

SAINT LOUIS-MARIE
GRIGNION DE MONTFORT



THE SECRET
OF THE ROSARY
FOR RENEWAL AND SALVATION

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Presentation

This work written by St. Louis Marie de Montfort (1673-1716) is defined as “precious” by Pope John Paul II in his Apostolic Letter Rosarium Virginis Mariae (no. 8), where he mentions Montfort among the saints “who have found in the Rosary an authentic way of sanctification”.

The Marvelous Secret of the Holy Rosary was printed for the first time only in 1912, almost two centuries after the death of its author.

In these most recent years however, it has spread rapidly. It is translated into many principal languages and read by those who seek in the Holy Rosary the most simple but profound way to meditate and contemplate the life of Jesus and of Mary.

St. Louis Marie de Montfort, who was also a third order Dominican has always preached the Rosary in his missions. He was authorized by the Superior General of the Dominicans to constitute the Confraternities of the Rosary in places where he used to preach.

Above all, in the last years of his ministry, Montfort has chosen the Holy Rosary as the special means of persevering in the fruits of the missions and recommended it as the secret to make rapid progress in the spiritual life.

The Holy Rosary mirrors in a perfect way the characteristics of the spirituality of St. Louis Marie:

it is a prayer that brings us to Jesus, since it makes us mediate on his life, death and resurrection; moreover it leads us to Jesus through Mary, as Montfort insists always. In fact, the Rosary is a Marian prayer.

Among the characteristics of the Rosary, there is its contemplative dimension, favored by the repetition of the Hail Mary, that becomes an authentic school of spiritual life: from the first easier ways of reciting of a simple formula until the prayer of the mind and of the heart.

St. Louis Marie was a missionary of the people and saw in the Rosary a means offered to all to insure a spiritual journey towards the most profound union to Jesus Christ and to Mary.

The Marvelous Secret of the Holy Rosary is a spiritual work which is very rich of theological and spiritual contents.

It is enough to read the comments of the author on the Our Father and on the Hail Mary, and the observations and reflections he makes on the mysteries of the life of Jesus and Mary, but at the same time is left a considerable space to the edifying stories of conversions, wonders and miracles obtained through the Holy Rosary, favoring the taste of the imagined popular.

Wise, persuasive and often witty are the annotations of pastoral character made by the author.

It must be a fruit of his missionary experience,

which made him a profound expert of the individual and social behaviors of his time.

The style, which is as always the incisive and brilliance of St. Louis Marie, makes the reading pleasant and charming, helping the reflections on the spiritual contents of the work.

In the Church today, the Holy Rosary has ever been recommended by the Supreme Pontiffs and its practice is being reinforced by the recommendations coming from the apparitions of the Blessed Virgin in Lourdes and in Fatima.

In particular, John Paul II has enriched it. Aside from the five Mysteries of Light, he has provided a new theological force encouraging the devotion as an authentic school of spiritual life. At the start of the third Millennium, he has proclaimed the Year of the Rosary as a special means to obtain peace in the world and to save the family to its profound human and Christian values.

In the same context, the reading of the writing of St Louis Marie de Montfort will surely bring abundant spiritual fruits for those who are desirous to enroll at the “school of Mary”, convinced that “one progresses more in a short time through submission and dependence on Mary, than in entire years of doing ones own will and counting on oneself” (Montfort, True Devotion to Mary, no. 55).

Battista Cortinovis, s.m.m.





Introduction

A white rose

1. Dear ministers of the most high God, you my fellow priests who preach the truth of God and who teach the gospel to all nations, let me give you this little book as a white rose that I would like you to keep. The truths contained in it are set forth in a very simple and straightforward manner, as you will see. Please keep them in your heart so that you yourselves may make a practice of the Rosary and taste its fruits. Please have them always on your lips too, so that you will always preach the Rosary and thus convert others by teaching them the excellence of this holy devotion.

I beg of you to beware of thinking of the Rosary as something of little importance – as do ignorant people, and even several great but proud scholars. Far from being insignificant, the Rosary is a priceless treasure which is inspired by God. Almighty God has given it to you because he wants you to use it as a means to convert the most hardened sinners and the most obstinate heretics. He has attached to it grace

in this life and glory in the next. The saints have said it faithfully and the Popes have endorsed it. When the Holy Spirit has revealed this secret to a priest and director of souls, how blessed is that priest! For the vast majority of people fail to know this secret or else only know it superficially. If such a priest really understands this secret, he will say the Rosary each day and will encourage others to say it. God and his blessed Mother will pour abundant grace into his soul, so that he may become God's instrument for his glory; and his word, though simple, will do more good in one month than that of other preachers in several years.

2. Therefore, my dear brothers and fellow priests, it will not be enough for us to preach this devotion to others; we must practice it ourselves, for if we firmly believed in the importance of the holy Rosary but never said it ourselves, people could hardly be expected to act upon our advice, since no one can give what he does not have: "Jesus began to do and to teach" (Acts 1:1). We ought to pattern ourselves on our Lord, who began practising what he preached. We ought to emulate St. Paul, who knew and preached nothing but Jesus crucified.

I could tell you at great length of the grace God has given me to know by experience the effective-

ness of the preaching of the holy Rosary, and of how I have seen, with my own eyes, the most wonderful conversions it has brought about.

I would gladly tell you all these things if I thought that it would move you to preach this beautiful devotion, in spite of the fact that priests are not in the habit of doing so these days. But instead of all this, I think it will be quite enough for this little summary that I am writing if I tell you a few ancient but authentic stories about the holy Rosary. These excerpts really go to prove what I have outlined for the faithful.

A red rose

3. Poor men and women who are sinners, I, a greater sinner than you, wish to give you this rose, a crimson one, because the precious blood of our Lord has fallen upon it. Please God that it may bring true fragrance into your lives – but above all, may it save you from the danger that you are in. Every day unbelievers and un-repentant sinners cry, “Let us crown ourselves with roses” (Wis. 2:8). But our cry should be, “Let us crown ourselves with the roses of the holy Rosary.”

How different are theirs from ours! Their roses are pleasures of the flesh, worldly honours and

passing riches which wilt and decay in no time, but ours, which are the Our Father and Hail Mary which we have said devoutly over and over again, and to which we have added good penitential acts, will never wilt or die, and they will be just as exquisite thousands of years from now as they are today. On the contrary, sinners' roses only look like roses, while in point of fact they are cruel thorns which prick them during life by giving them pangs of conscience, at their death they pierce them with bitter regret and, still worse, in eternity they turn to burning shafts of anger and despair. But if our roses have thorns, they are the thorns of Jesus Christ, who changes them into roses. If our roses prick us, it is only for a short time, and only in order to cure the illness of sin and to save our souls.

4. So by all means we should eagerly crown ourselves with these roses from heaven, and recite the entire Rosary every day, that is to say, three rosaries each of five decades, which are like three little wreaths or crowns of flowers. There are two reasons for doing this: first of all, to honour the three crowns of Jesus and Mary – Jesus' crown of grace at the time of his Incarnation, his crown of thorns during his passion, and his crown of glory in heaven, and of course the three-fold crown which the Blessed Trinity gave Mary in heaven.

Secondly, we should do this so that we ourselves may receive three crowns from Jesus and Mary, the first a crown of merit during our lifetime; the second, a crown of peace at our death; and the third, a crown of glory in heaven.

If you say the Rosary faithfully until death, I do assure you that, in spite of the gravity of your sins “you shall receive a never-fading crown of glory” (1 Pet. 5:4). Even if you are on the brink of damnation, even if you have one foot in hell, even if you have sold your soul to the devil as sorcerers do who practice black magic, and even if you are a heretic as obstinate as a devil, sooner or later you will be converted and will amend your life and save your soul, if – and mark well what I say – if you say the Rosary devoutly every day until death for the purpose of knowing the truth and obtaining contrition and pardon for your sins. In this book there are several stories of great sinners who were converted through the power of the Rosary. Please read and meditate upon them.

A mystical rose tree

5. Good and devout souls, who walk in the light of the Holy Spirit, I do not think you will mind my giving you this little mystical rose tree which comes

straight from heaven and which is to be planted in the garden of your soul. It cannot possibly harm the sweet-smelling flowers of your contemplations; for it is a heavenly tree and its scent is very pleasant. It will not in the least interfere with your carefully planned flower-beds; for, being itself all pure and well-ordered, it inclines all to order and purity. If it is carefully watered and properly attended to every day, it will grow to such a marvellous height, and its branches will have such a wide span that, far from hindering your other devotions, it will maintain and perfect them. Of course, you understand what I mean, since you are spiritually minded; this mystical rose tree is Jesus and Mary in life, death and eternity.

6. Its green leaves are the Joyful Mysteries, the thorns the Sorrowful ones, and the flowers the Glorious Mysteries of Jesus and Mary. The buds are the childhood of Jesus and Mary, and the open blooms show us both of them in their sufferings, and the full-blown roses symbolize Jesus and Mary in their triumph and glory. A rose delights us because of its beauty: so here we have Jesus and Mary in the Joyful Mysteries. Its thorns are sharp, and they prick, which makes us think of them in the Sorrowful Mysteries, and last of all, its perfume is so sweet that everyone loves it, and this fragrance symbolizes their Glorious Mysteries.

So please do not scorn this beautiful and heavenly tree, but plant it with your own hands in the garden of your soul, by making the resolution to say your Rosary every day.

By saying it daily and by doing good works you will be tending your tree, watering it, hoeing the earth around it.

Eventually you will see that this little seed which I have given you, and which seems so small now, will grow into a tree so great that the birds of heaven, that is, predestinate and contemplative souls, will dwell in it and make their nests there.

Its shade will shelter them from the scorching heat of the sun and its height will keep them safe from the wild beasts on the ground.

And best of all, they will feed upon the tree's fruit, which is none other than our adorable Jesus, to whom be honour and glory forever and ever. Amen.

God alone.

A rosebud

7. Dear little friends, this beautiful rosebud is for you; it is one of the beads of your Rosary, and it may seem to you to be such a tiny thing. But if you only knew how precious this bead is! This wonderful bud will open out into a gorgeous rose if you say your Hail Mary really well. Of course it would

be too much to expect you to say the whole fifteen mysteries every day, but do say at least five mysteries, and say them properly with love and devotion. This Rosary will be your little wreath of roses, your crown for Jesus and Mary. Please pay attention to every word I have said, and listen carefully to a true story that I want to tell you, and that I would like you to remember.

8. Two little girls, who were sisters, were saying the Rosary very devoutly in front of their house. A beautiful lady suddenly appeared, walked towards the younger girl, who was only about six or seven, took her by the hand, and led her away. Her elder sister was very startled and looked for the little girl everywhere. At last, still not having found her, she went home weeping and told her parents that her sister had been kidnapped. For three whole days the poor father and mother sought the child without success.

At the end of the third day they found her at the front door looking extremely happy and pleased. Naturally they asked her where on earth she had been, and she told them that the lady to whom she had been saying the Rosary had taken her to a lovely place where she had given her delicious things to eat. She said that the lady had also given her a baby boy to hold, that he was very beauti-

ful, and that she had kissed him again and again. The father and mother, who had been converted to the Catholic faith only a short time before, sent at once for the Jesuit Father who had instructed them for their reception into the Church and who had also taught them devotion to the Rosary. They told him everything that had happened, and it was this priest himself who told me this story. It all took place in Paraguay.

So, dear children, imitate these little girls and say your Rosary every day as they always did. If you do this, you will earn the right to go to heaven to see Jesus and Mary.

If it is not their wish that you should see them in this life, at any rate after you die you will see them for all eternity. Amen.

Therefore let all men, the learned and the ignorant, the just and the sinners, the great and the small, praise and honour Jesus and Mary night and day, by saying the holy Rosary. “Greet Mary who has laboured much among you” (Rom. 16:8).





First decade

The surpassing merit of the Rosary
as seen in its origin and name

First rose

9. The Rosary is made up of two things: mental prayer and vocal prayer. In the Rosary mental prayer is none other than meditation of the chief mysteries of the life, death and glory of Jesus Christ and of his blessed Mother. Vocal prayer consists in saying fifteen decades of the Hail Mary, each decade headed by an Our Father, while at the same time meditating on and contemplating the fifteen principal virtues which Jesus and Mary practised in the fifteen mysteries of the Rosary.

In the first five decades we must honour the five Joyful Mysteries and meditate on them; in the second five decades, the Sorrowful Mysteries; and in the third group of five, the Glorious Mysteries. So the Rosary is a blessed blending of mental and vocal prayer by which we honour and learn to imitate the mysteries and the virtues of the life, death, passion and glory of Jesus and Mary.

Second rose

10. Since the Rosary is composed, principally and in substance, of the prayer of Christ and the Angelic Salutation, that is, the Our Father and the Hail Mary, it was without doubt the first prayer and the principal devotion of the faithful and has been in use all through the centuries, from the time of the apostles and disciples down to the present.

11. It was only in the year 1214, however, that the Church received the Rosary in its present form and according to the method we use today. It was given to the Church by St. Dominic, who had received it from the Blessed Virgin as a means of converting the Albigensians and other sinners. I will tell you the story of how he received it, which is found in the very well-known book *De Dignitate Psalterii*, by Blessed Alan de la Roche.

Saint Dominic, seeing that the gravity of people's sins was hindering the conversion of the Albigensians, withdrew into a forest near Toulouse, where he prayed continuously for three days and three nights. During this time he did nothing but weep and do harsh penances in order to appease the anger of God. He used his discipline so much that his body was lacerated, and finally he fell into a coma. At this point our Lady appeared to him,

accompanied by three angels, and she said, “Dear Dominic, do you know which weapon the Blessed Trinity wants to use to reform the world?” “Oh, my Lady,” answered Saint Dominic, “you know far better than I do, because next to your Son Jesus Christ you have always been the chief instrument of our salvation.” Then our Lady replied, “I want you to know that, in this kind of warfare, the principal weapon has always been the Angelic Psalter, which is the foundation-stone of the New Testament. Therefore, if you want to reach these hardened souls and win them over to God, preach my Psalter.” So he arose, comforted, and burning with zeal for the conversion of the people in that district, he made straight for the cathedral. At once unseen angels rang the bells to gather the people together, and Saint Dominic began to preach. At the very beginning of his sermon, an appalling storm broke out, the earth shook, the sun was darkened, and there was so much thunder and lightning that all were very much afraid. Even greater was their fear when, looking at a picture of our Lady exposed in a prominent place, they saw her raise her arms to heaven three times to call down God’s vengeance upon them if they failed to be converted, to amend their lives, and seek the protection of the holy Mother of God. God wished, by means of these supernatural phenomena, to spread the new

devotion of the holy Rosary and to make it more widely known.

At last, at the prayer of Saint Dominic, the storm came to an end, and he went on preaching. So fervently and compellingly did he explain the importance and value of the Rosary that almost all the people of Toulouse embraced it and renounced their false beliefs. In a very short time a great improvement was seen in the town; people began leading Christian lives and gave up their former bad habits.

Third rose

12. The miraculous way in which the devotion to the holy Rosary was established is something of a parallel to the way in which God gave his law to the world on Mount Sinai, and it obviously proves its value and importance. Inspired by the Holy Spirit, instructed by the Blessed Virgin as well as by his own experience, Saint Dominic preached the Rosary for the rest of his life. He preached it by his example as well as by his sermons, in cities and in country places, to people of high station and low, before scholars and the uneducated, to Catholics and to heretics. The Rosary, which he said every day, was his preparation for every sermon and his little tryst with our Lady immediately after preaching.

13. One day he had to preach at Notre Dame in Paris, and it happened to be the feast of St. John the Evangelist. He was in a little chapel behind the high altar prayerfully preparing his sermon by saying the Rosary, as he always did, when our Lady appeared to him and said: “Dominic, even though what you have planned to say may be very good, I am bringing you a much better sermon.” Saint Dominic took in his hands the book our Lady proffered, read the sermon carefully and, when he had understood it and meditated on it, he gave thanks to her. When the time came, he went up into the pulpit and, in spite of the feast day, made no mention of Saint John other than to say that he had been found worthy to be the guardian of the Queen of Heaven. The congregation was made up of theologians and other eminent people, who were used to hearing unusual and polished discourses; but Saint Dominic told them that it was not his desire to give them a learned discourse, wise in the eyes of the world, but that he would speak in the simplicity of the Holy Spirit and with his forcefulness. So he began preaching the Rosary and explained the Hail Mary word by word as he would to a group of children, and used the very simple illustrations which were in the book given him by our Lady.

14. Carthage, the great scholar, quoting Blessed Alan de la Roche in *De Dignitate Psalte-*

rii, describes how this took place. “Blessed Alan writes that one day Father Dominic said to him in a vision, ‘My son, it is good to preach; but there is always a danger of looking for praise rather than the salvation of souls. Listen carefully to what happened to me in Paris, so that you may be on your guard against this kind of mistake. I was to preach in the great church dedicated to the Blessed Virgin and I was particularly anxious to give a fine sermon, not out of pride, but because of the high intellectual stature of the congregation. An hour before the time I had to preach, I was dutifully saying my Rosary – as I always did before giving a sermon – when I fell into ecstasy. I saw my beloved friend, the Mother of God, coming towards me with a book in her hand. “Dominic,” she said, “your sermon for today may be very good indeed, but no matter how good it is, I have brought you one that is very much better.” “Of course I was overjoyed, and I took the book and read every word of it. Just as our Lady had said, I found exactly the right things to say in my sermon, so I thanked her with all my heart.

When it was time to begin, I saw that the University of Paris had turned out in full force, as well as a large number of noblemen. They had all seen and heard of the great things that the good Lord had been doing through me. I went up into the pulpit. It was the feast of Saint John the Evangelist but