

Mary, the Rosary, and My Priestly Journey

Since I was a child, the Legion of Mary has been part of my life. I grew up praying the Rosary at home and with faithful people who taught me, by their example, the beauty and simplicity of prayer. Looking back now, I realize that the seeds of my vocation were being nourished in those ordinary moments of prayer. What I received as a child has continued to accompany me as a priest.

The Rosary has walked with me through many seasons of my life. There have been moments when I have felt peaceful and grateful, and there have also been moments when I have been tired, worried, uncertain, or burdened by the responsibilities of ministry. In those moments, I often found myself returning to the Rosary. Sometimes I have prayed with great devotion; at other times, I have simply held the beads and tried to place myself in God's presence. Either way, Mary has helped me to remain close to Jesus.

For me, the Rosary is not simply about saying prayers. It is about being with Jesus. As I pray the mysteries, I return to the Gospel and walk with Him through His life, His suffering, His death, and His Resurrection. I am reminded again of who Jesus is and of who I am called to be. The Rosary brings me back to what is essential: Christ must always be at the center of my life, my vocation, and my priesthood.

I have also come to know Mary more deeply as a mother. I do not simply think of her as the Blessed Mother whom I honor; I turn to her as a son turns to his mother. I bring my joys, my concerns, my weaknesses, and my priestly responsibilities to her. I ask her to accompany me and to protect my vocation—not because she takes the place of Jesus, but because she always leads me closer to Him. Mary teaches me to trust God. She teaches me to say yes even when I do not have all the answers. Her life reminds me that faith does not mean having everything under control. It means trusting the One who calls us. I need that lesson every day.

There are times in my priesthood when I know exactly what I need to do, and there are other times when I have had to pray, listen, wait, and discern. There have been moments of joy and moments of disappointment, moments when ministry has been deeply consoling and moments when it has been difficult. Through all of this, Mary continues to teach me patience, humility, obedience, and perseverance.

The mysteries of the Rosary also remind me of the extraordinary humility of God. In Jesus Christ, God truly became man. He took flesh, entered our human history, was born into a family, lived among His people, experienced human joys and sorrows, and ultimately gave Himself for our salvation. I am particularly moved by this mystery as a priest. The God whom I proclaim became one of us. He did not remain distant from our humanity. He entered it completely. And when I contemplate the Passion, I am brought to the very heart of my priesthood. Jesus is the perfect High Priest. He does not offer the sacrifice of another; He offers Himself. On the Cross, He gives His life for us and for the forgiveness of our sins.

Every time I stand at the altar to celebrate the Eucharist, I am reminded that my priesthood is not about me. It belongs to Christ. I am simply His servant. The altar reminds me that a priest is called to give his life away in love, just as Christ gave His life for His people. This realization

keeps me humble. I know that I am a sinner. I know that I have made mistakes. I have failed at times, and there have been moments when I have needed to acknowledge my weaknesses, accept accountability, ask forgiveness, and begin again. I share this not to focus on my failures, but because I have learned that God's mercy is greater than my weakness. I need God's mercy just as much as anyone to whom I minister.

That awareness changes the way I try to pastor. When I remember how much patience God has had with me, I am called to be more patient with others. When I remember how often God has forgiven me, I am called to be more merciful. When I remember how often God has lifted me up when I have fallen, I am less willing to give up on someone who is struggling.

The Rosary helps me to remember all of this. It also helps me in my ongoing struggle against sin. I do not pray the Rosary because I believe I have already become the person God wants me to be. I pray because I am still being converted. I still need to grow. I still need to examine my life and ask the Lord to change my heart.

The mysteries continually invite me to begin again. And perhaps this is one of the greatest gifts the Rosary has given me: it has taught me that holiness is not about never falling. It is about continually returning to Christ, trusting in His mercy, and allowing His grace to transform us.

My brothers and sisters, this is why I am asking you to rediscover the Rosary with me.

Some of you learned it from your parents or grandparents. Perhaps you remember a mother, father, grandmother, grandfather, or another loved one praying it faithfully. Maybe it was once a regular part of your family life but has slowly disappeared. Maybe you have never learned how to pray for it. And perhaps some of you are carrying a burden so heavy that you do not even know what words to say.

Wherever you are, begin again—or begin for the first time. Take the beads into your hands. Pray for one decade if you cannot pray the whole Rosary. Pray with your spouse, your children, or a friend. Pray when you are worried, when someone you love is sick, when your family is struggling, or simply when you are grateful.

Bring your whole life to Jesus: your marriage, your children, your parents, your joys and disappointments, your fears, loneliness, hopes, and wounds. Bring those who have wandered from the faith, those who are sick, those who have died, our parish, our Church, and our world. Let us place all of it into the hands of Mary and, through her, into the hands of Jesus.

I would love to see the Rosary become once again a prayer that unites our homes and our parish. I would love for parents to teach their children to pray it, for grandparents to pass it on to their grandchildren, and for families to rediscover the grace of praying together. Let us make our parish a place where people know that prayer is not something reserved for a few. It belongs to all of us.

And especially for those who feel distant from the Church: know that there is a place for you among us. You do not need to have everything figured out or to be perfect. Come with your questions, your struggles, and your hopes. We can take the journey back to Christ together. Mary will not keep us for herself. **She will lead us to Jesus.**

For me, the Rosary has become a school of discipleship and a school of priesthood. It teaches me to contemplate Christ before I speak about Christ, to listen before I speak, to trust before I understand, and to receive God's mercy before I presume to offer mercy to others. What began in my childhood has become a companion to my priesthood. I am grateful for every person who taught me to pray, every family who prayed the Rosary with me, and every faithful person whose simple devotion reminded me that prayer is not something complicated. It is simply turning our hearts toward God. And now I want to walk this path with you.

As your pastor, I ask you not only to pray for me, but to **pray with me**. Let us entrust our parish, our families, our vocations, our young people, our elderly, our sickness, and those who are struggling to the Lord. Let us pray for more vocations to the priesthood and religious life, for the strengthening of marriages and families, for those who have fallen away from the faith, and for those who feel forgotten or alone.

I ask you also to pray for me as your pastor—that I may remain faithful to Christ, faithful to the Church, and faithful to you, the people God has entrusted to my pastoral care. Pray that I may remain humble in responsibility, patient when I am tested, courageous when I face difficult things, and merciful toward those who are hurting.

And I promise you that I will continue to pray for you. When I hold the Rosary in my hands, I will remember the people entrusted to me. I will remember your family, your joys, your struggles, your illnesses, your hopes, and the intentions you have shared with me. I will place you before Jesus through the hands of His Mother.

Most of all, pray that I never forget that I am first a son—a son of God, a son of the Church, and a son who needs the loving guidance of his Mother. And so, I entrust myself, and all of you, once again to Mary, Mother of the Church and Mother of priests.

Mary, keep me close to your Son. Teach me to pray as you prayed, to trust as you trusted, to serve as you served, and to say yes to God as you said yes. When I am weak, I strengthen myself. When I am discouraged, I encourage myself. When I become impatient, teach me patience. When I forget that I am a sinner, lead me back to the mercy of your Son. And when my priesthood becomes difficult, I remind myself that I do not carry the Cross alone.

Mary, Mother of priests, pray for me. Mary, Mother of the Church, pray for our parish. Bring our families closer to Jesus. Bring our young people closer to Jesus. Bring those who have wandered away back to Jesus. And lead all of us, as one parish family, always and faithfully to your Son, Jesus Christ.

Mary, Mother of the Rosary, pray for us. Mary, Mother of the Church, pray for us. Mary, Mother of priests, pray for me. And lead us always to Jesus. Amen.

Fr. Vilaire Philius
Pastor