

SCRIPTURE & *the* ROSARY

**NEW TESTAMENT MYSTERIES
OLD TESTAMENT PARALLELS**

**Lessons 1–3: *Rosarium Virginis Mariae* (On the Rosary)
the apostolic letter by Pope St. John Paul II**

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Nihil Obstat
the Very Reverend Aquinas Nichols
Censor Librorum

Imprimatur
✠ the Most Reverend Richard E. Pates
Bishop of Des Moines
August 28, 2012

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ISBN 978-0-615-65517-8

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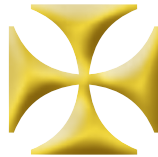
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THE ROSARY IS A SCHOOL of contemplation and silence.

At first glance, it could seem a prayer that accumulates words, therefore difficult to reconcile with the silence that is rightly recommended for meditation and contemplation. In fact, this cadent repetition of the Hail Mary does not disturb inner silence but indeed both demands and nourishes it. Similarly to what happens for the *Psalms* when one prays the Liturgy of the Hours, the silence surfaces through the words and sentences, not as emptiness, but rather as the presence of an ultimate meaning that transcends the words themselves and through them speaks to the heart.

—POPE BENEDICT XVI



FOREWORD

One of my life blessings is the ongoing companionship of Mary through her signature prayer, the Rosary. Beginning in my teenage years I have experienced this gift enabling me to be in touch with her Son, Jesus, through her intercession.

For me as a Catholic, the praying of the Rosary joins the litany recitation of the Hail Mary with opportunity for meditation on the significant events in the lives of Christ and the Virgin Mother. Jennifer McGaw Phelps and Tami Palladino have immeasurably enriched such meditation by comparing the mysteries of the Rosary with citations from the Old Testament, bringing together the events of salvation history from the Old and New Testaments.

In providing thought-provoking questions, the authors introduce rewarding meditation on the Joyful, Sorrowful, Glorious, and Luminous Mysteries of the Rosary. Moreover, the inspiration for the book is derived from the beautiful stained glass windows of St. Augustin Church here in Des Moines, thus blending two art forms.

For those who have grown to love the Rosary as I have and also for novices searching for a fruitful and readily accessible form of prayer, powerful insight into the mysteries of faith has been provided by Jennifer McGaw Phelps and Tami Palladino in *Scripture & the Rosary: New Testament Mysteries, Old Testament Parallels*.

It is a pleasure to give approval to this work. I urge all to use this tool to grow in appreciation and further discovery of abundant riches to be found in the praying the Rosary.

✠ the Most Reverend Richard E. Pates
Bishop Emeritus of the Diocese of Des Moines

CONTEMPLATING CHRIST WITH MARY

ROSARIUM VIRGINIS MARIAE: INTRODUCTION AND CHAPTER 1

In *Rosarium Virginis Mariae* (Rosary of the Virgin Mary), Pope St. John Paul II describes the Rosary as “a true doorway to the depths of the heart of Christ, ocean of joy and of light, of suffering, and of glory.” A powerful prayer, the Rosary has changed history and continues to change the lives of countless men and women who regularly turn to it in times of extreme need, joy, or sorrow.

This prayer-based Bible study begins with a look at the apostolic letter of 2002 that introduced the Luminous Mysteries of the Rosary. It examines key elements of the Creed as they relate to the Rosary, and it focuses on all 20 New Testament accounts of the Mysteries along with Old Testament passages that can be seen as parallels. The goal is to foster a deeper relationship with God through contemplation of the Mysteries of the Rosary of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

An online link to *Rosarium Virginis Mariae* can be found on the website on the supplemental study page for this lesson.

Think about the people you know who regularly pray the Rosary. In what other ways do they demonstrate their faith? How were you first introduced to the Rosary? What is your favorite Mystery of the Rosary, and why do you find it attractive? (The Mysteries can be found in the Table of Contents on page 3.) Consider what has been your most profound experience while praying the Rosary.

sac•ra•men•tals

sacred signs resembling the sacraments

The Rosary is one of the most popular **sacramentals**. Others include blessing with holy water, making pilgrimages, and praying the Stations of the Cross. Paragraph 1670 in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* teaches that, like sacraments, **sacramentals** draw their power from the Passion, death, and Resurrection of Christ. They prepare men and women to receive and cooperate with the grace of the Holy Spirit.

1 Introduction. In 2002 when Pope St. John Paul II wrote *Rosarium Virginis Mariae*, he saw three concerns contributing to what he called a crisis of the Rosary: 1) The prayers were not being taught to young people; 2) it was feared by some that the Rosary was detracting from the liturgy of the Eucharist; and 3) because of its Marian character the Rosary was unacceptable to some Christians. Consider whether these issues are prevalent in the present day.

2 A face radiant as the sun. In accounts of the Transfiguration, Jesus appears in radiant glory, and the event can be seen as an icon of Christian contemplation. Refer to the *Second Letter to the Corinthians* 3:18 to explain what Paul promises as a result of contemplating the glory of Christ. Name an example of another Rosary Mystery that shows the divinity of Jesus shining through his humanity. (The Mysteries can be found in the Table of Contents on page 3.)

3 Mary, model of contemplation. Through the Mysteries of the Rosary, the Blessed Virgin Mary contemplates the face of Jesus in different situations. With which of these scenes do you find it easiest to identify, and why? What qualities make Mary an “incomparable model” of contemplation of her Son, Jesus Christ?

ENCYCLICALS & APOSTOLIC LETTERS

A papal encyclical is a general letter from a pope about a particular topic. The titles of these encyclicals are in Latin and usually taken from the first words, as in *Rosarium Virginis Mariae*, translated as “Rosary of the Virgin Mary” (or sometimes as “On the Most Holy Rosary”). The word “encyclical” is from Latin *encyclia*, meaning “general” or “encircling.” An apostolic letter is less formal than an encyclical.

4 Mary's memories. The *Gospel According to Luke* 2:19 records that the Virgin Mary pondered “in her heart” memories of Jesus’ birth. What heartfelt memories of Jesus might present-day Christians treasure? What does pondering those memories involve?

5 The Rosary, a contemplative prayer. *Rosarium Virginis Mariae* emphasizes contemplation instead of “mechanical repetition” of the Mysteries of the Rosary. What can aid in developing “a quiet rhythm and a lingering pace” when praying the Rosary?

6 Remembering Christ with Mary. Throughout Scripture, memory is tied to worship—“Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy” in the book of *Exodus* 20:8 and “Do this in remembrance of me” in the *First Letter to the Corinthians* 11:23–24. Consider how praying the Rosary Mysteries can enhance memory and worship.

7 Learning Christ from Mary. How does the Blessed Virgin’s response at the Annunciation point toward God’s love for humanity? If necessary, refer to the *Gospel According to Luke* 1:38.

8 Being conformed to Christ with Mary. List virtues in addition to perfection that can be learned by keeping company with Jesus and Mary through praying the Rosary. How does St. Louis de Montfort define perfection in connection with conformity to Christ?

9 Praying to Christ with Mary. Refer to paragraphs 2679 and 2682 in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* to describe how the Rosary functions as a prayer to God and not to Mary.

10 Proclaiming Christ with Mary. Paragraph 2089 in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* defines heresy as “obstinate post-baptismal denial of some truth which must be believed with divine and catholic faith, or it is likewise an obstinate doubt concerning the same.” Consider how praying the Rosary fights heresies.



*The Rosary is my
favorite prayer.
A marvelous prayer!
Marvelous
in its simplicity
and its depth.*

—Pope St. John Paul II
16 October 2002



THE HEART OF THE ROSARY

At its heart, the Rosary is a contemplation of Jesus Christ. In it, Christians pray beside his Mother, the woman who knows and loves Jesus best. The Mysteries of the Rosary are Mary’s key memories of her Son’s life, with both its joys and sorrows.

Rosarium Virginis Mariae teaches: “The center of gravity in the *Hail Mary*, the hinge as it were which joins its two parts, is *the name of Jesus* It is precisely the emphasis given to the name of

Jesus and to his mystery that is the sign of a meaningful and fruitful recitation of the Rosary.”

The Rosary is a Christocentric prayer because it centers on Jesus Christ. It echoes the theme of the Blessed Virgin Mary’s Magnificat in the *Gospel According to Luke* 1:46–55, in which Mary praises God after Elizabeth’s greeting to her as the Mother of the Lord. Mary’s soul magnifies the Lord, and her spirit rejoices in God her Savior.



THE ROSARY: A COMPENDIUM OF THE GOSPEL

ROSARIUM VIRGINIS MARIAE: CHAPTER 2

The second chapter in *Rosarium Virginis Mariae* refers to the Rosary as a compendium of the *Gospel*, which means it's a collection of prayers that comprise key events in the life of Jesus. When Christians meditate on the Rosary's Mysteries, they contemplate the life, death, and Resurrection of Jesus and become immersed in the *Gospel* message—the Good News about Jesus Christ. An online link to *Rosarium Virginis Mariae* can be found on our website on the supplemental study page for this lesson.

The Rosary serves as a path of prayer that can lead Christians away from mere petitions and into a more intimate relationship with Jesus—and that in turn leads to more intimate relationships with all of the other people in their lives. Consider which parts of the *Gospel* most relate to current experiences in your life. How are those *Gospel* scenes related to the Mysteries of the Rosary? What advice would you offer to someone with little experience in praying the Rosary?

MORE ABOUT THE MYSTERY OF HUMANITY

To learn more about how Christ sheds light on humanity, links to the following Catholic Church writings can be found online:

- ***Evangelium Vitae***
(The Gospel of Life)
25 March 1995
- ***Familiaris Consortio***
(The Role of the Christian Family in the Modern World)
22 November 1981
- ***Novo Millennio Ineunte***
(Beginning of the New Millennium)
6 January 2001
- ***Redemptor Hominis***
(The Redeemer of Man)
4 March 1979
- ***Redemptoris Mater***
(Mother of the Redeemer)
25 March 1987
- ***Salvifici Doloris***
(The Christian Meaning of Human Suffering)
11 February 1984

1 A compendium of the *Gospel*. *Rosarium Virginis Mariae* encourages attentive listening and silence in prayer in order to know and understand Jesus Christ. Paragraph 144 in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* explains that hearing and listening are related to the obedience of faith, and teaches that Mary is the most perfect embodiment of obedience offered in the Scriptures. Name one or two settings that are conducive to listening to God. In what specific ways might Jesus be asking for more obedience from Christians?

2 A proposed addition to the traditional pattern. What Old Testament book serves as the pattern for the original prayers of the Rosary? What reason did Pope St. John Paul II give for proposing five new Mysteries, and what are those Mysteries? What other events in Jesus' life might be fitting for contemplation?

3 The Joyful Mysteries. What is the key event from which all five of the Joyful Mysteries radiate? List some ways that Christians can reflect this critical event in the world. Name three ways in which Jesus has brought joy into the present-day world.

4 The Mysteries of Light. *Rosarium Virginis Mariae* teaches that each of the Mysteries of Light “is a revelation of the kingdom now present in the very person of Jesus.” Consider how each of the Luminous Mysteries demonstrates the divinity of Jesus Christ.

5 In the *Gospel According to John* 1:34, John the Baptist identifies Jesus as the Son of God. How does Mary's relationship with Jesus differ from John the Baptist's relationship with Jesus? How might this influence Mary's understanding about who Jesus is? How is Mary's understanding reflected in her great maternal counsel in the *Gospel According to John* 2:5: “Do whatever he tells you.”?

6 The Sorrowful Mysteries. Meditating on the suffering of Jesus discloses the depths of God’s love for humanity. Refer to paragraph 609 in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* for teaching about why Jesus willingly underwent such intense suffering. What power is imparted to Christians as a result of Jesus’ suffering?

7 The Glorious Mysteries. How do each of the five Glorious Mysteries exhibit newness of life? How do they increase the Christian virtue of hope? *Rosarium Virginis Mariae* describes Pentecost revealing the face of the Church as a family gathered together with Mary. How can the mission of this family best be carried out?

8 Mary’s Way. *Rosarium Virginis Mariae* teaches that the Blessed Virgin possesses the secret that leads to a profound knowledge of Christ. From what is known about Mary from the Scriptures, how does she exemplify faith, silence, and attentive listening? In what ways can Christians more closely follow Mary’s example?

9 Mystery of Christ, mystery of man. *Psalms* 55:22*—“Cast your burden on the LORD, and he will sustain you”—encourages turning to God in times of need. Identify some pressing present-day problems. How do Christians go about handing burdens to Jesus?

10 Rhythm is a regular repeated pattern of movement or sound. Consider how praying the Rosary conforms human will to the will of God in order to bring human life into harmony with God.

Centered on the mystery of the redemptive Incarnation, the Rosary is a prayer with a clearly Christological orientation. Its most characteristic element, in fact, the litany-like succession of Hail Marys, becomes in itself an unceasing praise of Christ.

—Pope Paul VI
2 February 1974

duc in al•tum put out into the deep

In *Rosarium Virginis Mariae*, Pope St. John Paul II repeats Jesus’ call to his disciples—**duc in altum**, “put out into the deep” in the *Gospel According to Luke* 5:4—which is the basis of the apostolic letter, *Novo Millennio Ineunte* (Beginning of the New Millennium). Praying the Rosary allows Christians to continue to go ever deeper into the mystery of Christ, shining light on the human mystery: “Anyone who contemplates Christ through the various stages of his life cannot fail to perceive in him *the truth about man*.”



FACE TO FACE WITH THE TRUTH

When Christians pray the Rosary, they meditate on the events of Jesus’ life and accompany him on his road to Calvary. Through sharing in the Joyful Mysteries of Christ’s Incarnation, the Luminous Mysteries revealing his divinity, the Sorrowful Mysteries of his salvific suffering, and the Glorious Mysteries of new and eternal life, men and women learn the truth about their own humanity.

Longing to see God is a major biblical theme. This is evident—among other places—in *Psalms* 42:2*: “My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come and behold the face of God?” and in the *Gospel According to John* 14:8–9: “Philip said to [Jesus], ‘Lord, show us the Father, and we shall be satisfied.’ Jesus said to him, ‘Have I been with you so long, and yet you do not know me, Philip? He who has seen me has seen the Father.’”

When we look at Jesus, we see ourselves in his humanity. In his divinity we see the goal toward which each of us is called—if we allow ourselves to be transformed by the Holy Spirit.



*See the **Index of Citations** beginning on page 104 for different verse numbering in some translations of the *Psalms*.

ASSIMILATING THE MYSTERY OF CHRIST

ROSARIUM VIRGINIS MARIAE: CHAPTER 3 AND CONCLUSION

One of the primary messages of *Rosarium Virginis Mariae* can be summed up in this quote: “Anyone who assimilates the mystery of Christ—and this is clearly the goal of the Rosary—learns the secret of peace and makes it his life project.” An online link to *Rosarium Virginis Mariae* can be found on the website on the supplemental study page for this lesson.

Through the repetitive prayers of the Rosary, Christians learn Christ’s way of peace at the knees of their Mother, the Blessed Virgin Mary. Because the Rosary is a Marian prayer, it’s addressed to the Mother of the Church. When we were small children, we learned through repetition and example. As adults, we continue to develop habits of love and peace by participating in the prayer of the Christian family. When life becomes especially challenging, it can be difficult to find the words for prayer. At such times Christians can pick up their Rosaries as if holding their Mother’s hand. Mary never tires of hearing her children say “I love you.”



ART & PRAYER

In *Rosarium Virginis Mariae*, Pope St. John Paul II encourages the use of icons and visual elements to help Christians focus and to assist them in entering more deeply into the meditation of each Mystery of the Rosary.

1 A way of assimilating the mystery. Assimilation means “to come to resemble.” Consider how repetition of the Hail Mary prayer in the Rosary might serve as a method that men and women can use to come to a closer resemblance of Jesus and his Mother.

2 A valid method which can nevertheless be improved. What might be the primary difference between praying the Rosary and the repetitive chanting associated with some African, Hawaiian, Native American, Buddhist, and other world religions?

3 Announcing each mystery. Pope St. John Paul II teaches that the Mysteries of the Rosary are similar to snapshots of the life of Christ. The saint encourages praying the Rosary in a setting of prolonged recollection in order to draw the mind to a more expansive reflection on the rest of the *Gospel* message. Describe what such a setting of prolonged recollection might look like.

4 Listening to the word of God. According to *Rosarium Virginis Mariae*, what benefits accrue from proclamation of a biblical passage related to the Mystery being prayed in the Rosary?

5 Silence. Consider how listening and meditation are nourished or fed by silence. When does Pope St. John Paul II encourage silence as the Rosary is being prayed? How can a person create a silent place for regular contemplative prayer?

6 The prayers. According to Pope St. John Paul II, why is it important to include the Our Father when praying the Rosary? How is this prayer ecclesial (Church-related)? What is the “greatest miracle of history” that Christians celebrate when praying the Hail Mary? Consider how praying the Glory Be at the end of each decade of the Rosary functions as the high point of contemplation. (A diagram illustrating how to pray the Rosary is on page 112.)

7 Peace. What challenges to peace exist that might not have been present when *Rosarium Virginis Mariae* was written in 2002? The *Book of Isaiah* 9:6–7* identifies the Messiah as the Prince of Peace. How does this peace promised by the prophet differ from the peace offered by the present-day world? What might explain why the Rosary has a peaceful effect on the people who pray it?

8 The family. Just as the Liturgy of the Hours—the Prayer of the Church—is a path of contemplation for parish communities and Christian groups, so is the Rosary a complementary path recommended for families. In what ways does praying the Rosary as a family strengthen relationships? How can Catholic families be encouraged to pray the Rosary together? What are some creative ways that the Rosary can be presented to children and young people?

9 A treasure to be rediscovered. What group of Christians does Pope St. John Paul II exclude from his appeal to take up the Rosary and rediscover it in the light of the Scriptures, in harmony with the liturgy, and in the context of daily life? How can the Rosary be promoted in the present-day world?

10 What might be the most significant thing found in Pope St. John Paul II's apostolic letter about the Rosary? How can more people be helped to discover or rediscover the Rosary as an “easy yet so rich” prayer? What might help Christians to begin to pray the Rosary or to strengthen their habit of praying the Rosary?

*Although the repeated
Hail Mary
is addressed directly
to Mary, it is to Jesus
that the act of love
ultimately is directed,
with her
and through her.
The repetition
is nourished by
the desire to be
conformed ever more
completely to Christ,
the true program of
the Christian life.*

—Pope St. John Paul II
16 October 2002



EXPRESSIONS OF PRAYER

The three major expressions of prayer found in the fourth section in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* share one basic trait—composure of heart.

Vocal prayer. Paragraph 2700 in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* teaches: “Through his Word, God speaks to man. By words, mental or vocal, our prayer takes flesh.” Involving the bodily senses in prayer corresponds to a requirement inherent in human nature. Men and women are body and spirit, and they must pray with their whole beings to give all power possible to their supplication.

Meditation. Defined as a quest of the mind to understand the why and how of Christian life, meditation requires attentiveness that can be difficult to sustain. The Scriptures, particularly the *Gospels*, are especially helpful. Paragraph 2706 in the *Cate-*

chism of the Catholic Church teaches: “To meditate on what we read helps us to make it our own by confronting it with ourselves. Here, another book is opened: the book of life. To the extent that we are humble and faithful, we discover in meditation the movements that stir the heart.”

Contemplation. Paragraphs 2712–2718 in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* teach that contemplative prayer is a gift, a grace; it is the intense time in which men and women are grounded in love; it is a gaze of faith, fixed on Jesus; it is hearing the Word of God through obedience of faith; it is silence, a symbol of the world to come. Contemplative prayer is a union with the prayer of Christ insofar as it makes us participate in his mystery and manifest this mystery in our own acts of love.



*See the **Index of Scripture Citations** beginning on page 104 for different verse numbering in the New American Bible Revised Edition (NABRE).

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all Scripture is inspired by God

All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

—2 Timothy 3:16–17

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CCC 144 (pages 8, 14, 15 & 98): An explanation of the link between listening and obedience of faith.

CCC 149 (page 39): That the Church venerates the Blessed Virgin for her pure and unwavering faith.

CCC 194 (page 13): An explanation about why one of the Creeds is called the Apostles' Creed.

CCC 222–227 (page 15): Paragraphs stating the implications of having faith in the one God.

CCC 260 (page 23): The need to prepare now for the ultimate goal of the divine economy.

CCC 302 (page 13): The unexpected teaching that the world wasn't created in a state of perfection.

CCC 326 (page 15): What is meant in Scripture by the phrase "heaven and earth."

CCC 397 (page 13): A look at what's behind original sin and all subsequent sin.

CCC 404 (page 13): How the sin of Adam is transmitted as original sin to all men and women.

CCC 405 (page 25): That original sin isn't a personal fault but nevertheless instills human weakness.

CCC 457–460 (page 17): The four positive effects for humanity that result from Jesus' Incarnation.

CCC 475 (page 45): Church teaching regarding Jesus' human will and his divine will.

CCC 489 (page 27): That many women in the Old Testament prepared for the Blessed Virgin.

CCC 517 (page 41): That the mystery of redemption is at work throughout Christ's life.

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CCC 555 (page 97): A discussion of the meaning of Jesus' Transfiguration.

CCC 605 (page 17): That Christ suffered and died to bring the possibility of salvation to all humanity.

CCC 609 (page 9): About the importance of Jesus' humanity as an instrument of salvation.

CCC 613 (page 103): The two sacrificial meanings connected with the death of Jesus.

CCC 616 (page 19): Jesus' sacrifice as redemption, reparation, atonement, and satisfaction.

CCC 638 (page 65): Church teaching that Jesus' Resurrection is the crowning truth of Christianity.

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CCC 701 (page 87): A look at the dove as a fitting symbol for the sacrament of Baptism.

CCC 705 (pages 21, 35 & 97): The theological difference between image and likeness.

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CCC 734 (page 21): Forgiveness of sins as the first effect of God's love experienced by humanity.

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CCC 797 (page 77): That the Church is considered the Temple of the Holy Spirit.

CCC 811: The four characteristic marks that distinguish the Church.

CCC 817: Teaching that ruptures within the Church don't occur without human sin.

CCC 845: That Noah's ark serves as a prefiguration of the salvation available only in the Church.

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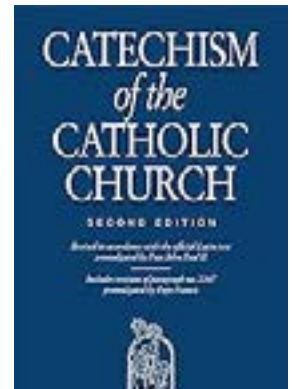
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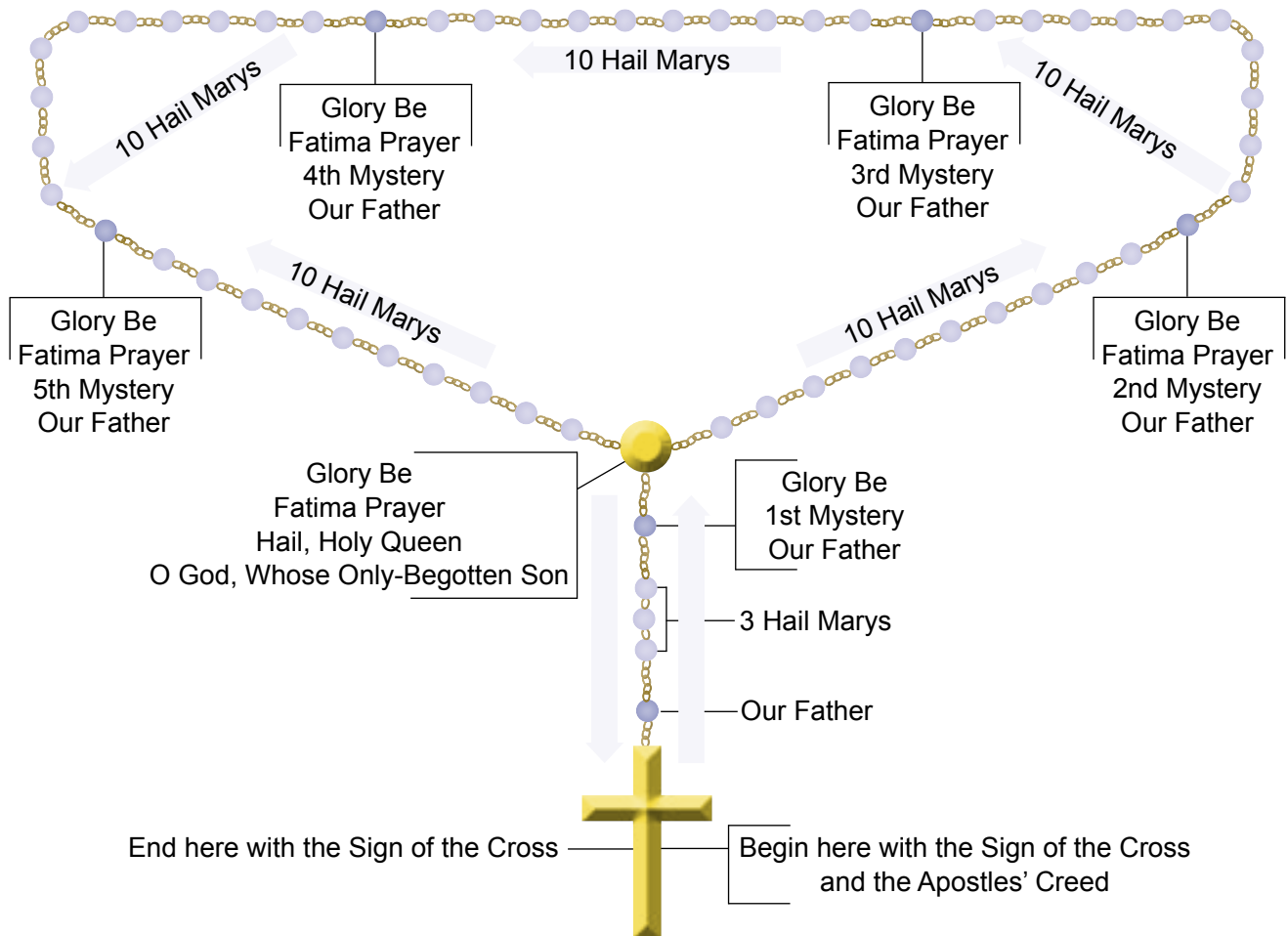
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- CCC 2682** (page 7): That the Church loves to pray in conjunction with the Blessed Virgin Mary.
- CCC 2684** (page 71): A look at the varied richness of spiritualities that have arisen within the Church.
- CCC 2700** (page 11): Church teaching regarding the proper approach to vocal prayer.
- CCC 2706** (page 11): A discussion of the spiritual benefits of Christian meditation.
- CCC 2708** (pages 21 & 59): Regarding *lectio divina* as an effective approach to prayer.
- CCC 2712–2718** (page 11): A discussion of the nature and importance of contemplative prayer.
- CCC 2733** (page 45): An explanation of *acedia* as a form of spiritual depression.
- CCC 2777**: A discussion of the boldness involved in praying to God as Father.
- CCC 2795**: Heaven as it relates to the covenant between God and humanity.
- CCC 2849**: About Jesus' ability to vanquish the tempter through prayer.
- CCC 2851**: Regarding the Church's understanding of the devil as a person, the Evil One.

HOW TO PRAY THE ROSARY



The Rosary prayers can be found on the Turning to God's Word website.

*The beads converge upon the crucifix,
which both opens and closes the unfolding sequence of prayer.
The life and prayer of believers is centered upon Christ.
Everything begins from him, everything leads toward him,
everything, through him, in the Holy Spirit, attains to the Father.*

—Pope St. John Paul II, 16 October 2002

ABOUT THE ARTWORK IN THIS BIBLE STUDY

Scenes from the Creed and the original 15 Mysteries of the Rosary are from windows by Charles J. Connick at St. Augustin Catholic Church in Des Moines, Iowa. The photographs were taken by Tom Knapp; AI-generated illustrations of the five Luminous Mysteries are by Tami Palladino.