

The Rosary: The Beginning of the Contemplative Life – The First Two Joyful Mysteries

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Welcome back. I'm Mark Hartfiel, vice president of Paradisus Dei. I'm also the creator of a video series called "Mysteries of the Rosary." The rosary is very near and dear to my heart. It's my weapon of choice for intercessory prayer as well as, John Paul II said, it's the beginning of the contemplative life.

In this reflection, we're going to jump right into the first two joyful mysteries: the Annunciation and the Visitation. We're going to take a biblical approach and go through the Annunciation and the Visitation as they occur in the Scriptures. Looking at some of the key words and phrases within these two mysteries. J.P. II urged us to rediscover the rosary in light of Scripture. That's our goal.

Opening Prayer

Let's begin in prayer. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, amen. Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil, amen. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, amen.

A Greeting Reserved For Royalty

In every single Hail Mary we have ever prayed and will ever pray, the joy of the Annunciation is present. It's an anchor in the Hail Mary. Even in the midst of the most sorrowful mysteries, we still echo the words of the Archangel Gabriel, "Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with you." Saint John Paul II said, "The whole of salvation history, the entire history of the world has led up to this greeting and we call this greeting so beautifully the Angelic Salutation." John Paul II said, "The whole of the universe is, in some way, touched by the divine favor, which the Father looks upon Mary." And profoundly humble as she is, Our Lady ponders, "What sort of greeting this may be?"

Because it's a greeting reserved for royalty, for kings and for queens. Hail, queen mother of a royal Son, the Son of God, and the Son of David, a Davidic kingdom in which there would be no end. Our Lady responds, How can it be? How can it be that an archangel from heaven uses this greeting to a young lowly virgin? And with each and every Hail Mary, we greet Mama Mary with the same Angelic Salutation once again. The sweet words of Gabriel reach her ears and her heart once again, 53 times over in every rosary. There's an explosion of joy that is radiating forth from the incarnation.

Our Lady wants to bring us her joy, the joy of Jesus Christ Himself. Jesus, God made flesh.

Full of Grace

The first joyful mystery is the Annunciation. "Hail Mary, full of grace." That's the next word I want to look at. Our Lady is full of grace. We know that grace is a free gift, undeserved, unmerited gift from God. Grace is the gift of a supernatural presence, a sharing in the divine life. When we say, "by the grace of God," what we're really saying is God's divine life within us, that should send holy chills down our bodies. And this gift is given not based on what we've done, it's pure favor. It's freely bestowed and it's never forced. And the first effect of this grace is that it sanctifies, grace renders the soul beautiful, that God, right, the Supreme Beauty, He shares His beauty with His creation.

And we often rather, I often miss the gravity of this Angelic Salutation. "Hail, full of grace," not glass-half-full, not half-empty, full of grace, "the Lord is with you." "God's divine life has filled your entire being, "His divine favor has chosen you, Mary, "therefore, blessed are you. "Blessed are you among women." So from the outset of Luke's Gospel, we find Mary, human and only human, yet completely filled with God's grace, completely filled with His divine life. And I think it's fitting, it's poetic, it's beautiful. This reality of grace within her, which is a spiritual reality. An invisible reality becomes a physical reality. It has a physical manifestation.

Overshadowed by The Holy Spirit

What is invisible becomes visible. Namely Jesus, God Himself, becomes incarnate within her womb. How is this going to happen, right? Gabriel reveals to Mary, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you "and the power of the Most High will overshadow you." That's the next word I want to look at, overshadowed. Mary is overshadowed by the Holy Spirit. John Paul II calls her the Sanctuary of the Holy Spirit. And again, we know she is not divine, we know she is not the Holy Spirit incarnate. Nonetheless, we're still called to try to enter deeply into this mystery that Mary and the Holy Spirit are so intimately united, we don't have the words to properly express their spiritual union. The church calls it a singular grace. Saint Maximilian Kolbe calls her the Spouse of the Spirit.

That Our Lady is, she's so receptive to this fullness of grace being offered to her, she's so docile to the Spirit, that whatever we see Mary doing, whatever we hear her saying, we are seeing a manifestation of the Holy Spirit at work within her, because she's immaculate, she has no sin, therefore, there's nothing hindering, there's nothing blocking or frustrating the direct actions of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit can work in and through her freely without any interference, any obstacle.

To me, this is absolutely amazing and it's beautiful and it would be worth it just to stay here and contemplate the beauty of this mystery. But we got to keep moving through the Scriptures, right? Gabriel then reveals to Mary, "Behold, your kinswoman, Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was called barren, for with God, nothing is impossible." It's as if the Angel Gabriel is trying to convince her. Remember, Mary asked the question, "How can this be?" In other words, according to nature, this is impossible. According to nature, the conception of a child is impossible. Mary's a virgin. She does not know man.

So Gabriel reminds her that our God is a God of miracles. Mary, you've seen this throughout the history of Israel, that miracles abound: a burning bush, the parting of the Red Sea, the manna in the desert, countless victories in battle, and now your own cousin has a miracle and now you, Mary, God has a miracle for you. Gabriel's last words to Our Lady, he says, "With God, nothing will be impossible." And then Gabriel goes silent. Gabriel awaits Mary's response and along with Gabriel, all of heaven, all of salvation history awaits her response. All the angels tremble in anticipation and Our Lady's response is absolutely beautiful. "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord, be it done unto me according to Thy word," and the angel departed from her.

The First Apostle, The First Evangelist

I like to imagine Our Lady falling to her knees, closing her eyes, opening up her hands to heaven and surrender to receive the gift. And with the fullness of grace and the fullness of exploding in her heart, she says, "Fiat, I am His, let it be, I surrender." This isn't just a prayer Mary offered one time, this is Our Lady's perpetual prayer and vulnerability before the Lord. This disposition of surrender and trust is precisely what allows the Holy Spirit to always work in and through her. Our Lady wishes to teach us the secret to super abundant joy, that namely, in surrender and trust, there is great joy. The deeper the surrender, the deeper the trust, the deeper the joy. And the very act of self-surrender and abandonment to God, we welcome Him, and the kingdom begins to reign in our hearts. And in this, there is great joy.

In our contemplation of the Annunciation, it's incredibly worthwhile to ponder the ways of God and ask the question, "Does God need Mary? "Does He need me? "Does He need you?" God could have done it in another way. In His infinitely creative mind, there is an infinite number of ways for Christ to have come into the world. And in His infinite wisdom, God chose Mary. We need to let that sink in. Properly speaking, God does not need Mary, yet, in His providential plan, God depends upon her yes, her consent.

This is a great mystery. In a very real, concrete, and tangible way, Mary brings Jesus into the world. Mary brings God Incarnate, Love Incarnate into the world. Mary brings the Prince of Peace into the world. She brings joy into the world. She brings salvation into the world. Our Lady is the privileged channel chosen by God Himself. It's a matter of biblical and historical fact that our God comes to us in Jesus Christ through Mary. For nine months, Our Lady became a living tabernacle, the dwelling place of God, the temple of God, far surpassing the glory and holiness of Israel's temples of old. It's amazing. Yeah, we don't just get to the privilege of contemplating this mysteries, we get to live it as well.

When you and I receive Holy Communion, we become a living tabernacle of God. Ask our leader to help you to enter into this mystery, to experience Christ's abiding presence within you. God could have chosen another way, but He desires to come into the world, today, through you. As soon as this mystery of the Annunciation comes to an end, the mystery of the Visitation begins. In the very next line in Scripture we read, "Mary arose and went with haste into the hill country to a city of Judah, and she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth." Our Lady is a woman of action. Notice, she arises and goes forth to share the good news with haste. And this word "haste" means with excessive speed, with urgent action. Immediately after Gabriel departs from Mary in the Annunciation, she arose and went to see Elizabeth. "The joy of the world is coming. He is here. He is within me." And the joy of the

Lord is expansive, it's explosive. You can't contain it within. Our Lady is the first Apostle, the first Evangelist. She's propelled forth in joy to share Jesus with her cousin. Mary has to go through what Scripture calls the hill country. And I've been blessed to have traveled to Ein Karem where Elizabeth lived. And this is an absolutely beautiful hill country. Yet, it would've been a very dangerous journey. This is not a trip a young, pregnant girl would take alone. It's roughly 100 miles rising in elevation. An uphill trek taking maybe 7 to 10 days.

Our Lady Magnifies the Lord

On this journey, the pregnant Blessed Virgin Mary was a tabernacle, a monstrance, the Word of God incarnate within her womb that she carries the Son of God from Nazareth to Ein Karem. And when our Lord and Our Lady arrive, it's an occasion for joy. Elizabeth exclaims, "For behold, when the voice of your greeting came to my ears, the babe in my womb leaped for joy." Try to imagine this scene, when Elizabeth hears Mary's greeting, immediately the supernatural begins because wherever Mary is present, the Mother of God, the Spouse of the Spirit, wherever she's present, the Holy Spirit is released. Scripture reveals that both Elizabeth and John the Baptist were filled with the Holy Spirit. The pre-born prophet has just been sanctified by the pre-born Messiah. There's this communication of grace from one unborn child to another. That Mary, full of grace, brings the sanctifying grace of Jesus Christ into our presence.

This is the key, when Jesus is present, miracles happen. Miracles of conversion, miracles of healing, miracles of reconciliation, miracles of love. John the Baptist leapt for joy in Elizabeth's womb. And we read in Luke, "Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit "and she exclaimed with a loud cry, "'Blessed are you among women "'and blessed is the fruit of your womb.'" In every Hail Mary, we pray, we pray these sacred words from sacred Scripture. And so when you pray the Hail Mary, pray with a holy confidence, with a faith that can move mountains. You're literally praying the Scriptures. You're praying these sacred words inspired by the Holy Spirit. Every Hail Mary has within it, a memory of both the Annunciation and the Visitation, and the scenes of the Visitation conclude with Mary's song of praise, we call this her Magnificat. It's the longest recorded passage of the words Our Lady spoke in all of Scripture. And Matthew's Gospel tells us that the overflow of the heart, the mouth will speak. Therefore, we can say that the Magnificat captures, for us, her heart, her joy, her humility.

Our Lady says, "My soul magnifies the Lord. "My spirit rejoices in God my Savior." I like to think of it like this, what does a magnifying glass actually do? It makes things bigger. It helps us see things more clearly, more intimately. Our Lady magnifies the Lord so that we can see Him more clearly, more intimately. And filled with the Holy Spirit, Mary's Magnificat gives us the secret, the key to the spiritual life, the divine direction and the divine pathway to the heart of the Father. She says, "He has regarded the low estate of His handmaiden, "exalted those of low degree, "He has filled the hungry with good things." That God takes the humble, the lowly, the little ones, and He raises them up. And to the proud and the mighty, those who lord over the little ones, her Magnificat tells us, "He has scattered the proud. "He has put down the mighty from their thrones, "the rich He has sent empty away."

And brothers and sisters to ascend to God, we must become smaller and smaller. John the Baptist testifies, "He must increase, I must decrease." The problem is we don't want to descend, we want to ascend. That everything in our world teaches us to grab for power, to

climb the ladder. But the stakes couldn't be any higher. This struggle, this war between pride and humility is of epic proportion. It separates angels from devils, heaven from hell. Mary models us profound humility. She teaches us so clearly the pathway back to the Father.

Humility is Truth

I'd like to give you an image, an analogy of water. Water, it never flows upward, it always descends, right? That water descends until it reaches the lowest place. And there in the lowest place, water finds its home, it races, it rushes forward with haste towards the lowest place, and there it completely fills the space. This is what Mary proclaims in her Magnificat, that the Holy Spirit descends to the lowest place and completely fills us. And so we have in Mary the most humble of humanity. Therefore, we have in Mary the one who is full of grace, completely filled with the Holy Spirit.

But if Mary is the most humble of all, how can she have the audacity to proclaim, in her Magnificat, "For behold, henceforth, all generations will call me blessed." I mean, who can say that? And sometimes we get humility a little twisted. Mary does not have a false humility. She knows precisely who she is before God, as she says, "A lowly handmaiden." "But all generations will call me blessed." Why? Because He who is mighty has done great things for me. And holy is His name. St. Thomas Aquinas had a very beautiful phrase, "humilitas est veritas," humility is truth.

Humility is knowing who you are before God. Relative to God, we are nothing. Nothing at all. Yet, God, He takes man, He takes our nothingness and He gives us His glory. That through Him, and with Him, and in Him, we go forth from dust to divinity, from nothing to everything. And we need to discover this dignity within us, not just that the Holy Spirit is present in Mary, but the Holy Spirit within you, God's sanctifying grace within you. And so with this good news, we go forth just like Our Lady with a haste. We have the good news. We should have an urgency to share it with joy and with humility. Knowing exactly who we are before God. Without Him, we can do nothing. But with Him, there is nothing we cannot do.

Closing Prayer

And so let's close in prayer. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, amen. Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou among women and blessed is the fruit of thy womb Jesus. Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death, amen. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, of the Holy Spirit, amen.