



What Makes Us Catholic?

The Holy Rosary – Why Do We Pray It?

HISTORY

The origins of the rosary are sketchy at best. The use of prayer beads and the repeated recitation of prayers to aid in meditation stem from the earliest days of the Church and has roots in pre-Christian times. Evidence exists from the Middle Ages that strings of beads were used to count Our Fathers and Hail Marys. These strings of beads became known as “Paternosters,” the Latin for “Our Father.”

Tradition holds that St. Dominic devised the rosary as we know it. Moved by a vision of our Blessed Mother, he preached the use of the rosary in his missionary work. However, the earliest accounts of his life do not mention it, the Dominican constitutions do not link him with it and contemporary portraits do not include it as a symbol to identify the saint.

WHY DO WE PRAY IT?

Praying the Rosary is a place to meet Mary. It’s one of the best ways to develop the living attitude of dependence on her to guide our prayers to her loving Son. There is something about the peaceful rhythm of the prayers that helps us develop a devout attitude of being with Mary. The goal is not so much to reflect on the words of the Hail Mary prayer itself, rather, the Hail Marys are meant to be a “background music” that helps us to enter into contemplation of the mysteries. This background music is like the gentle hand of a mother on our shoulders, standing behind us, getting us to look at Jesus, contemplate his face, and love him through his mother’s eyes, mind and heart. Praying the rosary allows Mary to shape and form us according to the image of her Son.

Want to read more about this topic?

Sources:

- “How to Pray the Rosary” prayer cards by the Knights of Columbus
- “History of the Rosary” by Fr. William Saunders
- “33 Days to Morning Glory” by Fr. Michael E. Gaitley, MIC

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