

What I See When I Say the Rosary

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"And, behold, there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon; and the same man was just and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel: and the Holy Ghost was upon him. And it was revealed unto him by the Holy Ghost, that he should not see death, before he had seen the Lord's Christ. And he came by the Spirit into the temple: and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him after the custom of the law, Then took he him up in his arms, and blessed God, and said, Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word: For mine eyes have seen thy salvation, Which thou hast prepared before the face of all people; A light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel. And Joseph and his mother marvelled at those things which were spoken of him. And Simeon blessed them, and said unto Mary his mother, Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel; and for a sign which shall be spoken against; (Yea, a sword shall pierce through thy own soul also,) that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed."

~ Luke chapter 2, verses 25-35, [King James Bible](#)

When I was a child, my mom took me and my next older brother to church one day. I think I was five years old. It was a church in Lawrence, Kansas and it was not a terribly engaging sermon. At least, not to a five year old. At the time I had no idea why we were doing this church attendance thing, because it was the only time I can recall being dressed up in "Sunday best" and being taken to church. Mom asked us how we liked it. I said it wasn't very interesting. Did we have to go back? We did not.

My dad was someone who had read Hans Reichenbach's book in the scientific philosophy and would on occasion mention that things which cannot be measured are not physics, but metaphysics. My dad did not take any position on metaphysical issues that I can recall. Discussions about "what came before the Big Bang" would be short and purposeless.

My mom described herself as an agnostic. She would say, "I don't know if there is a God, and I don't think you know either." She was also an English professor and she knew, like everyone who studies are language knows, that the two great sources of stories and expressions in our contemporary English are the King James Bible and the collected works of William Shakespeare. If an early American home in, say, 1821, had one book, that book was the King James Bible. If they had two, the other book was the works of Shakespeare.

So when it came to pass that I was a sophomore in high school, they offered a quiz for students who might find "basic English" a bit dull. I "quizzed out" as they say. I was found to be sufficiently conversant with the rules and the details that I could take some other course, but it could only be in fulfillment of the requirement to take some sort of English language course of study. Behold, there was only one such elective available to me, and it was "The Bible as Literature." So I moved to the very back of the classroom where that course was taught, and took both semesters of it.

For the purpose of taking that course, my mom gave me a small King James bible, which I have with me to this day. It has meant a lot to me to have the same bible she read from, and marked in a few places where she was curious about some passages. I feel a very strong connexion to her, even though she passed in May 2014.

Learn to Work the Rosary

It was not my expectation that I would grow up to want to pray the rosary every day. It had no significance to me in childhood, I don't remember seeing one in my mom's possession though my eldest brother thinks she must have had one at some point as she was confirmed in the Catholic faith as a young person. Nevertheless, after my dad passed away in 2010, during one of our evening meals, mom insisted that she wanted to tell me about the rosary.

In 2005, in order to help my mom care for my dad, I had moved to a house about two miles from them. So I would bring groceries, take dad to medical appointments, and be available for other tasks. After dad's passing, I would very often cook supper and eat with mom, do the dishes, and return to my house. I don't remember exactly when, but it might have been 2012 or so, my mom told me she wanted to go over what she knew about the rosary. I had utterly no interest in the topic, but I sat patiently and she went through several minutes of discussion about it. I did not think much further of the matter until 2020 when Jesus told me to go buy a rosary.

After praying the rosary according to a simple book on how to do so, I asked a few questions. I was instructed not to pray the so-called Luminous mysteries added to the Confraternity of the Holy Rosary by the pope Saint John Paul II. Instead, I pray the Sorrowful mysteries on Thursday as well as on Tuesday and Friday.

Annunciation

One of the first events in the announcement of the arrival of Jesus, also known as the annunciation, is the news given to Zacharias in the Second Temple, as he is preparing at the incense altar, by the archangel Gabriel. Zacharias is told that his wife Elishabeth will conceive and bear the child who would become John the Baptist. Zacharias expresses doubt, because of his age and his wife being "well-stricken in years." Because he does not believe Gabriel, Zacharias is made mute until the naming day of the child (at the time of the child's circumcision).

Now, it is important to realise that the Virgin Mary was consecrated to the temple in Jerusalem and so would have been familiar with Elishabeth and Zacharias. Indeed, we know that Mary visits Elishabeth a little bit later. Mary is chosen to be released from service at the temple and become eligible for marriage. Joseph is one of the young men who are asked to place his staff among those who are to be considered for Mary as her husband. When the priest picks up each of the other staffs, nothing happens, but when he picks up Joseph's staff, a dove flies out. So Mary and Joseph are betrothed.

In this context, Mary is informed by Gabriel that she is chosen by God to conceive by the Holy Spirit. Instead of expressing doubts, she simply describes herself as the hand maiden of God. Similarly, Joseph is given the news, and is at peace with it.

When I say the first decade of the rosary celebrating the joyful mysteries, I see Zacharias in the temple and reflect on his conversation with Gabriel. Then I reflect on Joseph's selection. Then I see Mary being hailed by Gabriel and given the great good news.

About that Temple

It occurred to me one time to ask whether at his visit to the Second Temple in Jerusalem when he was 12 years old did Jesus encounter the money changers and the sellers of birds for sacrifice? The answer was yes. When he visits Jerusalem again later in life, Jesus sees a woman who was "taken in adultery" brought to the Temple to be stoned. There is enough dust on the floor that Jesus gets down and writes

in it. So, to say that I visualise or see things as they were in those days is to say that I see the Temple not in good repair, not being kept clean, not being kept according to the commandments given Moses and Aaron for how the priests and how the holy objects are to be kept.

One might choose to explain away these issues by saying, well, Herod was king of Judaea and Judaea was merely a province of Rome, and of course Rome made a lot of demands on its provinces, and that would be true. True indeed. But it is also the truth that the Herod we see portrayed in scripture and in other historical writings of the period is a corrupt and decadent man.

An event not focused upon during the meditations of the rosary is called the massacre of the innocents, when Herod, having heard from the Magi that "this day a king is born in Israel" ordered all the male children under the age of two years old be killed. Before that happens, an angel appears to Joseph and urges him to take the child and Mary and flee into Egypt. So, Herod had wealth and power, he had men at his command willing to slaughter children, and yet the Temple was in disrepair.

Nor does it take great wealth to sweep the dust and dirt away. It takes effort, and devout people might have put in the effort. So what were they doing, the Judaeans? Apparently, setting exorbitant prices for sacrificial animals, cornering the market on Temple shekels to profit from their exchange with Roman coins, and doing any number of other things, instead of keeping the house of God in good shape, or at least tidy.

Visitation

After the experiences of the annunciation, Joseph and Mary go to visit Zacarias and Elishabeth. At this point in time, Elishabeth is about 6 months pregnant with the child who becomes John the Baptist. Mary has conceived of the Holy Spirit. When Elishabeth hears Mary call to her upon entering Elishabeth's home, the baby moves within her womb, John the Baptist "leaps for joy" within his mom.

You can, and I often do, reflect that Zacarias is still mute. It'll be three more months until John is born and then 8 days until the circumcision and naming of the child. So Joseph, a good man, probably lets the ladies have some time to themselves and goes and sits with his friend Zacarias, asks a few questions and gets nods of the head, or maybe Zacarias writes something down and passes it across the table. Maybe they sit and drink some herbal tea together.

Meanwhile, elsewhere in the house, Mary and Elishabeth are having a nice chat about pregnancy and angelic visitations and all the curious things that have been happening recently. It is not every day that the man who prepares the incense altar is visited by the archangel Gabriel and struck mute.

No doubt Mary is fascinated to see her good friend in this condition, especially as Elishabeth is "well-stricken in years" and also especially because Mary has been told that she will give birth. You can see Mary putting her hand on the big belly of her friend and thinking about her own shape in a few months. I suppose the same has been true of hominids for a million or more years, if you think about it.

With Zacarias made mute, the annunciation is not a mystery without some difficulty, though it is clearly an unalloyed blessing for Mary. The visitation, however, has the feeling of a goodness about it, people going about a nice time, choosing to visit one another, at home, in a spirit of joy.

Nativity

It is difficult in some rural districts and in many suburbs, and even still in a few cities, at Christmas time, to go very far without encountering a nativity scene. Store windows in New York City used to

carry Christmas celebrations of the birth of Jesus, his mom very proud and happy, the angel telling the shepherds the good news, the Magi coming with their gifts. I suppose this past Christmas, with all the lockdown and nonsense, many nativity scenes were missing from their usual places.

The very essence of this story is that Mary gives birth to Jesus. It is said that the birth was painless. Nevertheless, it was her first child, and it must have been overwhelming to be told that Caesar had commanded everyone to go to their places of birth. So Joseph takes Mary to the little town of Bethlehem and because of the sudden influx of people for the census, there is no room at the inn. What would it be like giving birth in a poorly lit stable near an inn in a small town two thousand years ago?

I've no idea, but I see the joy in Mary's eyes when she holds the baby Jesus. I see the manger and the angelic light shining all around. I see the shepherds with their flocks where they lay being given good news of great joy by an angel. This day a child is born!

Presentation

At the beginning of this essay is a quote from the book of Luke. It explains who Simeon is, how he was promised that before he died he would see the Messiah. It explains how he prophesies not only the difficulties ahead of Jesus, but that a sword of sorrow would pierce the soul of Mary.

It is my experience of praying the rosary that the key to the rosary is the sword of sorrow. One of the devotions that I pray every day is the seven sorrows of Saint Mary.

Mother Mary is said to have experienced seven enormous sorrows, sorrows of great magnitude. These are the prophecy of Simeon, the flight into Egypt, the losing of Jesus at the Temple while Joseph and Mary and the other children headed back to Nazareth, the experience of seeing Jesus carrying the cross and then following him to the execution grounds, witnessing the crucifixion, the taking down of the body of Jesus which is memorialised in the Pieta statue, and, finally, burying her son Jesus.

Understanding the rosary meditations is understanding the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, the experiences of Mary in being told of the conception, visiting her friend, giving birth, learning her child was the Messiah, losing her child in the big city, the sufferings of Jesus under Pontius Pilate, his crucifixion, death, resurrection, ascension, the descent of the Holy Spirit, the assumption of Mary into heaven, and her coronation. Every aspect of these two lives, the life of Mother Mary and the life of Jesus Christ, is significant to our understanding of the covenant between God and mankind.

When I see the Temple at the time of the presentation, I imagine St. Joseph inside bargaining for two turtledoves to sacrifice, then bringing them to the priest. Meanwhile, Mary is caring for Jesus. Simple things like nursing and changing the swaddling clothes are important parts of the life of every baby.

Simeon approaches, filled with the Holy Spirit, knowing that he is finally going to be granted the opportunity to see the Messiah. He holds the baby gently and he lets Mary know what is so, and the consequences for Jesus and for Mary. Through these events, the hearts of many will be revealed. Through our meditations on these events, we see into the fundamental mysteries.

Then Mary goes somewhat away from Simeon with Jesus and along comes the prophetess Anna who is also filled with certainty that this is indeed the Messiah. Anna is reported to be of great age, a widow, and having great devotion to communing with God at the Temple. I'm sure she gave consolation, comfort, and many smiles to Mary and Jesus.

Finding Jesus

The final mystery of the first five decades of the full rosary is known variously as losing Jesus at the Temple or finding Jesus at the Temple. The sorrow for Mary and Joseph was certainly at the point where they were about a day away from Jerusalem, on their way back to Nazareth, and where is Jesus?

Their twelve-year-old son is missing. The caravan is searched, the baggage might have been looked through, you can imagine consternation and rushing about. Word is sent in all directions. Having exhausted themselves looking, Mary, Joseph, and the other children settle down for the night when it would have been hazardous to travel. Then they head back to Jerusalem to continue the search.

It isn't clear to me whether these events may have happened late in the week so perhaps on their return to the city, its gates were closed for the Sabbath. In any event, they get to the Temple and by this time I gather word had been sent to them that Jesus is there.

It must have been a blessed relief to find her child there in the Temple. Sitting among scholars, Jesus is said to have been very learned, and to have impressed the others with his knowledge of scripture. Coming up to him, Mary no doubt expressed concern that he had not been where he was expected.

It is said that Jesus responded, "I must be about my father's work."

More to Follow

Indeed, there is much work to be done. Mankind should turn the hearts of the parents to the children. Stop the exploitation, rape, and torture of children. Care for them. Teach them. Love them.

The children should turn their hearts to their parents. Stop elder abuse. Stop the torture of the elderly at nursing homes. The human sleep cycle is 90 minutes, stop turning them every 30 minutes. Sleep deprivation is torture. Help them live, stop insisting that they die of fentanyl poisoning and overdosing on oral morphine.

Above you will read about what I see when I pray the first five mysteries of the rosary. There are ten more to go. I'll cover another five in my next essay.

Until then, pray. Pray devotions. Pray novenas. Pray the rosary. Ask God to heal our world. There is much work to be done.

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