

LAETITIAE SANCTAE

COMMENDING DEVOTION TO THE ROSARY



ENCYCLICAL OF POPE LEO XIII, SEPTEMBER 8, 1893.

To Our Venerable Brethren the Patriarchs, Primates, Archbishops, Bishops, and other Ordinaries, having Peace and Communion with the Apostolic See.

Venerable Brethren, Greeting and Apostolic Benediction.

The sacred joy which it has been given to Us to feel in attaining the fiftieth anniversary of Our Episcopal Consecration has been deepened by the knowledge that it was shared by the people of the whole Catholic world, and that as a father in the midst of his children We have been consoled by the touching testimonies of their loyalty and love. We gratefully accept it and record it as a fresh proof of God's special providence, and one which is markedly full of bounty to Ourselves, and of blessing to the Church.

2. At the same time We love to offer Our thanks for this signal benefit to the august Mother of God, whose powerful intercession We feel to have been exercised in Our behalf. For hers is the loving kindness which, during the length of years and the vicissitudes of life, has never failed Us, and which day by day seems to draw nearer to Us than ever, filling Our soul with gladness, and strengthening Us with a confidence of which the surety is higher than the things of time. It is as if the voice of the heavenly Queen made itself heard to Us, at one moment graciously consoling Us in the midst of trials; at another guiding Us by her counsel in directing the great work of the salvation of souls; at another, urging Us to admonish the Christian people to advance in piety and in the practice of every virtue. For Us it is once more a joy as well as a duty to respond to her inspirations. Amongst the happy results which have already rewarded Our exhortations which were due to her prompting, We have to reckon the remarkable impulse given to the Devotion of the Most Holy Rosary. This awakening has made itself felt in the increased number of Confraternities instituted for the purpose, the voluminous literature of pious and learned works written upon the subject, and the manifold tributes which Christian art has not failed to bring to its service. And now, as if for yet another time, listening to the voice of the same zealous Mother, who calls upon Us to "cry out and cease not," We rejoice once more to address you, Venerable Brethren, upon the subject of the Rosary, standing as We do upon the eve of that month of October which, by the award of

Laetitiae Sanctae

special Indulgences, We have deemed it well to dedicate to this most popular devotion. Our appeal to you, however, will not be directed so much to add any further recommendation of a method of prayer so praiseworthy in itself, nor yet to press upon the faithful the necessity of practicing it still more fervently, but rather to point out how we may draw from this devotion certain advantages which are especially valuable and needful at the present day.

3. For We are convinced that the Rosary, if devoutly used, is bound to benefit not only the individual but society at large.

No one will do Us the injustice to deny that in the discharge of the duties of the Supreme Apostolate We have labored – as, God helping, We shall ever continue to labor – to promote the civil prosperity of mankind. Repeatedly have We admonished those who are invested with sovereign power that they should neither make nor execute laws except in conformity with the equity of the Divine mind. On the other hand, we have constantly besought citizens who were conspicuous by genius, industry, family, or fortune, to join together in common counsel and action to safeguard and to promote whatever would tend to the strength and well-being of the community. Only too many causes are at work, in the present condition of things, to loosen the bonds of public order, and to withdraw the people from sound principles of life and conduct.

4. There are three influences which appear to Us to have the chief place in effecting this downgrade movement of society. These are – first, the distaste for a simple and laborious life; secondly, repugnance to suffering of any kind; thirdly, the forgetfulness of the future life.

5. We deplore – and those who judge of all things merely by the light and according to the standard of nature join with Us in deploring – that society is threatened with a serious danger in the growing contempt of those homely duties and virtues which make up the beauty of humble life. To this cause we may trace in the home, the readiness of children to withdraw themselves from the natural obligation of obedience to the parents, and their impatience of any form of treatment which is not of the indulgent and effeminate kind. In the workman, it evinces itself in a tendency to desert his trade, to shrink from toil, to become discontented with his lot, to fix his gaze on things that are above him, and to look forward with unthinking hopefulness to some future equalization of property. We may observe the same temper permeating the masses in the eagerness to exchange the life of the rural districts for the excitements and pleasures of the town. Thus the equilibrium between the classes of the community is being destroyed, everything becomes unsettled, men's minds become a prey to jealousy and heart-burnings, rights are openly trampled under foot, and, finally, the people, betrayed in their expectations, attack public order, and place themselves in conflict with those who are charged to maintain it.

6. For evils such as these let us seek a remedy in the Rosary, which consists in a fixed order of prayer combined with devout meditation on the life of Christ and His Blessed Mother. Here, if the joyful mysteries be but clearly brought home to the minds of the people, an object lesson of the chief virtues is placed before their eyes. Each one will thus be able to see for

himself how easy, how abundant, how sweetly attractive are the lessons to be found therein for the leading of an honest life. Let us take our stand in front of that earthly and divine home of holiness, the House of Nazareth. How much we have to learn from the daily life which was led within its walls! What an all-perfect model of domestic society! Here we behold simplicity and purity of conduct, perfect agreement and unbroken harmony, mutual respect and love—not of the false and fleeting kind—but that which finds both its life and its charm in devotedness of service. Here is the patient industry which provides what is required for food and raiment; which does so "in the sweat of the brow," which is contented with little, and which seeks rather to diminish the number of its wants than to multiply the sources of its wealth. Better than all, we find there that supreme peace of mind and gladness of soul which never fail to accompany the possession of a tranquil conscience. These are precious examples of goodness, of modesty, of humility, of hard-working endurance, of kindness to others, of diligence in the small duties of daily life, and of other virtues, and once they have made their influence felt they gradually take root in the soul, and in course of time fail not to bring about a happy change of mind and conduct. Then will each one begin to feel his work to be no longer lowly and irksome, but grateful and lightsome, and clothed with a certain joyousness by his sense of duty in discharging it conscientiously. Then will gentler manners everywhere prevail; home-life will be loved and esteemed, and the relations of man with man will be loved and esteemed, and the relations of man with man will be hallowed by a larger infusion of respect and charity. And if this betterment should go forth from the individual to the family and to the communities, and thence to the people at large so that human life should be lifted up to this standard, no one will fail to feel how great and lasting indeed would be the gain which would be achieved for society.

7. A second evil, one which is specially pernicious, and one which, owing to the increasing mischief which it works among souls, we can never sufficiently deplore, is to be found in repugnance to suffering and eagerness to escape whatever is hard or painful to endure. The greater number are thus robbed of that peace and freedom of mind which remains the reward of those who do what is right undismayed by the perils or troubles to be met with in doing so. Rather do they dream of a chimeric civilization in which all that is unpleasant shall be removed, and all that is pleasant shall be supplied. By this passionate and unbridled desire of living a life of pleasure, the minds of men are weakened, and if they do not entirely succumb, they become demoralized and miserably cower and sink under the hardships of the battle of life.

8. In such a contest example is everything, and a powerful means of renewing our courage will undoubtedly be found in the Holy Rosary, if from our earliest years our minds have been trained to dwell upon the sorrowful mysteries of Our Lord's life, and to drink in their meaning by sweet and silent meditation. In them we shall learn how Christ, "the Author and Finisher of Our faith," began "to do and teach," in order that we might see written in His example all the lessons that He Himself had taught us for the bearing of our burden of labor—and sorrow, and mark how the sufferings which were hardest to bear were those which He

Laetitia Sanctae

embraced with the greatest measure of generosity and good will. We behold Him overwhelmed with sadness, so that drops of blood ooze like sweat from His veins. We see Him bound like a malefactor, subjected to the judgment of the unrighteous, laden with insults, covered with shame, assailed with false accusations, torn with scourges, crowned with thorns, nailed to the cross, accounted unworthy to live, and condemned by the voice of the multitude as deserving of death. Here, too, we contemplate the grief of the most Holy Mother, whose soul was not merely wounded but "pierced" by the sword of sorrow, so that she might be named and become in truth "the Mother of Sorrows." Witnessing these examples of fortitude, not with sight but by faith, who is there who will not feel his heart grow warm with the desire of imitating them?

9. Then, be it that the "earth is accursed" and brings forth "thistles and thorns," – be it that the soul is saddened with grief and the body with sickness; even so, there will be no evil which the envy of man or the rage of devils can invent, nor calamity which can fall upon the individual or the community, over which we shall not triumph by the patience of suffering. For this reason it has been truly said that "it belongs to the Christian to do and to endure great things," for he who deserves to be called a Christian must not shrink from following in the footsteps of Christ. But by this patience, We do not mean that empty stoicism in the enduring of pain which was the ideal of some of the philosophers of old, but rather do We mean that patience which is learned from the example of Him, who "having joy set before Him, endured the cross, despising the shame" (Heb. xvi., 2). It is the patience which is obtained by the help of His grace; which shirks not a trial because it is painful, but which accepts it and esteems it as a gain, however hard it may be to undergo. The Catholic Church has always had, and happily still has, multitudes of men and women, in every rank and condition of life, who are glorious disciples of this teaching, and who, following faithfully in the path of Christ, suffer injury and hardship for the cause of virtue and religion. They reecho, not with their lips, but with their life, the words of St. Thomas: "Let us also go, that we may die with him" (John xi., 16).

10. May such types of admirable constancy be more and more splendidly multiplied in our midst to the weal of society and to the glory and edification of the Church of God!

11. The third evil for which a remedy is needed is one which is chiefly characteristic of the times in which we live. Men in former ages, although they loved the world, and loved it far too well, did not usually aggravate their sinful attachment to the things of earth by a contempt of the things of heaven. Even the right-thinking portion of the pagan world recognized that this life was not a home but a dwelling-place, not our destination, but a stage in the journey. But men of our day, albeit they have had the advantages of Christian instruction, pursue the false goods of this world in such wise that the thought of their true Fatherland of enduring happiness is not only set aside, but, to their shame be it said, banished and entirely erased from their memory, notwithstanding the warning of St. Paul, "We have not here a lasting city, but we seek one which is to come" (Heb. xiii., 4).

12. When We seek out the causes of this forgetfulness, We are met in the first place by the fact

Laetitia Sanctae

that many allow themselves to believe that the thought of a future life goes in some way to sap the love of our country, and thus militates against the prosperity of the commonwealth. No illusion could be more foolish or hateful. Our future hope is not of a kind which so monopolizes the minds of men as to withdraw their attention from the interests of this life. Christ commands us, it is true, to seek the Kingdom of God, and in the first place, but not in such a manner as to neglect all things else. For, the use of the goods of the present life, and the righteous enjoyment which they furnish, may serve both to strengthen virtue and to reward it. The splendor and beauty of our earthly habitation, by which human society is ennobled, may mirror the splendor and beauty of our dwelling which is above. Therein we see nothing that is not worthy of the reason of man and of the wisdom of God. For the same God who is the Author of Nature is the Author of Grace, and He willed not that one should collide or conflict with the other, but that they should act in friendly alliance, so that under the leadership of both we may the more easily arrive at that immortal happiness for which we mortal men were created.

13. But men of carnal mind, who love nothing but themselves, allow their thoughts to grovel upon things of earth until they are unable to lift them to that which is higher. For, far from using the goods of time as a help towards securing those which are eternal, they lose sight altogether of the world which is to come, and sink to the lowest depths of degradation. We may doubt if God could inflict upon man a more terrible punishment than to allow him to waste his whole life in the pursuit of earthly pleasures, and in forgetfulness of the happiness which alone lasts for ever.

14. It is from this danger that they will be happily rescued, who, in the pious practice of the Rosary, are wont, by frequent and fervent prayer, to keep before their minds the glorious mysteries. These mysteries are the means by which in the soul of a Christian a most clear light is shed upon the good things, hidden to sense, but visible to faith, "which God has prepared for those who love Him." From them we learn that death is not an annihilation which ends all things, but merely a migration and passage from life to life. By them we are taught that the path to Heaven lies open to all men, and as we behold Christ ascending thither, we recall the sweet words of His promise, "I go to prepare a place for you." By them we are reminded that a time will come when "God will wipe away every tear from our eyes," and that "neither mourning, nor crying, nor sorrow, shall be any more," and that "We shall be always with the Lord," and "like to the Lord, for we shall see Him as He is," and "drink of the torrent of His delight," as "fellow-citizens of the saints," in the blessed companionship of our glorious Queen and Mother. Dwelling upon such a prospect, our hearts are kindled with desire, and we exclaim, in the words of a great saint, "How vile grows the earth when I look up to heaven!" Then, too, shall we feel the solace of the assurance "that which is at present momentary and light of our tribulation worketh for us above measure exceedingly an eternal weight of glory" (2 Cor. iv., 17).

15. Here alone we discover the true relation between time and eternity, between our life on earth and our life in heaven; and it is thus alone that are formed strong and noble characters.

Laetitiae Sanctae

When such characters can be counted in large numbers, the dignity and well-being of society are assured. All that is beautiful, good, and true will flourish in the measure of its conformity to Him who is of all beauty, goodness, and truth the first Principle and the Eternal Source.

16. These considerations will explain what We have already laid down concerning the fruitful advantages which are to be derived from the use of the Rosary, and the healing power which this devotion possesses for the evils of the age and the fatal sores of society. These advantages, as we may readily conceive, will be secured in a higher and fuller measure by those who band themselves together in the sacred Confraternity of the Rosary, and who are thus more than others united by a special and brotherly bond of devotion to the Most Holy Virgin. In this Confraternity, approved by the Roman Pontiffs, and enriched by them with indulgences and privileges, they possess their own rule and government, hold their meetings at stated times, and are provided with ample means of leading a holy life and of laboring for the good of the community. They are, are so to speak, the battalions who fight the battle of Christ, armed with His Sacred Mysteries, and under the banner and guidance of the Heavenly Queen. How faithfully her intercession is exercised in response to their prayers, processions, and solemnities is written in the whole experience of the Church not less than in the splendor of the victory of Lepanto.

17. It is, therefore, to be desired that renewed zeal should be called forth in the founding, enlarging, and directing of these confraternities, and that not only by the sons of St. Dominic, to whom by virtue of their Order a leading part in this Apostolate belongs, but by all who are charged with the care of souls, and notable in those places in which the Confraternity has not yet been canonically established. We have it especially at heart that those who are engaged in the sacred field of the missions, whether in carrying the Gospel to barbarous nations abroad, or in spreading it amongst the Christian nations at home, should look upon this work as especially their own. If they will make it the subject of their preaching, We cannot doubt that there will be large numbers of the faithful of Christ who will readily enroll themselves in the Confraternity, and who will earnestly endeavor to avail themselves of those spiritual advantages of which We have spoken, and in which consist the very meaning and motive of the Rosary. From the Confraternities, the rest of the faithful will receive the example of greater esteem and reverence for the practice of the Rosary, and they will be thus encouraged to reap from it, as We heartily desire that they may, the same abundant fruits for their souls' salvation.

18. This then is the hope, which, amid the manifold evils which beset society, brightens, consoles, and supports Us. May Mary, the Mother of God and of men, herself the authoress and teacher of the Rosary, procure for Us its happy fulfillment. It will be your part, Venerable Brethren, to provide that by your efforts Our words and Our wishes may go forth on their mission of good for the prosperity of families and the peace of peoples.

19. And as a pledge of the Divine favor, and of Our own affection, We lovingly bestow upon you, your clergy, and your people, the Apostolic Benediction.

Laetitia Sanctae

Given at St. Peter's, Rome, this 8th day of September, in the year of Our Lord 1893, and the 16th of Our Pontificate.
