the rosary comes not from the multiplication of prayers (see Matthew 6:7) but from the imitation of Christ through obedience to the Father's will, according to the example of the Blessed Mother.

Maybe October would be a good month to turn off the radio or podcast as you commute to work or school and pray the rosary instead. See what graces the Lord wants to pour into your life from the rose garden of this daily meditation.



The Battle of Lepanto