

Gospel: Luke 11:1-4

Jesus was praying in a certain place, and when he had finished, one of his disciples said to him, "Lord, teach us to pray just as John taught his disciples." He said to them, "When you pray, say:

Father, hallowed be your name,
your Kingdom come.
Give us each day our daily bread
and forgive us our sins
for we ourselves forgive everyone in debt to us,
and do not subject us to the final test."

Homily: Our Lady of Fatima

The Lord's prayer is found in Scripture in two places: Matthew's Gospel and Luke's Gospel. Today we hear Jesus teaching his disciples this prayer from Luke, chapter 11 in response to their request, "Lord, teach us to pray." The way I imagine that scene, a big smile breaks across Jesus's face and he says, "Guys, I thought you'd never ask." There's that old adage: When the student is ready the teacher appears. At this moment the Disciples' hearts are ready they're eager, they're yearning to learn how to pray and the Lord gives them this great prayer.

In similar fashion, Our Lady has appeared hundreds of times over the centuries, often to young visionaries. She teaches them how to pray and how to approach her Son. We should think of these Marian apparitions not in opposition to anything that Jesus would say because Mary always does the will of her Son. She comes to teach us how to pray and how to draw closer to her Son.

As most of you know, we've been celebrating the centenary of the apparitions of Our Lady to the children at Fatima. It was in 1916 that an angel, the angel of Portugal, appeared to these three young children. Then in 1917 Our Lady herself appeared on the 13th of May and then promised to continue to appear to these three children in Portugal on the 13th of each month until this final month of October. So, this Friday, October 13, we commemorate the last of the apparitions to all three of the children. There was a final apparition to Lucia later.

The children were quite ignorant. They were young shepherds and they didn't understand what was happening, and as is often the case with apparitions, they were frightened by this heavenly appearance. Mary's words to them are, "Do not be afraid. I'm not going to harm you." Lucia responded for all three and asked, "Where are you from?" The Blessed Mother of course said, "I come from heaven."

"And what do you want of me?" Lucia asked.

"I want you to return here on the 13th of each month for the next six months at this very hour. Later I shall tell you who I am and what it is that I most desire and I shall return here yet a seventh time."

“And shall I go to heaven,” Lucia asked? “Yes,” was the reply. “And Jacinta?”

“She will go to.”

“And Francisco?”

“Francisco too my dear, but he will have to first pray many rosaries.”

And then they asked about some deceased members of their family.

“Is Maria Nevis in heaven?”

“Yes, she is.”

“And Amelia?”

“She's in purgatory.”

Then our lady asked, “Will you offer yourselves to God and bear all the sufferings he sends you in atonement for all the sins that offend him and for the conversion of sinners?”

They responded: “We will. We will.”

Then Our Lady said, “Then you will have a great deal to suffer, but the grace of God will be with you and will strengthen you.”

Those were the first words that Our Lady spoke. Then, much as it has rained yesterday and all night and then this morning, on the nights of October 12th and 13th, 1917, it had continued to rain. At this point word of the apparitions had spread like wild fire throughout Portugal and 70,000 people—and perhaps you've seen some of the photographic footage of this—70,000 people, descended on the site of the apparitions, what was called the Cova. They came by foot, they came by car, they came by cart to this spot and they made their way down the gentle hillside.

As the sun reached its zenith, Our Lady, just as she had promised, appeared to the children. Of course, the 70,000 couldn't see that, only the three children could. They asked of Our Lady, “What do you want of me? And she responded, “I want a chapel built here in my honor. I want you to continue saying the Rosary every day.” This was in the midst of World War I, of course, and Our Lady promised that the war would end soon and the soldiers would soon return to their homes.

“Will you tell me your name,” Lucia asked? At this point Our Lady revealed, “I am the Lady of the Rosary.”

“I have many petitions from many people,” the children asked, “will you grant them?” Our Lady responded, “Some I will grant and others I will deny. People must amend their lives and ask pardon for their sin. They must not offend our Lord anymore for he is already too much offended.”

And then Our Lady rose up into the clouds. As she turned her palms heavenward she was raised up into the sky. The rain had stopped by that point but dark clouds still filled the sky and then suddenly as our lady ascended to the sky the sun burst through the clouds and then appeared to be a soft spinning silver disc. This is the miracle of the sun that was witnessed by 70,000 people.

Now recently here in the United States we had a solar eclipse in different sections of the United States and we were all advised to get our special solar goggles or sunglasses so that we would not go blind because if you look at the sun, even in the midst of a solar eclipse, for more than a few seconds, your eyesight will be impaired. The miracle of the sun at Fatima, witnessed by these 70,000 people, is that they saw the sun spinning and were able to stare at it for many minutes and there wasn't any reported eye damage as a result of that. It was this miracle of the sun.

After Our Lady disappeared, the children beheld St. Joseph with the child Jesus and Our Lady robed in white with a blue mantel beside her Son. St. Joseph and the child Jesus appeared to be blessing the world and then Lucia saw our Lord and Our Lady of Sorrows appear and our Lord blessed the world in the same manner that St. Joseph had done. This would be the last of the apparitions that all three of the children would witness. Our Lady revealed herself on this October 13th, 1917, 100 years ago as Our Lady of the Rosary. At virtually every apparition, Our Lady asked us to pray the Rosary and she gave many promises to those who would devoutly pray the Rosary, 15 promises.

Number 1: Whosoever shall faithfully serve me by the recitation of the Rosary shall receive signal graces.

Signal graces are those little signs of our prayers being answered. Some of us pray to St. Terese and a sign of her hearing our prayers is a rose appearing. That's a small little sign, it's called a signal grace. Our Lady promises that when we pray the Rosary there will be those signal signs.

Number 2: I promise my special protection and the greatest graces to all those who shall recite the Rosary.

Our Lady's protection and great grace.

Number 3: The Rosary shall be a powerful armor against hell, it will destroy vice, decrease sin and defeat heresies.

Satan has gotten very strong within the last century and we look at the devastation that is going on in the wars within the world, the racial hatred. And we look at the way that our climate is being affected, Our Lady says, "Pray the Rosary to be armed against evil."

Number 4: It will cause good works to flourish; it will obtain for souls the abundant mercy of God; it will withdraw the hearts of men from the love of the world and its vanities, and will lift them to the desire for Eternal things. Oh, that souls would sanctify themselves by this means!

[The promise is] that we might be lifted up from the preoccupations, our daily concerns and worries that simply weigh us down. We will be lifted up with hope and strength.

Number 5: The soul which recommends itself to me by the recitation of the Rosary shall not perish.

Our Lady's promise is that she will bring us to her Son Jesus and save us from hellfire.

Number 6: Whosoever shall recite the Rosary devoutly, applying himself to the consideration of its Sacred Mysteries, shall never be conquered by misfortune. God will not chastise him in His justice, he shall not perish by an unprovided death; if he be just he shall remain in the grace of God, and become worthy of Eternal Life.

Our Lady promising that we will receive all the grace necessary at the hour of our death. Isn't that what we pray in every Hail Mary? Pray for us now and at the hour of our death. Our Lady saying that when we faithfully recite that Rosary, that promise will be fulfilled.

Number 7: Whoever shall have a true devotion for the Rosary shall not die without the Sacraments of the Church.

Number 8: Those who are faithful to recite the Rosary shall have during their life and at their death the Light of God and the plenitude of His Graces; at the moment of death they shall participate in the Merits of the Saints in Paradise.

So several promises here that Our Lady will be there as we pray in the Rosary, "Pray for us now, and in the hour of our death." Our Lady says, "I will fulfill that promise."

Number 9: I shall deliver from purgatory those who have been devoted to the Rosary.

Number 10: The faithful children of the Rosary shall merit a high degree of Glory in Heaven.

Number 11: You shall obtain all you ask of me by recitation of the Rosary.

Now that doesn't mean that we'll get exactly what we want. It means we will get what we need when we come to Our Lady; when we come to Jesus through Mary.

Number 12: All those who propagate the Holy Rosary shall be aided by me in their necessities.

So it's not just our praying the Rosary it's our encouraging our family and our friends and others to pray the Rosary. We can be emissaries of ecumenism in helping our Protestant brothers and sisters to better understand Marian intercession, for Mary is our great friend in heaven. Just as no Protestant would blink an eye at asking a friend, "Would you pray with me? Would you pray with me? I'm going through a hard time right now. Brother and Sister, I need your prayerful support." Any Protestant would be happy to do that. Well we're just saying to our friends in heaven, "I need your support. Mother you know Jesus better than anyone else. Pray with me because I'm weak right now. I'm being burdened and being attacked by the evil one. I need your prayer support."

It's simply asking our friends in heaven, as we ask our friends on earth, to pray with us that we might be brought to Jesus.

Number 13: I have obtained from my Divine Son that all the advocates of the Rosary shall have for intercessors the entire Celestial Court during their life & at the hour of death.

St. Ignatius Loyola said, "When you pray, imagine that you're praying in the presence of the whole heavenly court. It is not just those of us who are gathered in the chapel today, it is also the unseen angels and saints that are praying with us. And Our Lady says when we pray the Rosary, I'm going to gather together all my friends and I'll be praying with you. What a great source of comfort.

Number 14: All who recite the Rosary are my Sons, and brothers of my Only Son Jesus Christ.

So we become, in a very special way, members of the Holy Family; Mary's children; Jesus as our brother.

Number 15: Devotion to my Rosary is a great sign of predestination.

Which means we're on the right path. We have been chosen by God and predestined for that holiness. These are Mary's 15 promises for those who pray the Rosary daily. When Saint Pope John Paul II added the Luminous Mysteries to the Rosary, he encouraged us to pray the Rosary not in a rote way. It's not simply getting through the mysteries, it's praying them in a contemplative way. What does that mean, "Pray them in a contemplative way?"

It means imagining that we're in the presence of Our Lady and our Lord. St. Ignatius taught us to pray with our imaginations. St. Pope John Paul II encouraged us to use our imaginations and to be creative, especially when we're praying with the children. My brother Tom has a website called the Embodied Rosary where he teaches us to pray with gestures; I find that particularly powerful. Using gestures is a way of focusing our prayer.

We want to be careful that we don't simply rattle off the mystery: Hail Mary...Hail Mary...Hail Mary...Hail Mary...Those are dead prayers. When we pray the Rosary, we want to pray it with a lively faith and really mean what we pray and pray in great hope and confidence. As Our Lady has said, coming to Jesus through Mary is a great way to be ushered into heaven.

Amen. (Amen.)