

THE ROSARY

Contemplation of the Mysteries of the Rosary releases all their saving power, and it conforms, unites and consecrates us to Jesus Christ.

Pope Benedict XVI

One day a colleague of mine heard the devil say during an exorcism: “Every Hail Mary is like a blow on my head. If Christians knew how powerful the Rosary was, it would be my end.”

Fr Gabriel Amorth, Chief Exorcist of the Vatican

The Luminous Mysteries

1.The Baptism of Jesus in the Jordan (Mt 3:13-17; Mk 1:7-11; Lk 3:15-17,21-22; Jn 1:29-34)

Jesus, whose sacred humanity was united with the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity was completely sinless, indeed incapable of sinning. Yet he lowered himself to stand among sinners and ask John for baptism. Although sinless, he was the Head of the fallen human race. He was “the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world” (Jn 1:29) but to do that, he had to take the world’s sins upon himself. “For our sake he [God] made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” in St Paul’s strong language (2Cor 5:21).

John objected to baptizing Jesus: “I need to be baptized by you and do you come to me?” (Mt 3:14). St Ephrem has him reply: “The waters will be sanctified when I am baptized in them; they will receive from me fire and the Holy Spirit. For unless I receive baptism, they will not possess the capacity to bring forth immortal children.”¹ So the water didn’t sanctify Jesus, it was Jesus who sanctified the water to make it capable of conferring Christian baptism, although this did not begin until the day of Pentecost when about 3000 souls were baptized by the apostles.²

After thirty years of a silent, hidden life, Our Lord’s baptism was the inauguration of his public ministry. It was also a revelation of the Holy Trinity – the Father’s voice is heard proclaiming, “This is my beloved Son with whom I am well pleased,” and the Spirit is seen in the form of a dove. In Bl Columba Marmion’s words: “The Father’s testimony accredits, so to speak, His Son before the world. ... Christ is solemnly presented to the world as the One sent by the Father ... the Holy Spirit rests upon Him to show the plenitude of gifts that adorn His blessed soul.”³ This all fulfils the prophecy of Isaiah, “Behold my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my Spirit upon him, he will bring forth justice to the nations” (42:1).⁴

¹ St Ephrem, *Hymn 14*.

² The baptism mentioned in Jn3:22, 4:1-2 was a symbolic baptism of repentance, like that of John the Baptist, not yet baptism of the Spirit.

³ Bl Columba Marmion OSB, *Christ in His Mysteries*, “The Baptism and the Temptation of Jesus”, Section ii.

⁴ It should be noted that the appearance of the Holy Spirit at the baptism of Jesus was a manifestation of his presence, not a first anointing. As the Catechism says, “The Spirit, whom Jesus possessed in fullness from his

When he arose from the water, “the heavens were opened”, the heavens which had been closed after the sin of Adam. This is the beginning of the Redemption. By this act, Our Lord is committing himself to the road that lies ahead – the road to Jerusalem, to his Passion and Death. “I have a baptism to be baptized with,” he would later say, “and how I am constrained until it is accomplished” (Lk 12:50; cf Mk 10:38). It was to be a baptism in his blood, for as St John says, “This is he who came by water and blood, Jesus Christ, not with water only but with water and the blood” (1Jn 5:6). For when his side was pierced by a lance after his death, there came out blood and water. The same apostle writing in the book of Revelation tells us that the great multitude of the redeemed in heaven clothed in white robes had “washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb” (Rev 7:14), while St Paul asserts, “Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?” (Rom 6:3).

So let us never forget the price which Our Lord has paid to procure for us the grace of baptism which cleanses from original sin, confers divine sonship, and implants the seed of eternal life. The prayers of the Mass for the feast of the Baptism draw us into the Mystery: “grant that your children by adoption, reborn of water and the Holy Spirit, may always be well pleasing to you”; “grant that we may be inwardly transformed”; “that faithfully listening to your Only Begotten Son, we may be your children in name and in truth.” In the words of Bl Columba Marmion, “May I live for Him, for His glory, and no longer for myself, no longer to satisfy my covetousness, my self-love, my pride, my ambition.”⁵

2. The First Miracle of the Wedding Feast at Cana (Jn 2:1-11)

In this Mystery, we meditate on the mediation of Mary, “the Mother of Jesus.” Our Lord seems brusque in response to her implicit request, “They have no wine.” The title “woman” however, in fact bespoke the grandeur of her mission. That one word encapsulates the whole of Our Lady’s place in salvation history. It takes us back to Genesis, to Eve the first woman, and to the woman (3:15) whose seed will crush the serpent’s head, evoking Mary’s role as the Second Eve alongside the Second Adam; it takes us forward to the woman on Calvary, (Jn 19:26-27) to whose maternal care the dying Saviour entrusts John and, implicitly, the whole of mankind, (“Woman, behold your son!”) and further forward to the woman of the Apocalypse (Ch 12): in glory, clothed with the sun, but still at the heart of the temporal struggle between good and evil.

Yet Our Lord seems to use that title for the very purpose of refusing her request. “My hour has not yet come.” References to his “hour” punctuate St John’s Gospel and refer to his passion and glorification, e.g., “no one laid hands on him, because his hour had not yet come” (7:30). “The hour has come for the Son of man to be glorified” (12:23). Christ’s first obedience was to his Father, and Mary’s union with her Son was dependent on that same submission. But she was not daunted. “Do whatever he tells you” (Jn 2:5). “Her daring perseverance in faith was rewarded ... and the divine plan modified to accept Mary’s initiative.”⁶

It is noteworthy that the water used for the miracle was that intended for the Jewish rites of purification. Jesus took the water of the Old Covenant and changed it into the wine of the New Covenant – good wine and superabundant. As the Fathers of the Church have pointed

conception, comes to ‘rest on him’. Jesus will be the source of the Spirit for all mankind.” CCC 536. Moreover, the angels announced to the shepherds the birth of “Christ the Lord,” Christ meaning, “the Anointed One”.

⁵ Bl Columba Marmion OSB, op. cit., Ch.X, Section i.

⁶ Jean Galot SJ, *The Eucharistic Heart*, Ch 4.

out, this anticipation of Our Lord's "hour" was the prelude to the institution of the Holy Eucharist: "that changing of water into wine foreshadowed the changing of the element in the banquet of the Lord's table."⁷ "Once at Cana in Galilee he changed water into wine by his sovereign will; is it not credible, then, that he changed wine into blood?"⁸

Christ's presence at the wedding was a confirmation of the sacred nature of marriage, but there is also a deeper, mystical teaching here. It was the custom at Jewish weddings for the bridegroom to provide the wine, and Jesus had taken over that role. In St Augustine's words: "The bridegroom in that marriage, to whom it was said, 'You have kept the good wine until now,' represented the person of the Lord. For Christ had kept the good wine – namely the Gospel – until now."⁹

St Bernard elaborates on the same theme and takes it a step further:

We are all invited to the spiritual nuptials in which Christ Our Lord is the Bridegroom. Hence, we sing in the psalm, "And he as a bridegroom coming out of his bride-chamber" (Ps 18:6). And the bride? We ourselves, my brethren, are the bride.¹⁰

So, the wedding feast at Cana typified the marriage of Christ with the Church (c.f. Eph Ch 5) and ultimately with all mankind.¹¹ His will was not only that he should become one with us, but that we, each of us, should become one with him. At Cana, and at Mass, the water symbolizes human nature, the wine divine nature, as is made clear by the priest's silent prayer at the offertory: "By the mystery of this water and wine, may we come to share in the divinity of Christ who humbled himself to share in our humanity." The marriage at Cana speaks not only of Our Lord's first miracle, not only of the Mass, to which it pointed, but also to the fulfilment of them both – the heavenly nuptials, the eternal wedding banquet, the marriage feast of the Lamb, which is, please God, our final destiny:

"Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready" ... "Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb" (Rev 19:7,9).

3.The Proclamation of the Kingdom & Call to Conversion

"The Kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the Gospel" (Mk 1:15).

The life of this Kingdom is Christ's continuing life in those who are his own. In the heart that is no longer nourished by the vital power of Christ, the Kingdom ends; in the heart that is touched and transformed by Christ, the Kingdom begins ... it exists solely through the Lord who is its life, its strength, its centre.¹²

Conversion is a vital part of our Benedictine life. Monks and nuns take a vow of conversion of life; oblates make a solemn promise. It is a life-long process. As a priest once said to me: "We

⁷ Bl Gueric of Igny, *4th Sermon for the Epiphany*, 1.

⁸ St Cyril of Jerusalem, *4th Lecture on the Mysteries: The Eucharist*.

⁹ St Augustine, *Tractate on St John's Gospel*, 9:2.

¹⁰ St Bernard, *2nd Sermon for the 1st Sunday after the Octave of the Epiphany*.

¹¹ For an elucidation of the nuptial imagery used in the Bible, see Brant Pitre, *Jesus the Bridegroom*.

¹² Reinhold Schneider, *Das Vaterunser*, p.31f. quoted by Pope Benedict XVI in *Jesus of Nazareth*, Vol. I, p. 147.

must seek God until our last breath.” It is the seeking of God which is at the heart of conversion. It is not simply an exercise in self-improvement; we are not trying to convince ourselves or anyone else that we are good – with a goodness which is our own – and can therefore look down on others. There is no goodness which is not God’s; “one there is who is good” Our Lord said (Mt 19:17). We cannot add anything to his goodness; we can only share in that goodness. A comparison of the Pharisee and the tax-collector by Pope Benedict illustrates this (c.f. Lk 18:9-14):

The Pharisee can boast considerable virtues; he tells God only about himself, and he thinks he is praising God in praising himself. The tax collector knows he has sinned, he knows he cannot boast before God, and he prays in full awareness of his debt to grace... The Pharisee does not really look at God at all, but only at himself; he does not really need God, because he does everything right by himself. He has no real relation to God, who is ultimately superfluous – what he does himself is enough. Man makes himself righteous. The tax collector, by contrast, sees himself in the light of God. He has looked toward God, and in the process his eyes have been opened to see himself. So he knows that he needs God and that he lives by God’s goodness, which he cannot force God to give him and which he cannot procure for himself. He knows that he needs mercy and so he will learn from God’s mercy to become merciful himself, and thereby to become like God. He draws life from being-in-relation, from receiving all as gift; he will always need the gift of goodness, of forgiveness, but in receiving it he will always learn to pass the gift on to others.¹³

Holiness is Christ living within us; therefore, conversion is a work of grace, a growth in our relationship with him, a growth in love, a turning from sin to God, from self to God. It is a response to the deep, personal, merciful love that God has for each one of us. As we grow in love for Our Lord, we will want ever more to do what pleases him and become ever more aware of what is displeasing to him.

We have all the sources of grace we need: primarily, the sacraments, then praying the Divine Office and personal prayer, supported by the regular reading of sacred Scripture, the Holy Rule and other spiritual reading. Only God can give the increase to the divine life within us, but we can – must – water and nourish the soil. There is also weeding to be done, with his assistance – pulling up by the roots the vices that choke the good growth. We all have our own particular failings and besetting sins with which to do battle: selfishness, falsehood, grumbling, meanness, bearing grudges, criticism of others, sloth, anger, envy, pride. Finally, there is the pruning which the divine gardener does through all the adversities, sorrows and sufferings of life: sickness, bereavement, failure, humiliation... These all make us rely less on ourself and more on God, and contribute to the death of our false self, enabling him to gain sovereignty over our life, to shape our day-to-day existence. “He must increase, but I must decrease” in the words of St John the Baptist (Jn 3:30).

“Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God is one Lord; and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might” (Deut 6:4-5). “Hear, O Israel ...” Pope Benedict says that for God’s kingdom to come, for him to reign within us, “the first and essential thing is a listening heart.”¹⁴ The Rule of St Benedict begins, “Listen, my son, to the instructions of your Master, turn the ear of your heart to the advice of a loving father.” The advice given by the Mother of Jesus to the servants at the wedding feast at Cana was, “Do

¹³ Pope Benedict XVI, *ibid.* pp.61-62.

¹⁴ *Ibid.* p.146.

whatever he tells you” (Jn 2:5). At the Transfiguration, the Father again proclaims that Jesus is his beloved Son, with whom he is well pleased, and adds, “Listen to him” (Mt 17:5).

We would do well to make this the bedrock of our spiritual life, our life of conversion, so as to be able to fulfil St Paul’s admonition: “Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect” (Rom 12:2).

4. The Transfiguration (Mt 17:1-9; Mk 9:2-10; Lk 9:28-36)

The Transfiguration is another revelation of the Blessed Trinity. Jesus took his three closest disciples and led them up a high mountain. The word mountain is significant: it is the place of encounter with God, the place of Revelation. It was on Mount Sinai that God gave the Ten Commandments to Moses, on Mount Horeb that he spoke to Elijah, on a mountain that Our Lord, as the new lawgiver, preached the Beatitudes and the sermon which followed

In Luke’s account, it was while Jesus was praying that he was transfigured, and a responsory for the feast says his face became as bright as the sun when his Father looked upon him: “splendida facta est ut sol facies Iesu, dum respiceret in eum Pater.” We see a glimpse, therefore, of the glorious nature of the relationship between Father and Son, the inner reality of the divine life in Jesus.

Whence then came this wonderful radiance? From the Divinity. It was an overflowing of the Divinity upon the holy Humanity, an irradiation from the furnace of eternal life which was ordinarily hidden in Christ, and now at this hour caused His sacred body to shine with marvellous splendour. This was not a borrowed light, coming from without, but rather a reflection of that incommensurable majesty which Christ contained within Himself... At the Transfiguration, the Word gave full liberty to His eternal glory; He allowed it to throw its splendour upon the humanity which He had taken.¹⁵

The “bright cloud” (Mt 17:5) denotes the Holy Spirit. It is reminiscent of what the rabbis called the “shekinah” of the Old Testament, the visible presence of God which appeared, for example, at the dedication of Solomon’s Temple: “... the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud, for the glory of the Lord filled the house of the Lord” (1Kgs 8:11).

In the Bible, God is often portrayed as light. “O Lord my God, thou art very great! Thou art clothed with honour and majesty, who coverest thyself with light as with a garment” (Ps 103/4:1-2). Pope Benedict writes:

In the Book of Wisdom, the symbolism of light is used to describe the very essence of God: Wisdom, an outpouring of his glory, is “a reflection of eternal light” superior to any created light. In the New testament, it is Christ who constitutes the full manifestation of God’s light.¹⁶

He is the light of the world; the light of life. By his Resurrection he has assured us that, however great the darkness may seem, that light will never be extinguished.

¹⁵ BI Columba Marmion, *op.cit.*, “On the Heights of Thabor”, Section iii.

¹⁶ Quoted in the *CTS Sunday Missal*’s introduction to the feast of the Transfiguration.

Six days before the Transfiguration, Our Lord said: “there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom,” (Mt 16:28). The revelation of his glory is the fulfilment of that promise; it is the glory of the Parousia, the Second Coming of Christ. It was portrayed not merely in words but by an event, with witnesses who could later preach with the certitude that what they proclaimed was true (c.f. 2 Pet 1:16-19)

The prayers of the Mass for this feast show how we are associated with this mystery. The Preface asserts that Christ our Lord “filled with the greatest splendour that bodily form which he shares with all humanity ... that he might show how, what so wonderfully shone forth first in its Head, is to be fulfilled in the Body of the whole Church.” Or as a biblical commentary puts it: “Here on Tabor we have before us the living and perfect icon of human nature divinised by being taken up into divine life.”¹⁷ This is our eternal destiny.

Thus, St Paul assures us: “We await a Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will change our lowly body to be like his glorious body” (Phil 3:20-21); and, “We all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being changed into his likeness, from one degree of glory to another” (2 Cor 3:18).

5. The Institution of the Eucharist (Mt 26:26-28; Mk 14:22-25; Lk 22:17-20; 1Cor 11:23-26)

Blessed are you, O Upper Room, for two disciples were sent to designate you as the place for the Lord’s supper ... Blessed is your dwelling place in which bread was broken by a blessed Hand! In you was pressed into the chalice of salvation the grape which came forth from Mary. O blessed room! No one has seen nor ever will see what you have seen: the Lord, the true altar and true priest, become the bread and cup of salvation.

St Ephrem: *Hymn on the Crucifixion*

O God, who have called us to participate in this most sacred supper,
in which your Only Begotten Son,
when about to hand himself over to death,
entrusted to the church a sacrifice new for all eternity,
the banquet of his love,
grant, we pray, that we may draw from so great a mystery,
the fullness of charity and of life.

Collect for the Mass of the Lord’s Supper on Holy Thursday

The Lord, having loved those who were his own, loved them to the end. Knowing that the hour had come to leave this world and return to the Father, in the course of a meal he washed their feet and gave them the commandment of love. In order to leave them a pledge of this love, in order never to depart from his own and to make them sharers in his Passover, he instituted the Eucharist as the memorial of his death and Resurrection, and commanded his apostles to celebrate it until his return; ‘thereby he constituted them priests of the New Testament.’

Catechism of the Catholic Church § 1337

¹⁷ Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis, *Fire of Mercy*, Vol II, p. 551.

It is as if He said: My desire is to communicate My Divine life to you. I hold My being, My life, all, from My Father, and because I hold all from Him, I live only for Him; I desire with an intense desire that you, likewise, holding all from Me, live only for Me. Your corporal life is sustained and developed by food; I will to be the food of your soul, so as to preserve and develop its life which is Myself. He that eats Me, lives by My life; I possess the fulness of grace, and those to whom I give Myself as food partake of this grace.

Bl Columba Marmion, *Christ, the Life of the Soul*,
“Panis Vitae”, Section i.

His will was that this sacrament be received as the soul’s spiritual food [c.f. Mt 26:26] which would nourish and strengthen those who live by the life of him who said: “He who eats me will live because of me” [Jn 6:57] and that it be also a remedy to free us from our daily faults and to preserve us from mortal sin. Christ willed, moreover, that this sacrament be a pledge of our future glory and our everlasting happiness and, likewise, a symbol of that one “Body” of which he himself is “the Head” [c.f. 1Cor 11:3; Eph 5:23], and to which he willed that we, as members, should be linked by the closest bonds of faith, hope and love, so that we might all say the same thing, and that there might be no dissensions among us [c.f. 1Cor 1:10].

Council of Trent, *Decree on the Most Holy Eucharist*, Ch 2,
in *The Christian Faith* edited by J. Dupuis SJ.

Since the Christ who gives himself is the glorified Christ, he brings us into the heart of the joy which accompanies the resurrection. By sharing in this meal, Christians receive a special grace to lead their lives in sincere joy. The eucharistic presence is a source of joy for those who welcome it and respond to the permanent gift of himself which the Lord makes. It calls us to contemplation and to experience the happiness that contemplation brings. It helps Christians to come out of themselves, their worries and their sufferings, by turning towards the person of Christ, who radiates peace and joy under the sacramental sign.

Jean Galot SJ, *op cit.*, p. 143.