

Three paths into the Secret Garden

Contrary to popular belief, it is not especially easy to make the Rosary. Of course, it is easy enough to say the prayers, but to maintain a right concentration upon the Mysteries - a perfect contemplation - requires rare qualities of pure attention and self-giving. To a great degree, these qualities can be developed by daily practice, and by pursuing Divine love and self-control in our lives. How easy we find it will depend on how far we have advanced in this life and those before it.

Practice is important, because each devotion deepens and widens the channel to the Interior. Life is important, for not only are our lives reflected in our devotions, but a frequent recall of our love for the Divine and Her love for us in daily life will fill our minds with ideas and images, books and poems, pictures, snatches of sentences, thoughts and scenes, all of which are connected in our minds and feelings with our personal relationship with our Lady. All this jumble of loving fragments will be gathered together and poured helter-skelter into our contemplation, caught up in the rhythm and shape of the Rosary, and moulded and sculpted by it into the pattern and structure of the Eternal Mystery.

But there is no need to worry if you find it hard at first. Your very dissatisfaction is a sign that you are conscious of your weakness, and are striving for higher things. When as a child I could not sleep, my mother would tell me that if I lay still I would at least have some rest. The same is true of the Rosary: even when we are unable to enter into the full experience, the very act of following this cosmic prayer-structure will bring powerful spiritual benefit. And, as in all prayer, it must be remembered that the conscious mind is not the whole of us. The Spirit of the Goddess may be working in us at a level deeper than we can know. Whenever we genuinely pray to the best of our ability, we may be assured that this is the case.

But there are a number of ways in which we can begin to penetrate deeper into the Mysteries of the Rosary, and to increase our power to contemplate them. I would like to suggest three of these which I have found helpful. But first of all, we must take note of a very important fact: the five decades of the Rosary fall into two very distinct sections - the two Mother decades (the first decade and the last) and the three Daughter decades (the three central decades). These two groups are very different in character. The Mother decades deal more with ideas and realities (the dependence of all things on the Mother for existence - the complete union of self with Her.) The Daughter decades deal more with Divine Events (the Events of the Nativity, Passion and Resurrection.) It is not always best to use the same methods for each; the Daughter decades, for instance, lend themselves much better to the eidetic method than do the Mother decades.

The Eidetic Path

This is good for keeping the mind fixed, particularly during the Daughter decades. The method is to select one particular image for each bead, so that the mind moves rapidly over a set path. It is a good elementary method, because each image will touch off numerous reactions in the unconscious spiritual memory, while the conscious mind is prevented from wandering.

One cannot use the method fully for the first decade, but one can take guiding images from verses 1 - 7 of the Creation, chapter I. For the beads of the Daughter decades, I would suggest the following images from the Mythos:

Nativity Decade: 1, the conception upon the waters. 2, the journey and entry into the cavern. 3, the appearance of the Star. 4, the coming of the children of the earth. 5, the appearance and address of the Genis. 6, the silence before dawn. 7, the voice from the cavern and the rejoicing of the daughters of Heaven. 8, 9, 10, the adoration of the Mother and Child.

Passion Decade: 1 - 7, the seven gates of Hell. 8, the binding of Her hands and the beating. 9, the death. 10, the hanging upon the pillar. (it is important to try to understand the particular sinking dread associated with the seven gates.)

OR: 1, the descent into Hell. 2, the questions of the Dark Queen. 3, the binding of Her hands. 4, the beating and humiliation. 5, the kneeling before the Dark Queen. 6, the death. 7, 8, the body upon the pillar. 9, the desolation of the world. 10, the sorrow of the Mother.

Resurrection Decade: 1, the shattering of the gates of Hell. 2, the taking down of the body. 3, the sprinkling of water. 4, the awakening of the Daughter. 5, the leading of the souls out of Hell. 8, the greeting of the children of earth. 9, the ascent into Heaven. 10, the crowning of the Queen of Heaven.

The method cannot be used for the final decade, but one may make the Pentacle on oneself after the Eternity and use the Rose-and-Pentacle meditation described in Appendix 1 of the Catechism.

The Contemplative Path

This involves an intellectual fixing upon the Mysteries themselves. A deep and thoughtful consideration of what they mean, what they are, and of one's own relationship to them. For example, in the second decade, one might fix upon the image of Mother and Child, and let the mind play upon the Truth that though They are two Persons, yet They are one and the same. This is not always an easy method, but it can be very rewarding one. (Incidentally, it is a good idea to keep a record of any thoughts which strike you as important.)

The Emotional Path

In this method we attempt to realise the Mysteries through emotion. Again, the Daughter decades provide the most directly accessible material for this, but the final decade can become the most emotionally significant of all as it becomes more fully understood.

Both the Mother decades call forth an emotion of wonder or glory, which is a little harder to achieve than those of the Daughter decades.

The emotional pattern of the Rosary is absolutely symmetrical, moving from wonder to joy (Nativity), to sorrow (Passion), to joy again (Resurrection), to wonder again.

But the wonder and joy of the first half are different from those of the second half. It is hard to describe subtle shades of emotion, but these are brought out naturally by the consideration of the different Mysteries. In the first half they are fresh and bright, like the new moon. In the second, they are full and glorious, like the full moon.

In this method, one must throw aside the normal social restraints upon emotion, and allow oneself to feel fully the emotions of the Daughter decades, letting it come through in the tone of the voice and the attitude and movements of the body.

In practice, of course, every meditation will contain something of all three methods. Nor do these three exhaust the possibilities of the Rosary.

The Mother Decades

In what has been said, it may have seemed that the Mother decades are somewhat apart from the rest of the Rosary. But in fact they make a perfect and indispensable entry to and consummation of the Mysteries of the Daughter. In the first decade, we shift our perception from the everyday acceptance of our material surroundings, and remind ourselves of their original nature as Divine Ideas and their perpetual dependence on the continuing creative Act of the Mother for their very existence. In this decade, I sometimes look at the ground on which I rest, and recall that this very place was once part of the roaring seas of primordial Chaos; that it is created by a deliberate Act of the Divine Will which sustains it in every moment. With this realisation of the Absolute, it is far easier to realise the Absolute nature of the events of the Mythos.

In the final decade, the emotional and mental experience built up by the Daughter decades - the joy of Nativity, the sorrow and apprehension of the Passion, the exultant happiness of the Resurrection - come to a climax in the Fire of the Rose. Suddenly we are asked to give ourselves; to offer ourselves completely to our Mother, keeping nothing back, to become consumed in the fire of Her love.

The whole meaning of all the decades is suddenly concentrated into one utterly personal demand. It is the ultimate demand of religion - the ultimate sacrifice and the ultimate ecstasy. Of course one will not experience this on every occasion but even in the most earthbound recital of the final decade, the fullness of this experience lies folded like a rose within the bud.

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