



## History of the Rosary

*In 2008, the Master General of the Order of Preachers that we call Dominicans said:*

“I have come to see the rosary as indeed a beloved universal prayer. I believe one reason for this is because it is a tangible reality as well as a prayer. It is something almost every Catholic owns. It is given as a gift. It is a ritual whether said alone or together. It is something we can touch, hold, and even grasp at difficult moments of our life; it is like grasping the hand of Mary herself. The rosary is placed in our hands both at the “hour of our death” and afterwards when we are buried. The prayers of the rosary are summaries of our faith. Learning these prayers is like learning to talk; it is the beginning of our prayer life; and yes, it is also the end of our life of prayer “your will be done” “now and at the hour of our death.” He added, “It needs to be used in the world today as a means of bringing about peace.”

*Let us begin by looking at each of the prayers in the rosary.*

The Lord’s Prayer, spoken by Jesus Himself in Matthew 6:9-13 and Luke 11:2-4, is also known as The Our Father or Pater Noster in Latin. In Luke’s Gospel, the prayer was a result of a disciple asking the Lord to “teach us to pray.” Matthew’s version, the prayer we use today, was taught by Jesus during the Sermon on the Mount. This version contains 7 petitions worshiping God and asking for basic daily needs. We end with Amen which The Lord’s Prayer, spoken by Jesus Himself in Matthew 6:9-13 and Luke 11:2-4 means “I believe” as we accept that the Light of Christ reveals the Father’s glory and leads us into God’s Kingdom on earth and in heaven.

The Hail Mary evolved over centuries. Known as the Ave, the words of the angel Gabriel to Mary as translated from the Greek to Latin to English as “Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with you” Luke 1:28. Also known as the Angelic Salutation, Gabriel greeted Mary, wished her well, and saluted her. Now known as the Hail Mary, with her name added to the Angelic Salutation sometime later, back to the 11<sup>th</sup> century at least. The original Greek did not include calling Mary “full of grace”, a title added in the Latin translation. Eastern churches pray, “God-bearer, Virgin, rejoice. Mary, full of grace...”

The Evangelical Salutation of Elizabeth to Mary, “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb” Luke 1:42, was not added to the Angelic Salutation until the 6<sup>th</sup> century. Together they were used as the Offertory Prayer for the last Sunday of Advent mass and became known as the Hail Mary, a prayer of praise honoring Mary and used when petitioning Mary. Pope Urban IV added the name of Jesus to the prayer in 1261.

At this point, the Hail Mary was not a complete prayer because it lacked a petition. True prayers contained 4 parts: praise offered to God, repentance, petition, and thanksgiving. True prayer contains petitions, acknowledging that all good comes from God and we need God’s grace at all times.

The Black Death or Plague of the 14<sup>th</sup> century caused many to urgently petition Mary to intercede. Venerable Fulton J. Sheen said, “The Black Death, which ravaged all Europe and wiped out one-third of its population, prompted the faithful to cry out to the Mother of Our Lord to protect them at a time when the present moment and death were almost one.” After the Black Death, the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of the Hail Mary began to appear in the breviaries of religious orders. It was not until the Council of Trent in the 16<sup>th</sup> century that “Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death, Amen” was officially added.

All prayer is Christ-centered. The Hail Mary is all about bringing Christ to us. We must do as Elizabeth did: come to know and draw close to Jesus through His mother.

In 2005, Pope Benedict XVI called the Sign of the Cross “the fundamental act” of Christian prayer. “Making the Sign of the Cross... means saying a visible and public “yes” to the One who died and rose for us.” It is a prayer all by itself, a form of physical prayer. Use of the Sign of the Cross was spoken of by the early Church fathers writing that it served both as a prayer and a blessing. It was used from earliest times for the sacrament of baptism which comes from Christ and is found at the end of Matthew’s Gospel. The motions alone used to make the sign speak of God’s own actions in Christ: coming down from heaven, to become human upon earth, stretching himself out to give to others, to suffer and die, and then to pass through death and to rise up again. Early 2<sup>nd</sup> century Christians practiced the custom of tracing the Sign of the Cross on their foreheads.

According to tradition, the 12 apostles wrote the Apostles’ Creed on the day of Pentecost under the direction of the Holy Spirit, who gathered in prayer around the Blessed Virgin. Each of the Twelve contributed one statement of belief-- one of the 12 articles of the faith-- to that creed. In reality, this creed, this profession of faith, developed over time. In early Christianity, creeds, also called symbols, were short and simple statements, such as “Jesus is Lord.” Around the 5<sup>th</sup> century the “Old Roman Symbol” was used as a baptismal creed and included 3 parts, each part dealing with one person of the Trinity. Our present Apostles’ Creed developed out of this. The most ancient form of the Apostles’ Creed could date as far back as the early 3<sup>rd</sup> century. The Apostles’ Creed didn’t become a part of the Rosary until sometime in the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

A doxology is any short prayer of praise to God. The Glory Be or Gloria Patri, the Lesser Doxology, gives praise to the triune God. From “the beginning”, God’s divine presence or “glory” has permeated all of creation and will do so always and everywhere now and forever. The first part of the Gloria or Greater Doxology has been used since at least the 2<sup>nd</sup> century with later parts added around the 4<sup>th</sup> century. The Gloria Patri seems to have a similar history. The Glory Be was added to the Rosary by followers of St. Dominic.

In the 17<sup>th</sup> century the Our Father, 3 Hail Marys, and Glory Be were added to the Rosary to be offered for the intentions of the pope or to ask the Lord for an increase of the theological virtues of faith, hope, and charity.

In 1917, Mary appeared to the children of Fatima. She requested that a prayer she recited to them be said after every Glory Be when the Rosary was recited. This prayer is known as the Fatima prayer. It is not a mandatory part of the Rosary, but Mary did ask.

Customarily, the Rosary concludes with the recitation of the Salve Regina or “Hail, Holy Queen.” This is a prayer for Mary’s intercession and protection. It is one of the 4 great Marian antiphons sung to honor the Mother of God. The Marian antiphons are sung at Compline or Night Prayer before retiring at night seeking the blessings of peace throughout the night. It is meant to bring a sense of calm and reliance upon the mercy of the Lord. The Salve is a form of responsorial song that is paired with the chanting of psalms. The origin of the Salve has been attributed to a number of saints and religious of the Middle Ages. It was added to the Rosary by followers of St. Dominic. In the 16<sup>th</sup> century, striking the breast was added.

Amen is from ancient Hebrew and is one of few words unchanged through multiple translations. It occurs 20-30 times in the Old Testament and over 100 times in the New Testament often spoken by Jesus. The Hebrew ‘aman had multiple meanings: dealing with certainty and truth, faithful, confirmed, an adverb to support an action or profession of faith. Jesus did not end a statement with Amen, he started with it. He used Amen to say: this is the truth, believe this, act on this. The early Christians’ Amen at the end of prayers meant: this is the truth revealed by Christ, this is the truth because God’s power, revealed in Jesus Christ, is present here, and I believe this, in Christ and through the Spirit.

Other prayers often added to the Rosary are The Memorare, The Prayer to St. Joseph, The Prayer to St. Michael, and The Concluding or Closing Prayer.

The prayers of the Rosary are tracked on rosary beads. The roots of these beads go back to the desert where 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> century monastic mothers and fathers devoted themselves to solitude and prayer. Bags or bowls of stones, ropes with knots, or strings of beads were used to keep track of the number of prayers said. Ancient Hindu, Chinese, and Buddhists used prayer beads. Modern Catholics, Orthodox Christians, Muslims, Hindus, and Buddhists use prayer beads today.

The desert hermits prayed 150 psalms daily, a custom called the Davidic Psalter. Followers who could not read said the Lord's Prayer 150 times instead. Pater Noster, Latin for Our Father, became the customary repetitive prayer. The prayer beads were called the Paternoster beads. As early as the ninth century, particularly in Ireland, illiterate monks recited 150 Paternosters because they could not read the prayers of the Breviary, the daily Liturgy of the Hours. Sets of 50 beads became more popular and were used 3 times for the 150 prayers. Some were straight, but some were in a loop. Eastern Rite Catholics and Eastern Orthodox prayed the Jesus prayer repeatedly. The prayer, "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner," is a type of creed or profession of faith in Jesus Christ that continues to be prayed today.

In the 12<sup>th</sup> century, Cistercian monks developed a Psalter dedicated to honoring Mary using the Paternoster beads but instead praying 150 Hail Marys. Within a short period of time, 15 Our Fathers were added to break up the 150 Hail Marys into sets of 10 which became known as decades. The Carthusian monks developed a similar version with Hail Marys and antiphons. Both were known as the Marian Psalter that would be preached and meditated. This new Marian Psalter would be the basis of the Rosary as we know it.

In 1208, the Blessed Virgin Mary appeared to St. Dominic, a preaching priest who struggled to defeat the Albigensian heresy which denied that Christ was human. Mary directed St. Dominic to preach the Gospel using her Psalter. She revealed to him specific mysteries to combat the heresy and instructed St. Dominic to divide the 150 Hail Mary's into groups of ten, or decades. The Marian Psalter became an evangelical prayer that used meditation on the mysteries to change hearts. Meditation and reflection on the Gospel mysteries are an essential aspect of the importance and power of the rosary.

Although St. Dominic has been given the title of "founder of the rosary," the Marian Psalter was not commonly called the rosary until 200 years later when Mary appeared to a Franciscan monk stating that each time the Hail Mary was prayed, a rose was placed upon her head. Praying the Psalter made a crown of roses. Rosary became the name that the Marian Psalter was called.

***Pride in our ancestors and the power of the rosary:***

In the 16<sup>th</sup> century Oliver Cromwell, of the British Protestant Reformation, was a military leader sent to Ireland to rid the country of Catholics. He reported back to his superiors, "All is not well with Ireland yet. You gave us the money, you gave us the guns. But let me tell you that every house in Ireland is a house of prayer, and when I bring these fanatical Irish before the muzzles of my guns, they hold up in their hands a string of beads, and they never surrender."