

Pope John Paul II and the Luminous Mysteries of the Rosary

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Preface

THE promulgation of the Apostolic Letter, *Rosarium Virginis Mariae*, by Pope John Paul II on October 16, 2002, comes as a welcome surprise to the entire Church. By addressing devotion to the Rosary of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Holy Father has chosen to thus inaugurate the Silver Jubilee Year of his Pontificate. Not only has he identified the power of the prayer of the Rosary, but he has added a new series of Mysteries of the Rosary known as the Luminous Mysteries. In so doing, he has broken precedent. Not only has he expanded the number of Mysteries from 15 to 20, but he has focused more directly on the Public Life of Jesus and His message.

This innovation provides a remarkable pastoral tool through which it is possible to acknowledge the content of Jesus' public preaching and ministry. In particular, the central teaching of Jesus, the "Kingdom of God," calls for renewed pastoral examination. Ours is an age of both rapid social change and an obviously deepening commitment to material and secular aspirations toward success, privilege, power, and acquisition. According to New Testament Apocalyptic teaching, these are hallmarks of the kingdom of Satan, whose principal representative on this earth, the devil, attempts to seduce the elect to turn and worship the Beast. The kingdom of this world masquerades much privilege and possessions as a god. Jesus, by proclaiming that the Name of the

Father is hallowed, inaugurates the *true* Kingdom. Through His Public Life, Jesus is completely identified with God as His Father and with God's future, where all of the baptized are called to stand among the elect; they have a place in the Kingdom of God, which is beginning even now.

The *Luminous Mysteries* also highlight the Institution of the Eucharist, making it the central Mystery of the Holy Rosary. It is my view that by this gesture Pope John Paul II is affirming that the tradition of the Rosary is linked with the celebration of the Eucharist, and is, in its own way, a part of the Prayer of the Church. I have observed this fact to be verified by the practice of the many faithful of my diocese. Daily, large groups of people gather in parishes throughout Orlando to pray the Rosary before or after the celebration of the daily Mass, making it a part of the daily ritual of Eucharistic praise and thanksgiving.

By presenting the events of the lives of Jesus and Mary in such innovative fashion, Pope John Paul II has called for a re-examination of all devotion in light of the richness of Sacred Scripture. In the early days of the Church, it was recognized that the inspired texts and documents were themselves a source of grace. They were then known as "the Books." Later, they were called "the Bible," which means "the books put together." When read alongside one another, both Old and New Testaments provide a richness of experience and understanding which enhances the practice of the faith. We live in an age afflicted with "bibli-

Pope John Paul II and His Predecessor, Pope Paul VI

As in other aspects of his pontificate, the doctrine of Pope John Paul II furthers the teaching of his penultimate predecessor, Pope Paul VI. The first and clearest example of this deliberate magisterial pattern can be dated to the Pontiff's discourse on Evangelization at the Puebla Conference of 1979. There he addressed the entire college of Latin American Bishops gathered together in Mexico; on that important occasion, when he accepted that hierarchy's invitation, which had first been extended to Pope Paul VI and then to Pope John Paul I, for clarification regarding the meaning of the Church within a period of social and cultural upheaval there, he recalled and affirmed Paul VI's own words, already written in 1975:

“The Church is deeply aware of her duty to preach salvation to all. Knowing that the Gospel message is not reserved to a small group of the initiated, the privileged, or the elect, but is destined for everyone, she shares Christ's anguish at the sight of the wandering and exhausted crowds, like ‘sheep without a shepherd,’ and she often repeats His words: ‘I feel sorry for all these people’ ” (Evangelii Nuntiandi, no. 57).

This was the premise, really, of the first phase of his pontificate. The Mystery of the Church allows for no oligarchy, no establishment, no elite. Christ is the center of all. Christ is the possession of all. The ground

The Idea of the Luminous

THE phenomenon of light is a major component in the celebration of Christian liturgies. This has been so since the inception of Christianity itself in Jerusalem. The first Christians were also pious Jews. Lights, lamps, candelabrae, and candles were part of their heritage and were important aspects of Hebrew cultic practice since the time of Moses. During the period of the Exodus, the Ark of the Covenant was carried with reverence by day; a flame lighted by virgin oil rested before the Ark in the tent by night.

The Menorah, the eight-branched candlestick, was, from the days of Moses, a sign of the presence of God. To this day, it is still associated with synagogue worship and Jewish domestic liturgies. Even now, the Sabbath begins with the kindling of light in every Jewish home, as the mother of the family draws the rays from the flame to her eyes.

History, including archaeology and epigraphy, reveals the significance of light in the temple worship at Jerusalem. Within the Holy of Holies in the Temple, the large central lamp at the altar of incense was surrounded by other lanterns, all of them bent toward the central light. Should the central lamp be extinguished, it might only be relit by fire from the altar itself. In the year 70 C.E., the second temple at Jerusalem was sacked and destroyed during the Jewish-Roman War; to this day in the city of Rome, the Arch of Titus still stands and commemorates in great detail the Roman soldiers carrying off the

First Luminous Mystery: Jesus Is Baptized in the Jordan

THE evidence of the New Testament indicates that this incident in the life of Jesus is unique. This event is recorded in all four Gospels (Mt 3:13-17; Mk 1:9-11; Lk 3:21-22; Jn 1:31-34). As such, it is on a par with the Passion Narratives which appear in every Gospel tradition. The details of this Mystery are recorded by all four evangelists with remarkable similarity.

From the most ancient days of Church life, various Christian liturgical texts in both the East and the West contain evidence that the celebration of the Baptism of Jesus was an ancient and important feast of the Nativity Cycle. Along with the celebration of the Wedding Feast at Cana, the feast of the Baptism of Jesus in the Jordan was connected to the commemoration of the Epiphany, i.e., the presentation of the Child Jesus to the three Wise Men from the East. Evidence of this is still found in the *Magnificat Antiphon* for the second Vespers for the Feast of the Epiphany. It is very ancient.

Three Mysteries mark this Holy Day: Today the star leads the Magi to the Infant Christ; today water is changed into wine for the wedding feast; today Christ wills to be baptized by John in the river Jordan to bring us salvation.

The three events cited are acts of revelation of the divine origin and mission of Jesus. The Magi of the