

ADIUTRICEM ON THE ROSARY



ENCYCLICAL OF POPE LEO XIII, SEPTEMBER 5, 1895

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

1. The mightiest helper of the Christian people, and the most merciful, is the Virgin Mother of God. How fitting it is to accord her honors ever increasing in splendor, and call upon her aid with a confidence daily growing more ardent. The abundant blessings, infinitely varied and constantly multiplying, which flow from her all over the whole world for the common benefit of mankind, add fresh motives for invoking and honoring her.
2. For such magnanimous favors, Catholics on their part have not failed to return to her the tender devotion of grateful hearts; because, if ever there was a time when love and veneration of the Blessed Virgin were awakened to new life and inflaming every class of society, it is in these days so bitterly anti-religious. The clearest evidence of this fact lies in the sodalities which have everywhere been restored and multiplied under her patronage; in the magnificent temples erected to her august name; in the pilgrimages undertaken by throngs of devout souls to her most venerated shrines; in the congresses whose deliberations are devoted to the increase of her glory; in other things of a like nature which are praiseworthy in themselves and augur well for the future.
3. It is specially deserving of notice, and it gives Us the greatest pleasure to recall, that of all the forms of devotion to the Blessed Virgin, that most excellent method of prayer, Mary's Rosary, is establishing itself most widely in popular esteem and practice. This, We repeat, is a source of great joy to Us. If We have spent so large a share of our activities, in promoting the Rosary devotion, We can easily see with what benevolence the Queen of Heaven has come to Our aid when We prayed to her; and We express the confident conviction that she will continue to stand at Our side to lighten the burdens and the afflictions which the days to come will bring.
4. It is mainly to expand the kingdom of Christ that We look to the Rosary for the most effective help. On many occasions We have declared that the object which at the present time

engrosses Our most earnest attention, is the reconciliation to the Church of nations which have become separated from her. We recognize, at the same time, that the realization of Our hopes must be sought chiefly in prayer and supplication addressed to almighty God. This conviction We again affirmed not long ago, when We recommended that special prayers be offered for this intention to the Holy Ghost during the solemnities of Pentecost; a recommendation that was adopted everywhere with the greatest good will.

5. But in view of the importance and the difficulty of such an undertaking, and the necessity of perseverance in the practice of any virtue, it is well to recall the Apostle's apt counsel: "Be instant in prayer"¹¹ – counsel all the more to the point because an auspicious beginning of the enterprise will supply the best inducement to perseverance in prayer. Next October, therefore, if you and your people devoutly spend the whole month with Us in praying assiduously to the Virgin Mother of God through her Rosary and the other customary devotions, nothing could do more to further this project or be more pleasing to Us. We have the best reasons for entrusting Our plans and Our aspirations to her protection and the highest hopes of seeing them realized.

6. The mystery of Christ's immense love for us is revealed with dazzling brilliance in the fact that the dying Saviour bequeathed His Mother to His disciple John in the memorable testament: "Behold thy son." Now in John, as the Church has constantly taught, Christ designated the whole human race, and in the first rank are they who are joined with Him by faith. It is in this sense that St. Anselm of Canterbury says: "What dignity, O Virgin, could be more highly prized than to be the Mother of those to whom Christ deigned to be Father and Brother!"¹² With a generous heart Mary undertook and discharged the duties of her high but laborious office, the beginnings of which were consecrated in the Cenacle. With wonderful care she nurtured the first Christians by her holy example, her authoritative counsel, her sweet consolation, her fruitful prayers. She was, in very truth, the Mother of the Church, the Teacher and Queen of the Apostles, to whom, besides, she confided no small part of the divine mysteries which she kept in her heart.

7. It is impossible to measure the power and scope of her offices since the day she was taken up to that height of heavenly glory in the company of her Son, to which the dignity and luster of her merits entitle her. From her heavenly abode she began, by God's decree, to watch over the Church, to assist and befriend us as our Mother; so that she who was so intimately associated with the mystery of human salvation is just as closely associated with the distribution of the graces which for all time will flow from the Redemption.

8. The power thus put into her hands is all but unlimited. How unerringly right, then, are Christian souls when they turn to Mary for help as though impelled by an instinct of nature, confidently sharing with her their future hopes and past achievements, their sorrows and joys, commending themselves like children to the care of a bountiful mother. How rightly, too, has every nation and every liturgy without exception acclaimed her great renown, which has grown greater with the voice of each succeeding century. Among her many other titles we find her hailed as "our Lady, our Mediatrix,"¹³ "the Reparatrix of the whole world,"¹⁴ "the

Dispenser of all heavenly gifts."⁵

9. Since faith is the foundation, the source, of the gifts of God by which man is raised above the order of nature and is endowed with the dispositions requisite for life eternal, we are in justice bound to recognize the hidden influence of Mary in obtaining the gift of faith and its salutary cultivation-of Mary who brought the "author of faith"⁶ into this world and who, because of her own great faith, was called "blessed." "O Virgin most holy, none abounds in the knowledge of God except through thee; none, O Mother of God, attains salvation except through thee; none receives a gift from the throne of mercy except through thee."⁷

10. It is no exaggeration to say that it is due chiefly to her leadership and help that the wisdom and teachings of the Gospel spread so rapidly to all the nations of the world in spite of the most obstinate difficulties and most cruel persecutions, and brought everywhere in their train a new reign of justice and peace. This it was that stirred the soul of St. Cyril of Alexandria to the following prayerful address to the Blessed Virgin: "Through you the Apostles have preached salvation to the nations...through you the priceless Cross is everywhere honored and venerated; through you the demons have been put to rout and mankind has been summoned back to Heaven; through you every misguided creature held in the thrall of idols is led to recognize the truth; through you have the faithful been brought to the laver of holy Baptism and churches been founded among every people."⁸

11. Nay she has even, as this same Doctor claims, upheld and given strength to the "sceptre of the orthodox faith."⁹ It has been her unremitting concern to see to it that the Catholic Faith stands firmly lodged in the midst of the people, there to thrive in its fertile and undivided unity. Many and well known are the proofs of her solicitude, manifested from time to time even in a miraculous manner. In the times and places in which, to the Church's grief, faith languished in lethargic indifference or was tormented by the baneful scourge of heresy, our great and gracious Lady in her kindness was ever ready with her aid and comfort.

12. Under her inspiration, strong with her might, great men were raised up-illustrious for their sanctity no less than for their apostolic spirit-to beat off the attacks of wicked adversaries and to lead souls back into the virtuous ways of Christian life, firing them with a consuming love of the things of God. One such man, an army in himself, was Dominic Guzman. Putting all his trust in our Lady's Rosary, he set himself fearlessly to the accomplishment of both these tasks with happy results.

13. No one will fail to remark how much the merits of the venerable Fathers and Doctors of the Church, who spent their lives in the defense and explanation of the Catholic Faith, redound to the Virgin Mother of God. For from her, the Seat of Divine Wisdom, as they themselves gratefully tell us, a strong current of the most sublime wisdom has coursed through their writings. And they were quick to acknowledge that not by themselves but by her have iniquitous errors been overcome. Finally, princes as well as Pontiffs, the guardians and defenders of the faith-the former by waging holy wars, the latter by the solemn decrees which they have issued- have not hesitated to call upon the name of the Mother of our God,

and have found her answer powerful and propitious.

14. Hence it is that the Church and the Fathers have given expression to their joy in Mary in words whose beauty equals their truth: "Hail, voice of the Apostles forever eloquent, solid foundation of the faith, unshakable prop of the Church."¹⁰ "Hail, thou through whom we have been enrolled as citizens of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church."¹¹ "Hail, thou fountain springing forth by God's design, whose rivers flowing over in pure and unsullied waves of orthodoxy put to flight the hosts of error."¹² "Rejoice, because thou alone hast destroyed all the heresies in the world."¹³

15. The unexampled part which the Virgin most admirably played and still plays in the progress, the battles, and the triumphs of the Catholic Faith, makes it evident what God has planned for her to do. It should fill the hearts of all good people with a firm hope of obtaining those things which are now the object of our common desire. Trust Mary, implore her aid.

16. That the one self same profession of faith may unite the minds of Christian nations in peace and harmony, that the one and only bond of perfect charity may gather their hearts within its embrace—such is our prayerful hope! And may Mary, by her powerful help, bring this ardently desired gift into our possession! And remembering that her only begotten Son prayed so earnestly to His heavenly Father for the closest union among the nations whom He has called by the one Baptism to the one inheritance of salvation bought for an infinite price, will she not, for that reason, see to it that all in His marvelous light will strive as with one mind for unity? And will it not be her wish to employ her goodness and providence to console the Spouse of Christ, the Church, through her long-sustained efforts in this enterprise, as well as to bring to full perfection the boon of unity among the members of the Christian family, which is the illustrious fruit of her motherhood?

17. A token that the fulfillment of these hopes may soon be a reality is to be seen in the conviction and the confidence which warms the hearts of the devout. Mary will be the happy bond to draw together, with strong yet gentle constraint, all who love Christ, no matter where they may be, to form a nation of brothers yielding obedience to the Vicar of Christ on earth, the Roman Pontiff, their common Father.

18. Here our mind, almost of its own accord, looks back through the annals of the Church to the illustrious examples of her ancient unity, and dwells with affectionate regard on the memory of the great Council of Ephesus. The absolute unity of faith, the participation in identical worship, which in those days linked East with West, manifested itself in the Council with a strength unparalleled, and shone beyond it with a radiant beauty when, after the Fathers had emphasized the dogma that the Blessed Virgin is the Mother of God, the news of their procedure—spread abroad from the exultant populace of that most devout of cities—filled all Christendom with transports of universal joy.

19. Every motive which bolsters and increases confidence in the power of our mighty and kindhearted Virgin Mother to obtain the things we ask for, should act as a powerful incentive generating in us that fiery zeal to pray to her—a zeal we would incite in every Catholic heart.

Adiutricem

Let each one weigh for himself, moreover, how fitting is this practice and how fruitful to himself; and how acceptable and pleasing to the Blessed Virgin it is bound to be. For, possessing as they do unity of faith, Catholics thus make clear not only that they value this precious gift at its true worth, but also that they intend to hold to it with jealous tenacity. No better way is afforded of proving a fraternal feeling toward their separated brethren than to aid them by every means within their power to recover this, the greatest of all gifts.

20. Such brotherly affection, truly Christian and practiced as long as the Church can remember, has traditionally sought a special efficacy from the Mother of God, since she has been the foremost promoter of peace and unity. St. Germain of Constantinople addresses this prayer to her: "Be mindful of Christians who are thy servants; commend the prayers of all; help all to realize their hopes; strengthen the faith; keep the Church in unity."¹⁴ And to this day the Greeks beseech her in this manner: "O Virgin most pure, whose privilege it is to approach thy Son without fear of rebuff! Beseech Him, O Virgin most holy, to grant peace to the world and to breathe into the churches of Christendom one mind and one heart; and we shall all magnify thee."¹⁵

21. There is another special reason why Mary will be favorably disposed to grant our united prayers in behalf of the nations cut off from communion with the Church: namely, the prodigious things they have done for her honor in the past, especially in the East. To them is due much of the credit for propagating and increasing devotion to her. From them have come some of the best-remembered heralds and champions of her dignity, who have wielded a mighty influence by their authority or by their writings-eulogists famed for the ardor and the charm of their eloquence;"empresses well beloved of God,"¹⁶ who imitated the Virgin most pure in the example of their lives, and paid honor to her with lavish generosity; temples and basilicas built to her glory with regal splendor.

22. And We may here add a detail not foreign to Our subject and reflecting further glory upon the Mother of God. It is common knowledge that, under the changing fortunes of time, great numbers of venerable images of our Lady have been brought from the East to the West, most of them finding their way to Italy and to Rome.

23. Our forebears received them with deepest respect and venerated them with magnificent honors; and their descendants, emulating their piety, continue to cherish these images as highly sacred treasures. It is a delight for the mind to discover in this fact the approval and the favor of a mother wholly devoted to her children. For it seems to indicate that these images have been left in our midst as witness of the ages when the entire Christian family was held together by ties of absolute unity, and as so many precious pledges of our common inheritance. The very sight of them must needs invite souls, as though the Virgin herself were bidding them, to keep in devout remembrance those whom the Catholic Church calls with loving care back to the peace and the gladness which they formerly enjoyed, within her embrace.

24. And so, in Mary, God has given us the most zealous guardian of Christian unity. There

are, of course, more ways than one to win her protection by prayer, but as for Us, We think that the best and most effective way to her favor lies in the Rosary. We have elsewhere brought it to the attention of the devout Christian and not least among the advantages of the Rosary is the ready and easy means it puts in his hands to nurture his faith, and to keep him from ignorance of his religion and the danger of error.

25. The very origin of the Rosary makes that plain. When such faith is exercised by vocally repeating the Our Father and Hail Mary of the Rosary prayers, or better still in the contemplation of the mysteries, it is evident how close we are brought to Mary. For every time we devoutly say the Rosary in supplication before her, we are once more brought face to face with the marvel of our salvation; we watch the mysteries of our Redemption as though they were unfolding before our eyes; and as one follows another, Mary stands revealed at once as God's Mother and our Mother.

26. The sublimity of that double dignity, the fruits of her twofold ministry, appear in vivid light when in devout meditation we think of Mary's share in the joyful, the sorrowful, the glorious mysteries of her Son. The heart is inflamed by these reflections with a feeling of grateful love toward her and, esteeming everything beneath her as so much worthless chaff, strives with manful purpose to prove worthy of such a Mother and the gifts she bestows. Meditation on the mysteries of the Rosary, often repeated in the spirit of faith, cannot help but please her and move her, the fondest of mothers, to show mercy to her children.

27. For that reason We say that the Rosary is by far the best prayer by which to plead before her the cause of our separated brethren. To grant a favorable hearing belongs properly to her office of spiritual Mother. For Mary has not brought forth-nor could she-those who are of Christ except in the one same Faith and in the one same love; for "Can Christ be divided?"¹⁷ All must live the life of Christ in an organic unity in order to "bring forth fruit to God"¹⁸ in the one same body. Every one of the multitudes, therefore, whom the mischief of calamitous events has stolen away from that unity, must be born again to Christ of that same Mother whom God has endowed with a never failing fertility to bring forth a holy people. And this Mary, for her part, longs to do. Adorned by us with garlands of her favorite prayer, she will obtain by her entreaties help in abundance from the Spirit that quickeneth. God grant that they refuse not to comply with the burning desire of their merciful Mother but, on the contrary, give ear, like men of good will, with a proper regard for their eternal salvation, to the voice, gently persuasive, which calls to them: "My little children, of whom I am in labor again, until Christ be formed in you."¹⁹

28. Knowing what power our Lady's Rosary possesses, not a few of Our Predecessors took special care to spread the devotion throughout the countries of the East-in particular Eugene IV in the Constitution "Advesperascente" issued in 1439, and later Innocent XII and Clement XI. By their authority, privileges of wide extent were granted to the Order of Preachers in favor of this project. The hoped-for results were forthcoming, thanks to the energetic activity of the brethren of that Order, result to which many a bright record bears witness, although time and adversity have since raised great obstacles in the way of further progress. Yet even

Adiutricem

today the same zeal for the Rosary devotion which We cited at the beginning of this Letter still fills the hearts of great numbers in those lands—a fact which, We trust, will be as useful in the realization of Our hopes as it was in raising them.

29. Along with this hope, there is the joyful fact, of equal importance to the East and the West, and in keeping with the longing We have expressed: namely the plan, Venerable Brethren, which took form at the celebrated Eucharistic Congress held in Jerusalem, to build a shrine in honor of the Queen of the Most Holy Rosary at Patras in Achaia, not far from places where at one time Christianity, under her patronage, shone brilliantly. For, as We have with great pleasure learned from the committee which was organized with Our approval to advance the project and take charge of the work, most of you have already sent in contributions collected for this purpose and have promised to continue your help until the project has been completed.

30. On the strength of this it has been decided to begin work on a scale proportioned to the size of the undertaking, and We have granted permission for the laying of the first stone of the shrine at an early date with solemn ceremonies. The temple will stand as a monument of ever lasting thanksgiving erected in the name of the Christian people to their heavenly Helper and Mother. There she will be invoked unceasingly in the Greek and the Latin rites that, ever more propitious, she will continue to heap new favors upon the ancient blessings.

31. And now, Venerable Brethren, Our exhortation returns to the point from which it began. Well may all, shepherds and flocks alike, fly with fullest confidence to the protection of the great Virgin, especially next month. Let them not fail to call upon her name, with one voice beseeching her as God's Mother, publicly and in private, by praise, by prayer, by the ardor of their desire: "Show thyself our Mother." May her motherly compassion keep her whole family safe from every danger, lead them in the path of genuine prosperity, above all establish them in holy unity. She looks upon Catholics of every nation with a kindly eye. Where the bond of charity joins them together she makes them more ready, more and more determined, to uphold the honor of religion which, at the same time, brings upon the state the greatest blessings. May she look with utmost compassion upon those great and illustrious nations which are cut off from the Church and upon the noble souls who have not forgotten their Christian duty.

32. May she aspire in them most salutary desires, foster their holy aspirations, and bring them to happy completion. In the East, may that widespread devotion to her which the dissident nations profess, as well as the countless glorious acts of their ancestors in her honor, effectively aid them. In the West, may the memory of her beneficent patronage stand its dissidents in good stead; with surpassing kindness she has, through many ages, manifested her approval of, and has rewarded, the admirable devotion shown her among every class.

33. May the peoples of the East and West, and all the others wherever they may be, profit by the suppliant voice of Catholics united in prayer, and by our voice which will cry to Our last breath: *Show thyself a Mother.*

Adiutricem

Given at Rome, at St. Peter's, the fifth day of September, in the eighteenth year of Our Pontificate.

Notes:

1. Col. 4:2.
2. St. Anselm, Orat, 47.
3. St. Bernard, Serm.II in Adv.
4. St. Tharasius, Orat. in Praesentatione.
5. On Off. Graec., 8 Dec.
6. Hebr. 12:1.
7. St. Germ. Constantinop., Orat. 11, in Dortnitione B.M.V.
8. St. Cyril Alex., Homil. contra Nestor.
9. Ibid.
10. Ex hymno Graecorum.
11. St. John Damasc., in Annuntiatione Deigenitricis, n. 9.
12. St. German. Constantinop., Orat. in Praesentatione B.M.V.
13. In Officio B.M.V.
14. Orat. hist. in Dormitione Deiparae.
15. Men., 5 maii, Theotokion.
16. St. Cyril Alex., De fide, Ad Pulcheriam.
17. I Cor. 1:13.
18. Rom. 7:4.
19. Gal. 4:19.