

The Rosary Renewed

SISTER CATHERINE, O.P.

Everyone knows by now that the Church is in the midst of a great biblical and liturgical revival. It is certainly a wonderful movement with many wonderful results. But such an accomplishment cannot occur without a certain amount of controversy. The 'extremists' among the liturgical enthusiasts would like all devotions to be buried forever in oblivion. The 'conservatives' cling to the old order; many of them still want to live nineteenth-century piety with their 'manuals of devotion' and rosary beads at mass in a silent church where the mass itself is a private devotion. Of course, this is stating the case rather in the extreme, and a great deal has already been done by the liturgists themselves in recent years to clarify the meaning of liturgy, – which in the past has been associated with the idea of rite and exterior ceremonial. Now we see it all in a deeper and simpler way as the worship of the whole man. However, devotions are still a problem to many. The point is not to cast them all out completely and with finality but to bring them in line with the liturgy where this can be done.

When we think of the rosary, often enough we picture to ourselves, in sentimental fashion, the poor old peasant woman fingering her worn out beads. Or perhaps we think of the three little Fatima children through whom our Lady encouraged the devotion of the rosary for peace in the modern world. Unfortunately, people too often miss the point of her message and are inclined to grasp at the superficial saying of the rosary, or of a certain number of rosaries, as a kind of 'magic' formula by which their requests will infallibly be granted. This kind of thing, like 'novena spirituality', leads to a kind of superstition which has no real connection with Catholic doctrine and a spirit of faith, and which rightly engenders the criticism of those outside the Church. In the face of all this we may well ask, is there still something worthwhile in the rosary for the liturgist and the biblical advocate? There is; if we understand it properly. This understanding could be fostered if there were more meditations on the mysteries written from a true liturgical viewpoint and fewer from a sentimental, subjective or analytical viewpoint. After all, it is really not so much a matter of forming imaginative pictures of the scenes of the mysteries, or of getting rid of this or that

sin and acquiring this or that corresponding virtue for oneself, as of simply putting on Christ in his whole mystery of death and life. In this way, the rosary devotion with its primitive simplicity and elasticity would be well adapted to enter into the present day liturgical and biblical revival. It could serve as an extension of the liturgy since it actually sums up in its fifteen mysteries the whole content of the liturgical cycle which is spread out over the course of a year. It could be a real aid to the keeping of individual feasts of this cycle in the context of unity, each feast being in reality only part of a single whole, the passage in Christ from death to life. The whole of human history is only a single movement of humanity by the Holy Spirit, in Christ and by means of his infinite oblation, back to the Father.

And so the rosary can be a sort of casting of our lives by faith and desire into the mould which is Christ, the surrender of our whole being into each mystery, so that the life of Christ may be continued in us and through us in his mystical body. The mysteries are the skeleton or framework of that mystic life of Christ in each baptized soul, the pattern according to which the Spirit moulds each soul into the image of the Son, 'according to the grace that has been given us' (Rom. 12. 6). In the early days of the Church baptism was administered by immersion, a fitting sign that the candidate was 'buried with him in baptism' (Rom. 6. 4) so that it might also be said that he had 'put on Christ' (Gal. 3. 27). Perhaps we could apply this idea by analogy to the mysteries of the rosary. When they are properly made use of they are more than a meditation, in the sense of being simply a glance from without. They are rather an 'immersion' into the mystery of Christ, a death to self and a living in him under the various forms presented in each mystery.

The rosary as we have it now is of fairly recent origin. It evolved over the course of many centuries and by means of historical circumstances, just as the liturgy itself did. The primitive forms of the liturgy were shaped by the spontaneous devotions of the people. What we call today the lessons or readings in the divine office were their meditations, the *lectio divina*, and the psalms were the common spontaneous outpourings of their hearts. Thus meditation, reading, vocal prayer were already combined, long before it ever occurred to anyone to fix detailed and rigid methods for formal meditation. One is much inclined to think that it was the growing popularity of these methods which almost automatically set the divine office apart as a 'vocal prayer' and finally as something rather foreign and practically unintelligible. In any case, one simply cannot in practice make a clear-cut division between vocal

and mental prayer. Obviously, if one were to pray vocally without any thought or will behind it there would be no real prayer. This thought brings us back to the 'novena spirituality', counting a certain number of 'prayers' for certain intentions. If we had not lost the original simplicity of the liturgy perhaps all these distinctions and refinements would not have caused so much trouble.

In the early centuries of the church people were accustomed to honour Mary by repeating the angel Gabriel's salutation at the annunciation. A little later, the words of St Elizabeth at the visitation were added. By the sixteenth century the last part of our present prayer was appended. In this way the 'Hail Mary' itself evolved, beginning in holy scripture. It is not certain just when meditations on definite mysteries began to accompany these repetitions. These were not exactly as we have them today either, nor were the divisions into fifteen decades. All this grew by a gradual process into a fixed form. There were different mysteries at different times, sometimes more numerous, sometimes just a rather general contemplation of the incarnation, passion, resurrection and ascension of Christ. There is no evidence that the public life was ever included in any way. However, it is not essential to the mystery of redemption. It was rather the proclamation of the mystery among men by preaching and the miracles which verified it. Numerous sources tell us that the early monks and friars of the middle ages and before were accustomed to remain in the church after the divine office, especially the office of matins, to prolong their prayer. We may generally assume from this that the prayer would be a direct overflow of the office which preceded it and concerned with the mystery of the particular feast of the day. Many, if not most of these monks and friars had deep devotion to the mother of God. And so, to carry the supposition a little further, it is not hard to imagine them during this time addressing themselves to her intercession by the repetition of the Hail Mary, and at the same time or during intervals, pondering in her presence the mystery of the day's feast and, as contemplatives, linking this up with the whole mystery of Christ and of redemption. Thus it would easily include the incarnation, passion, death, resurrection, ascension, pentecost, and probably a loving inclusion of the passing from this world and glorification of Mary herself. Since doctrinal theories and devotions come about by a gradual shaping and a slow, indefinite process, it could be in some such way that the rosary as we have it now began to be formed. At least the idea demonstrates that the rosary could and should be a free and spontaneous way of entering into the mystery of Christ.

In our modern age of technology and rigid patterns it is less easy for us to accommodate ourselves to the more free and easy flow of thought and action of former ages. It might be a very refreshing thing to try! Prayer should not be a methodical activity of the mind and of the other faculties in their appointed and pre-arranged place and time, all this followed up by well-calculated and minutely specific resolutions. It should be the spontaneous overflow of the heart and of the whole person dedicated to God in Christ.

The sense of offering, dedication, sacrifice is the deepest and most spontaneous expression of true piety. This attitude must be the very essence of that prayer which is our life. It is the deepest meaning of the liturgy and of all prayer which is the extension of the liturgy. All of the Old Testament and man's religious experience bears this out. Christ took upon himself all the ordinary conditions and circumstances of human life and, as it were, infused them with a total loving dedication in obedience to the will of the Father. As Son of Man he gathered human history into himself according to the plan of God. 'He chose us in him before the foundation of the world' (Eph. 1. 4) and wills to 'restore all things in Christ' (Eph. 1. 10). The idea of oblation has been an underlying theme since the beginning of time. Just as the 'spirit of God moved over the waters' (Gen. 1. 2) at the creation of the world, so he has moved since then imperceptibly in the souls of men, drawing them by the very forces of their higher nature to adoration, submission and offering. 'Cain offered of the fruits of the earth gifts to the Lord, Abel also offered of the firstlings of his flock' (Gen. 4. 3-4). The offering of Abel was acceptable because it was the symbol and expression of a total dedication. And so the lamb of God was offered by type and foreshadowing, the true Son in whom all other offerings are acceptable.

When God called Abraham, his answer was 'here I am' (Gen. 22. 1), a short phrase expressing complete openness of mind and heart to the will and good pleasure of God. This was later proved by the intention, at God's command, to sacrifice his only son as a burnt-offering. A greater expression of faith and obedience could not have been asked, Isaac being the sole heir of the promise. Later this sense of total oblation began to weaken and become indistinct, so that, through Moses, God was obliged to interpose a law as a means of expressing it; or rather to bring to consciousness in his people their relation to him. Man was gradually losing his original simplicity, in giving only a half-hearted service, and giving it in a servile manner with less joy and love in the giving. The offerings of the people became more and more of an ex-

terior nature, the fruits of the earth, by which they thought to satisfy the obligation of worship. Formalism and ritualism was already entering in. The ceremonial of the law allowed them to offer these first fruits of the earth, but they were meant to be the tangible expression of their heart offering, and an expiation for sin. 'Speak to the children of Israel that they bring first-fruits to me; of every man that offereth of his own accord, you shall take them' (Exod. 25. 2). 'Of his own accord' indicated the interior disposition which God wanted. The more half-hearted became man's service, the greater became the burden of the law, until in the time of our Lord the burden was well nigh intolerable.

Nevertheless, throughout the whole of Old Testament history, the Spirit of God brought forth from the depths of the souls of his servants a sense of total dedication to him. When God called the boy Samuel in the temple he answered quite simply 'Speak Lord, for thy servant heareth' (I Sam. 3. 10). David, in spite of his weaknesses, had a sincere heart towards God and an understanding of true worship: 'I know, my God, that thou provest hearts and lovest simplicity, wherefore I also in the simplicity of my heart have joyfully offered all these things' (I Chron. 29. 17). Much later on (I Macc. 4. 56) we find the spontaneous expression of the people who, through much affliction and persecution, had come to a deeper understanding of true worship: 'And they kept the dedication of the altar eight days, and they offered holocausts with joy, and sacrifices of salvation and of praise.' These examples could be multiplied; the psalms are filled with them. The prophets, especially Isaiah, foretell the future oblation of the Word Incarnate in a more direct manner.

Perhaps the spirit and keynote of this idea which pervades and sums up all of Old Testament history and overflows into the New can be found in two passages from the psalms. In the first, we hear the voice of the eternal Father admonishing his people:

Not for thy sacrifices do I reprove thee, indeed thy burnt-offerings are always before me. I will take no bullock from thy house, nor he-goats from thy flocks; for all the beasts of the forest are mine . . . If I were hungry I would not tell thee, for the world is mine and the fullness thereof . . . Offer to God a sacrifice of thanksgiving, and pay thy vows to the most high . . . He who offers a sacrifice of thanksgiving honours me, and to him who walks in the right path I will show the salvation of God (Ps. 24. 8-10, 12, 14, 23).

The second passage is the answer of the eternal Son, and of all his faithful servants possessed by his Spirit:

Sacrifice and oblation thou wouldst not, but a body thou has fitted to me. Burnt-offering and sin-offering thou didst not require; then I said: behold I come; in the head of the book it is written of me: to do thy will, O God, is my delight, and thy law is written in my very heart (Ps. 39. 7-9).

There are all the essentials. Doing the will of God is the true law which is written in the depths of a faithful soul, and this whole-hearted doing of it is a delight and true joy. This is the holocaust which God seeks, perfectly fulfilled in Christ, in whom ours becomes acceptable. Throughout the New Testament Christ has shown us in his own life and teaching that the greatest expression of worship is a totally interior thing, a perfect self-abandonment to the Father in love, and that when it is perfect, joy and sorrow are always found together. The state of perfect joy is forfeited for the present while we must live by faith. But the less there is of that total obedience of self-abandonment, the less there is of the joy in sorrow. And where it is lacking entirely there can be unalloyed sorrow, even amidst earthly pleasures and satisfactions.

It ought now to be easier to see that the so-called joyful, sorrowful, glorious mysteries of the rosary, always animated by a liturgical spirit of worship and self-dedication, should not be placed in rigid categories, isolating one set of mysteries from the other. Some systems of spirituality are almost exclusively intent upon ruminating over the sufferings of Christ, considering them individually and in great detail, without any relation to the *transitus* of which they were only a part and a means. This was not the spirit of the early Christians who venerated the cross as the sign of victory. And as members of Christ filled with his Spirit they looked upon martyrdom in a spirit of true joy and as the ultimate victory and the way into eternal glory. In the accounts left us of these shining members of the early Church we do not see them weeping over and compassionating one another as they share in the passion of Christ, but rather we find them joyfully and valiantly encouraging one another on to victory. How then can we think of the king of martyrs in any other way?

The mysteries of the rosary are simply another way of expressing in prayer the one great mystery of redemption. The joyful mysteries are the announcement and preparation of that perfect oblation which, through sorrow, will culminate in eternal glory. The acceptance of sorrow brings joy now and glory hereafter. The sacerdotal prayer of Christ, the great heart-offering of his whole being to the Father, shows us this plainly. It was uttered on the threshold of untold suffering and

death on a cross, yet the prayer speaks only of joy and glory in his sanctification for love of the Father. Here we see through the mind and heart of Christ the one great mystery with three aspects, and the three grow together. It is the summing up of the one interior disposition of his whole life: 'I do always the things that please him' (John 8. 29). St John especially makes a point of bringing this out in various ways throughout his gospel. In the farewell sermon Christ speaks to his apostles of his return to the Father, of impending persecutions and sufferings for the Church; but at the same time the whole message is one of peace, joy, love, victory. 'These things I have spoken to you that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have affliction. But take courage, I have overcome the world' (John 16. 33).

St Paul, with his genius for giving a penetrating synthesis of the mystery of Christ, shows us the whole pattern in a few words, which teach us how to put on the mind of Christ in his mystery of joy, sorrow and glory:

Have this mind in you, which was also in Christ Jesus, who though he was by nature God, did not consider being equal to God a thing to be clung to, but emptied himself taking the nature of a slave and being made like unto men. (The joyful mysteries) And appearing in the form of a man, he humbled himself becoming obedient to death, even to death on a cross. (The sorrowful mysteries). Therefore God also has exalted him. – The Lord Jesus Christ is in the glory of God the Father (The glorious mysteries) (Phil. 2. 5-9, 11).

The mystery has an atmosphere of paradox about it in the humiliation-exaltation antithesis. These are contrasted conditions, yet the exaltation depends upon and is the result of the humiliation. St John, too, always speaks of the passion and death as Christ's glorification. 'The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified' (John 12. 23). We can view the joy-sorrow antithesis in somewhat the same way. The joy of Christ is in the Father's will about to be accomplished through the passion in which the Father and the Son are glorified. 'You therefore have sorrow now; but I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no one shall take from you' (John 16. 22). Our Lord may have been referring here to the ultimate joy of heaven, but it is more likely that he meant the joy of his resurrection with all its implicit meaning for the apostles and all Christians. It is this joy, a share in the resurrection which we receive at baptism and which remains with us and always grows through all the sorrows of our 'passover' from earth to heaven. It is the joy which is the sign of the glory hidden under the veil of faith. There

is only one reality for us: the Christlife – manifested in joy, increased in joy-sorrow, consummated through joy-sorrow in glory. It is precisely that enduring joy in sorrow which bears witness to the world that this present life is only a pilgrimage to the fatherland. Here is the whole point of Christianity. It is for this reason that St Paul could exhort the early Christians: 'If you have risen with Christ, seek the things that are above . . . When Christ, your life, shall appear, then you too will appear with him in glory' (Col. 3. 1, 4).

Praying the rosary in this way we become ourselves a living prayer in Christ, offered with him through joy in sorrow opening up into glory. In this way we live always in the spirit of the liturgy, for the mysteries of the rosary are summed up in the mass, the true oblation of Christ in which our oblation is merged with his as the water is with the wine. 'Present your bodies as a sacrifice, living, holy, and pleasing to God, your spiritual service' (Rom. 12. 1).

Having placed the rosary in a sacramental context and having brought the fifteen mysteries together into one simple view of redemption, it may be interesting to notice the particular unity of the first five mysteries under the particular aspect of annunciation. In various ways and to different people each one of these mysteries is an announcement or manifestation of the redemption: to Mary first of all and above all; then to Elizabeth and the precursor, to the shepherds, to Simon and the prophetess Anna, and to the doctors of the law. In the first four of the mysteries an act of worship and praise of God in some form was the response to the manifestation. In the fifth, the circumstances are more obscure. The wisdom and answers of Christ to the doctors of the law must have had reference to the redemption, though perhaps indirectly. And the fact that they 'wondered' at all this was, for those among them who were well disposed, an act of worship and praise of God in some sense. This gives the joyful mysteries a sort of 'sacramental setting'. First there is the announcement or manifestation of the word; then follows the response, the acceptance of the word and act of worship. We may assume, then, that in every case though, in varying degrees, the glad receiving of the word was accompanied by initiation into or increase of grace, the Christ-life. An obvious example of this could be found in the words of Elizabeth: 'The moment that the sound of thy greeting came to my ears, the babe in my womb leapt for joy' (Luke 1. 44).

When we seek to 'put on Christ' by means of the rosary mysteries, it is always through the intercession of Mary. It was her oblation to

the divine will, as shown at the annunciation, by which God wrought the incarnation, death and resurrection mystery of our redemption. And so her unique and powerful intercession will assuredly obtain for us our re-creation in Christ which we seek by uniting our self-offering to his throughout the mysteries as she herself did. She is the mother of the whole Christ who ever brings forth her mystic child the Church, the body of Christ. She sees, through the light of the Word, God's plan for each of us in her Son, and she cannot but work with him to bring this plan to its fulfilment. We must begin by imitating her *fiat*, and then she will call down the Spirit of her Son upon us and form him in us, making his mysteries ours. She will give us his joys and sorrows that she may bring forth Christ to glory again in us.

To conclude, we should take up the rosary as the book of our life in Christ, in the spirit of the liturgy. We should approach the mysteries, not as spectators observing a drama, nor even just as disciples observing their master so as to imitate him. Instead we should allow ourselves to be wholly immersed in these mysteries by the Holy Spirit as in the bottomless ocean of living water (cf. John 4. 10). We must seek to be truly 'buried with him' (Rom. 6. 4) in order that we may experience by a living faith his mystery of death and life, joy and sorrow, so that 'the life also of Jesus may be made manifest in our mortal flesh' (2 Cor. 4. 11), as we are 'being transformed into his very image from glory to glory' (2 Cor. 3. 18).

Jungsmann Revisited, or a Word to Mr Waugh

EDMUND FLOOD, O.S.B.

Liturgy is still widely regarded in England as something connected either with archeology, rubrics, or monasteries. In Belgium, France and Germany, for several decades, the liturgy has been seen and used for what it is: the man-in-the-street's closest and most active contact with God. Historical research, used before the war often just to resuscitate