

Excerpts from the Apostolic Letter *Rosarium Virginis Mariae* of Pope St. John Paul II

“[T]o bring out fully the Christological depth of the Rosary it would be suitable to make an addition to the traditional pattern which, while left to the freedom of individuals and communities, could broaden it to include *the mysteries of Christ’s public ministry between his Baptism and his Passion*. In the course of those mysteries we contemplate important aspects of the person of Christ as the definitive revelation of God. Declared the beloved Son of the Father at the Baptism in the Jordan, Christ is the one who announces the coming of the Kingdom, bears witness to it in his works and proclaims its demands. It is during the years of his public ministry that *the mystery of Christ is most evidently a mystery of light*: ‘While I am in the world, I am the light of the world’ (Jn 9:5).” Number 19

The Rosary is a method of contemplation, and while the method it employs has been fruitful in the lives of many saints throughout the centuries, the Holy Father offers some suggestions to improve this method in certain circumstances.

“Such is the intent of the addition of the new series of *mysteria lucis* to the overall cycle of mysteries and of the few suggestions which I am proposing in this Letter regarding its manner of recitation. These suggestions, while respecting the well-established structure of this prayer, are intended to help the faithful to understand it in the richness of its symbolism and in harmony with the demands of daily life.” Number 28

Announcing the Mystery

“Announcing each mystery...is as it were *to open up a scenario* on which to focus our attention. The words direct the imagination and the mind towards a particular episode or moment in the life of Christ.... Yet, even though the mysteries contemplated in the Rosary, even with the addition of the *mysteria lucis*, do no more than outline the fundamental elements of the life of Christ, they easily draw the mind to a more expansive reflection on the rest of the Gospel, especially when the Rosary is prayed in a setting of prolonged recollection.” Number 29

Listening to the Word of God

“In order to supply a Biblical foundation and greater depth to our meditation, it is helpful to follow the announcement of the mystery with *the proclamation of a related Biblical passage*, long or short, depending on the circumstances. No other words can ever match the efficacy of the inspired word. As we listen, we are certain that this is the word of God, spoken for today and spoken ‘for me’.... In certain solemn celebrations, this word can be appropriately illustrated by a brief commentary.” Number 30

Silence

“Listening and meditation are nourished by silence. After the announcement of the mystery and the proclamation of the word, it is fitting to pause and focus one’s attention for a suitable period of time on the mystery concerned, before moving into vocal prayer. A discovery of the importance of silence is one of the secrets of practicing contemplation and meditation.” Number 31

The “Our Father”

“After listening to the word and focusing on the mystery, it is natural for *the mind to be lifted up towards the Father*. In each of his mysteries, Jesus always leads us to the Father, for as he rests in the Father’s bosom (cf. Jn 1:18) he is continually turned towards him.... Acting as a kind of foundation for the Christological and Marian meditation which unfolds in the repetition of the *Hail Mary*, the *Our Father*

makes meditation upon the mystery, even when carried out in solitude, an ecclesial experience.”
Number 32

The ten “Hail Marys”

“This is the most substantial element in the Rosary and also the one which makes it a Marian prayer *par excellence*. Yet when the *Hail Mary* is properly understood, we come to see clearly that its Marian character is not opposed to its Christological character, but that it actually emphasizes and increases it. The first part of the *Hail Mary*, drawn from the words spoken to Mary by the Angel Gabriel and by Saint Elizabeth, is a contemplation in adoration of the mystery accomplished in the Virgin of Nazareth. These words express, so to speak, the wonder of heaven and earth; they could be said to give us a glimpse of God’s own wonderment as he contemplates his ‘masterpiece’—the Incarnation of the Son in the womb of the Virgin Mary.... The repetition of the *Hail Mary* in the Rosary gives us a share in God’s own wonder and pleasure: in jubilant amazement we acknowledge the greatest miracle of history. Mary’s prophecy here finds its fulfillment: ‘Henceforth all generations will call me blessed’ (Lk 1:48).

The center of gravity in the *Hail Mary*, the hinge as it were which joins its two parts, is *the name of Jesus*. Sometimes, in hurried recitation, this center of gravity can be overlooked, and with it the connection to the mystery of Christ being contemplated. Yet it is precisely the emphasis given to the name of Jesus and to his mystery that is the sign of a meaningful and fruitful recitation of the Rosary. Pope Paul VI drew attention...to the custom in certain regions of highlighting the name of Christ by the addition of a clause referring to the mystery being contemplated. This is praiseworthy custom, especially during public recitation. It gives forceful expression to our faith in Christ, directed to the different moments of the Redeemer’s life. It is at once *a profession of faith* and an aid in concentrating our meditation, since it facilitates the process of assimilation to the mystery of Christ inherent in the repetition of the *Hail Mary*.” Number 33

The “Gloria”

“Trinitarian doxology is the goal of all Christian contemplation.... It is important that the *Gloria, the high-point of contemplation*, be given due prominence in the Rosary. In public recitation it could be sung, as a way of giving proper emphasis to the essentially Trinitarian structure of all Christian prayer.” Number 34

The concluding short prayer

“In current practice, the Trinitarian doxology is followed by a brief concluding prayer.... [I]t is worthwhile to note that the contemplation of the mysteries could better express their full spiritual fruitfulness if an effort were made to conclude each mystery with *a prayer for the fruits specific to that particular mystery*. In this way the Rosary would better express its connection with the Christian life.”
Number 35