

Reflections upon the Rosary

In our journey through life we need a companion who knows the way, a sure support on which one can rely, a path that leads to our goal. The Rosary provides us all these things. It is a summary of the Gospel which can guide us from the cradle to the grave.

Once I saw a rosary made in a prison camp of the most precious material to be found there, namely bread-crumbs. The fact that a starving soldier had denied himself the bread necessary to survival in order to fashion a Rosary out of it, speaks more eloquently for the value of these holy beads than volumes of pious books can do.

In the Rosary we can see the path traced out by Jesus in the world. "I have been sent by the Father into the world and now I leave the world and return to the Father". From the Father, to the Father... that is the way. In between, Our Lord trod the many paths of this world, to and fro across the land. And we go with Him, from bead to bead, from decade to decade. Through the mysteries of His Childhood, through the stations of His sanctifying Passion, with Mary, we are permitted to follow His way to its fulfilment. His ways become our ways.

The world is full of byways, false ways and blind alleys. We need a direction. Once we take up the Rosary we are on the right track, in the tracks of Jesus who went out from the Father and has returned home to the Father. It is a sure path, that leads us to our goal. It is the path trodden by Our Lord and His Mother.

In the 15 Mysteries of the Rosary whoever prays with faith will experience Mary's helping hand. In the Gospel the reality of God becomes something tangible. In the Rosary the saving and supporting hand of the Mother of Christ reaches out to us. When all other supports fail, then it is to this hand that one can confidently entrust oneself.

The Rosary is the summary of our entire Faith. A few years ago when the Gospel was still forbidden in the Soviet Union and Christians still persecuted, I was visited in East Germany by a group of Catholics who had been unable to attend a Mass since 1943. Their longing for the Church was almost physically tangible. They asked me: What must we believe and pass on to our children in order to reach our eternal goal? They were forbidden to carry any books, so I pressed a rosary into their hands. When they asked me what this had to do with the content of our Faith, I was able to tell them simply:

On the end of the Rosary hangs the Cross. Saint Thomas Aquinas said: The Cross is the book that we can never come to the end of studying. On the Cross we pray the Creed. This is our Rule of Faith. Then come the first three Ave's with the three theological Virtues: Faith, Hope and Charity. This is our Rule of life. Finally, in a threaded sequence, in a sort of braille, there follows the entire New Testament, decipherable only by the praying hands of the believer. The Rosary contains all that I need to believe and to live by. Thereupon a man in the group, deeply moved, held up his Rosary and said: So here I hold the entire Faith of the Church in my hand.

+ Joachim Cardinal Meisner

Taken by kind permission of the author from his book:
"Sein, wie Gott uns gemeint hat - Betrachtungen zu Maria".