

How to Pray the Rosary

Greetings, favoured one! The Lord is with you. (Luke 1:28)

Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. (Luke 1:42)

History

It is said that the rosary was revealed to St Dominic de Guzmán (1170-1221), founder of the Order of Preachers or Dominicans, by Mary in a vision. It became an almost universal form of prayer during the Middle Ages and Renaissance, particularly among the illiterate majority who could pray in a structured way from memory and without using a written Office.

During her various appearances over the centuries, at Lourdes, Knock, Fatima, etc, Mary has urged Christians to use the rosary for their spiritual benefit. In praying the rosary, "it is to Jesus the act of love is ultimately dedicated." (Pope John Paul II)

What is the Rosary?

The rosary is a form of meditative prayer in which we say a sequence of repeated short prayers while contemplating twenty "Mysteries": episodes from the story of the Incarnation and our Redemption.

Each Mystery is considered as we pray a "decade": An Our Father, ten Hail Marys, and Glory be to the Father. The Mysteries are grouped into fives, and it is normal to pray in a daily sequence so that each day we contemplate five Mysteries, thus saying five decades.

If we pray the rosary regularly, we benefit from deep and regular immersion in the astonishing story of God's love for us.

The Mysteries

The Joyful Mysteries

1. The Annunciation: Gabriel appears to Mary
2. The Visitation: Mary visits Elizabeth, mother of John the Baptist
3. The Nativity: Jesus is born in Bethlehem
4. The Presentation: Jesus is brought to the Temple and acclaimed by Simeon
5. The Finding in the Temple: Jesus is found in the Temple, talking with the teachers

The Luminous Mysteries

1. The Baptism of the Lord by John the Baptist
2. The Wedding at Cana: the first miracle as water is turned into wine
3. The Proclamation of the Kingdom of God: Luke 9:27
4. The Transfiguration: Jesus' divinity is revealed
5. The Institution of the Eucharist at the Last Supper

The Sorrowful Mysteries

1. The Agony in the Garden: Jesus prays in anguish and is arrested
2. The Scourging at the Pillar: Jesus is flogged with a spiked whip
3. The Crowning with Thorns: as they mock Him, the soldiers unknowingly acknowledge Jesus' kingship
4. The Carrying of the Cross: Jesus bears our sins as he goes to his death
5. The Crucifixion: God's ultimate redemptive self-sacrifice

The Glorious Mysteries

1. The Resurrection: death is defeated
2. The Ascension: Jesus opens the Gates of Heaven to humanity
3. The Descent of the Holy Spirit: the Church is given the gifts of the Spirit
4. The Assumption: Mary is taken body and soul into Heaven
5. The Coronation of Mary as Queen of Heaven: in the eyes of God, wealth, fame and power are nothing - only holiness counts

The normal schedule is:

Mondays: The Joyful Mysteries
Tuesdays: The Sorrowful Mysteries
Wednesdays: The Glorious Mysteries
Thursdays: The Luminous Mysteries
Fridays: The Sorrowful Mysteries
Saturdays: The Joyful Mysteries
Sundays: The Glorious Mysteries

The sequence is not mandatory, and it can be varied to suit your personal circumstances and the seasons of the year. During Advent, for example, more emphasis might be given to the Joyful Mysteries, during Lent, the Sorrowful Mysteries.

Praying the Rosary: the mechanics

Beads

Rosary beads are the usual way of keeping count of the repeated prayers, but you can equally do so by counting on your fingers or on pebbles, buttons, etc. For convenience, I am going to set out the instructions for praying the rosary while using beads.

A set of beads looks like a necklace with a crucifix hanging from it. The crucifix is on a string/chain with, in sequence, one bead, three beads, and one bead. The “necklace” itself consists of five sets of 10 beads, divided by single beads.

What to do

All the prayers are set out below.

You can say the rosary anywhere: kneeling or sitting in church or at home, on the bus or train, or while taking a walk. If you feel self-conscious, it is easy to use rosary beads inside a coat pocket. You can say five decades all at once or spread them across the day. You can say it alone or with others.

- Holding the crucifix, say the *In nomine* and then the *Apostles' Creed*.
- Holding the first bead, pray an *Our Father*.
- On each of the next three beads, pray a *Hail Mary*.
- On the piece of chain/string after the three beads, pray the *Doxology*.
- On the final bead, name the first Mystery you are going to pray and, while meditating on the Mystery, pray an *Our Father*.
- On the first set of ten beads, while continuing to meditate on the first Mystery, pray ten *Hail Marys*.
- On the chain/string after the ten beads, pray the *Doxology* [and OPTIONALLY the *Prayer of Fatima*].
- On the next single bead, announce the second Mystery you are going to pray and, while meditating on the Mystery, pray an *Our Father*.
- Continue until you have prayed a decade for each of the five Mysteries you are praying that day.
- When you have completed five decades, pray the *Hail, Holy Queen* and the *Concluding Prayers*.

The prayers

In nomine

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Apostles' Creed

I believe in God, the Father almighty, Creator of heaven and earth, and in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried; he descended into hell; on the third day he rose again from the dead; he ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of God the Father almighty; from there he will come to judge the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and life everlasting. Amen.

Our Father

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name; thy kingdom come; thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. Amen.

Hail Mary

Hail Mary, full of grace. The Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus. Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death. Amen.

Doxology

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, as it was in the beginning, is now, and shall be forever. Amen.

Prayer of Fatima [optional]

O my Jesus, forgive us our sins. Save us from the fires of hell. Lead all souls to heaven, especially those in most need of thy mercy.

Hail, Holy Queen

Hail, holy Queen, mother of mercy, our life, our sweetness, and our hope. To thee do we cry, poor vanished children of Eve; to thee do we send up our sighs, mourning and weeping in this valley of tears. Turn then, O most gracious advocate, thine eyes of mercy toward us, and after this our exile, show unto us the blessed fruit of thy womb, Jesus. O clement, O loving, O sweet Virgin Mary.

Pray for us, O holy Mother of God,

That we may be worthy of the promises of Christ.

Concluding Prayers

Let us pray. O God, whose Only Begotten Son, by his life, death, and Resurrection has purchased for us the rewards of eternal life; grant, we beseech thee, that meditating on these mysteries of the most holy rosary of the Blessed Virgin Mary,

we may imitate what they contain, and obtain what they promise through the same Christ our Lord. Amen.

May the divine assistance remain always with us.

May the souls of the faithful departed, through the mercy of God, rest in peace.
Amen.

More help

Rosary beads are available in a wide variety of styles and costs. They can be bought in church bookstalls (for example at St Michael's, Croydon (CofE) or St Anselm's, Tooting Bec (RC)), in most Cathedral shops (Westminster Abbey, St Paul's and Southwark stock them), or in the St Paul's and CTS bookshops by Westminster Cathedral.

There are also many books and pamphlets offering practical instructions and meditations on the Mysteries, available from the same sources.

For those wishing to read a more scholarly approach to the Mysteries, I highly recommend Aidan Nichols O.P., *Lessons in a Rose Garden: Reviving the Doctrinal Rosary* (Leominster, Herts: Gracewing, 2012).