

THE YEAR OF THE ROSARY

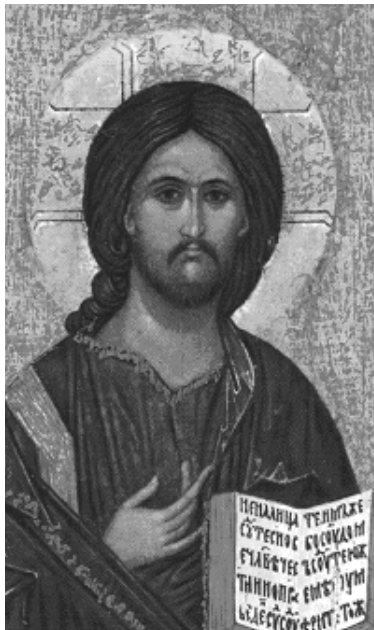
proclaimed by Pope John Paul II

October 2002 through October 2003

"Simple yet profound, it still remains, at the dawn of this third millennium, a prayer of great significance, destined to bring forth a harvest of holiness." — John Paul II

John Paul II followed in the footsteps of the Pontiffs before him when, scarcely two weeks after his election on October 16, 1978, he said: "The Rosary is my favourite prayer. A marvellous prayer! Marvellous in its simplicity and its depth ... it can be said that the Rosary is, in some sense, a prayer-commentary on the final chapter of the Vatican II constitution *Lumen Gentium*, a chapter which discusses the wondrous presence of the Mother of God in the Mystery of Christ and the Church. Against the background of the words *Ave Maria* the principle events of the life of Jesus Christ pass before the eyes of the soul. They take shape in the complete series of the Joyful, Sorrowful and Glorious Mysteries, and they put us in living communion with Jesus through—we might say—the heart of his Mother. At the same time our heart can embrace in the decades of the Rosary all the events that make up the lives of individuals, families, nations, the Church, and all mankind. Thus the simple prayer of the Rosary marks the rhythm of human life.

"With these words, dear brothers and sisters, I set the first year of my Pontificate within the daily rhythm of the Rosary. As I begin the twenty-fifth year of my service as the Successor of Peter, I wish to do the same. How many graces have I received in these years from the Blessed Virgin through the Rosary: *Magnificat anima mea Dominum!* I wish to lift up my thanks to the Lord in the words of his Most Holy Mother, under whose protection I have placed my Petrine ministry: *Totus Tuus!* (Totally Yours!)



"After the experience of the Jubilee, I invited the people of God to 'start afresh from Christ'. I have felt drawn to offer a reflection on the Rosary, as a kind of Marian complement to my Letter *Novo Millennio Inuente* and an exhortation to contemplate the face of Christ in union with, and at the school of, his Most Holy Mother.

The Mysteries of Light

After proclaiming the Year of the Rosary John Paul II asked: "For the demanding, but extraordinarily rich task of contemplating the face of Christ together with Mary, is there a better instrument than the prayer of the Rosary? ... Repeating the invocation *Ave Maria*, we can more deeply reflect on the essential events of the mission of the Son of God on earth, which have been transmitted to us by the Gospel and Tradition. In order for this synthesis of the Gospel to be more complete and to offer greater inspiration, in the Apostolic Letter *Rosarium Virginis Mariae*, I proposed adding five more mysteries to those currently contemplated in the Rosary, and I called them: the Mysteries of Light. These mysteries focus on Jesus' Public Life: (1) His Baptism in the Jordan, (2) The wedding feast of Cana, (3) His proclamation of the Kingdom of God, (4) The Transfiguration and (5) His institution of the Eucharist.

Peace and Family

"The grave challenges confronting the world at the start of this new millennium which began with the terrifying attacks of September 11th, 2001, and which wit-

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nesses everyday in numerous parts of the world fresh scenes of bloodshed and violence lead us to think that only an intervention from on high, capable of guiding the hearts of those living in situations of conflict and those governing the destinies of nations, can give reason to hope for a brighter future. The Rosary is by its nature a prayer for peace, since it consists in contemplating Christ, the Prince of Peace, the one who is 'our peace.'

"As a prayer for peace, the Rosary is also, and always has been, a prayer of and for the family. ... *The family that prays together stays together.* The holy rosary by age old tradition, has shown itself particularly effective as a prayer which brings the family together. Individual family members, in turning their eyes towards Jesus, also regain the ability to look one another in the eye, to communicate, to show solidarity, to forgive one another and to see their covenant of love renewed in the Holy Spirit.

"To pray the Rosary *for children*, and even more, *with children*, training them from their earliest years to experience this daily 'pause for prayer' with the family, is admittedly not the solution to every problem, but it is a spiritual aid which should not be underestimated.

"The Church has always attributed particular efficacy to this prayer, entrusting to the Rosary, the most difficult problems. At times when Christianity itself seemed under threat, its deliverance was attributed to the power of this prayer, and Our Lady of the Rosary was acclaimed as the one whose intercession brought salvation. Today I willingly entrust to the power of this prayer the cause of peace in the world and the cause of the family." ⁱ

Teach us to Pray

Catherine Doherty, in her book *Bogoroditza*, wrote: "Show us O Mother of Wisdom, the height, the depth, the width, and the endless breadth that is to be found in the Rosary. Indeed, it is your song and your prayer. We need you, Gate of Heaven, to teach us how to pray. Bend down to our littleness and say the Rosary with us. In our spiritual childhood, the beads will teach us how to pray with your voice. In our spiritual youth, through you, they will reveal to us how to plunge our minds into the blessed mystery spelled out by each decade. And in our spiritual maturity, show us your secret ways to the prayer of silence, of contemplation. The Rosary is a school of prayer and you are the perfect mistress of it.

"We stand between war and peace; we live in insecurity and fear; we bear the almost unendurable heat of a market place from which your Son has been almost completely shut out. We truly need to learn to pray. ... This century needs Christians who are Christians in faith and deed. On such depends the fate of the world.

"You who are the gate to Christ, the way to the Father, our ultimate goal, you, Mary, Mother of Christ, teach us to pray your Rosary as it should be prayed. For these ordinary beads hold within themselves all the mysteries of our holy faith and all the main ways of prayer. Mary, Queen of the Rosary, open to us its holy secrets. Let it be our door to the heart of your Son, his Father, and the Holy Spirit." ⁱⁱ

ⁱ Compiled from Apostolic Letter of John Paul II *Rosarium Virginis Mariae*

ⁱⁱ *Bogoroditza*: Catherine Doherty, Madonna House Classics

The entire Apostolic Letter is available at: www.ewtn.com/library and on the Vatican Website.