

Maronite Monks of Adoration

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Starting Afresh with the Rosary Part II

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In a previous newsletter, we looked at the Rosary's gradual formation during the second millennium, being the fruit of medieval piety under the heavenly guidance of the Holy Spirit and the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of the Church.

We can consider again the Rosary's "coming to be," but from a different aspect, a more remote aspect: the *biblical inspiration* of the Rosary. And there is more to be looked into than we have space for in this newsletter, so we will fix our gaze upon the *New Testament* inspiration of the Holy Rosary; in particular, the inspiration of the Rosary as found in two small verses of the Gospel of St. Luke, both from chapter two: verses 19 and 51. In these verses we meet the Holy Mother of God. Given our limited space, on the one hand, and the uniquely Marian character of the Rosary, on the other, it is eminently fitting to consider, of all the modes of biblical inspiration for the Rosary, this specifically *Marian* mode.

First of all, unless archeology soundly proves to the contrary, we can safely assume that Maryam of Nazareth did not own a pearl rosary with a Lourdes medal on it. That is, she herself most likely did not "pray the Rosary" as we know it. Yet in her unbroken, prayerful reflection on the mystery of the Person of her divine Son, she most perfectly exemplifies that spiritual attentiveness that would one day take form in the Holy Rosary. And following this Marian-biblical example, we too, in praying the Rosary, in our own way take up and *are taken into* Our Lady's own loving reflection upon the ultimate plan of God: the reconciliation of Man to Himself through the Word made Flesh, her Child.

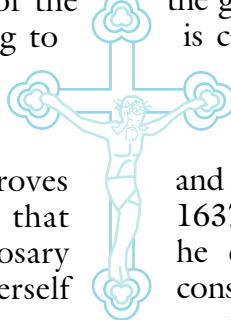


Illustration:
Maronite Monks

"But Mary kept all these things, pondering them in her heart." (Lk. 2:19)
"And His mother kept all these things in her heart." (Lk. 2:51)

See here the two great biblical texts in which the prayerful vocation of Mary is expressed. They are undoubtedly testimonies from the Mother of God herself to the first followers of her Son. As biblical historians tell us, there can be little doubt that St. Luke lived for some space of time in the company of the Mother of the Lord, and would have received these data directly from her.

We resume: she "kept" the events of Christ's life in her virginal heart, and there she "pondered" them. Truly, she was a daughter of the chosen Hebrew people, whose entire spiritual heritage was shot through with "keeping," i.e. "remembering," the great deeds of the LORD. But when a person is captivated by something, he does not merely "ponder" it in isolation from other things, but passes on to creative reflection and consideration. The eminent Belgian theologian and biblical scholar, Cornelius à Lapidé (1567-1637), has admittedly shown great perception as he describes the Virgin of Luke 2 as both considering in her heart *and comparing* events one with another. Biblical scholar Louis Fillion—almost certainly following à Lapidé—provides us with this comment: "Wonderful reflection, in which we can read the inmost heart of Mary. She compared what she saw and heard with the earlier revelations she had received, and she was in adoration of the wonders of the divine plan." So let us take up some of "these things" which Mary kept and pondered in her heart; we will see in her a singular inspiration for that prayer which has come to be known as the Holy Rosary.

1. We turn first to the account of St. Luke's Gospel in which the first of the above texts is situated: *'When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us." And they went with haste, and found Mary and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger. And when they saw it they made known the saying which had been told them concerning this child; and all who heard it filled with wonder at what the shepherds told them. But Mary kept all these things, pondering them in her heart.'* (Lk. 2:15-19)

The shepherds came in haste, adored the child of their hope, and recounted to Mary and Joseph in detail the angelic announcement of joy they had received. Cornelius à Lapidè describes: "All of these wonderful things, the Blessed Virgin peacefully compared with what she had experienced in her own life: the announcement made to her by the Archangel Gabriel, the oracles of SS. Elizabeth and Zechariah, and all the other things she had seen or come to understand within herself concerning the Christ-Child. She beheld these things within herself and, struck by their marvelous harmony one with another, she but grew in faith that of her own flesh had been born the only-begotten Son of God. She gave herself over to a delightful contemplation of these things, nourishing her spirit upon these wonders which fit together so marvelously. With a firm hope that Christ her Son would truly redeem all men, she waited upon God, who would bring His plan to its completion."

A "lesser verse," which nonetheless opens the curtain somewhat upon the contemplative wonder of the Most Holy Virgin, is verse 33 of this same chapter 2. In it, we learn that Joseph and Mary were *"filled with wonder at the things which were being said concerning him"* by Simeon the Elder and Anna the Prophetess. à Lapidè explains: "The greatness of the things Mary was seeing and hearing moved her to wonder as she pondered them." And the anonymous Greek commentator continues: "Truly, as often as the knowledge of such surpassing things came back to her memory, so often was the miracle of it all renewed, so to say, in her mind."

2. The second major Gospel verse referred to above finds its place in the account of the finding of the Child Jesus in the Temple: *"After three days [his parents] found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions; and all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers. And when they saw*

him they were filled with wonder; and his mother said to him, "Son, why have you treated us so? Behold, your father and I have been looking for you anxiously." And he said to them, "How is it that you sought me? Did you not know that I must be in my father's house?" And they did not understand the saying which he spoke to them. And he went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them; and his mother kept all these things in her heart.' (Lk.2:46-51)

She kept "these things" as so many treasures "to be pondered and more lovingly searched out" the Holy Fathers teach us, "that in the course of time she might grasp more fully the deeds and words of Christ; and that she might, in due time, unfold these things in an orderly manner to those who would gather around her Son, to be written down or passed on in some other way."

But why did the Virgin so taken by the words and actions of her Child? The illustrious bishop, Titus of Bostra (c.380), explains at least part of the reason: "Although she did not fully grasp the things she received from him, yet with her human understanding she did perceive something of the divine things before her: she listened to Jesus, not as to a child of twelve, but she received his word as the word of a man already perfect in every way." Another Father says, "she received his words, not as those of a mere child, but as the words of the Son of God!" She was profoundly affected, as no other has ever been or ever will be, by the Mystery of the Incarnation, whose closest handmaiden she was chosen to be.

We consider these explanations of the great theologians and Fathers to be well-founded; and we can not at all be surprised by these words of the Holy Father: "No one has ever devoted himself to the contemplation of the face of Christ as faithfully as Mary. The eyes of her heart already turned to Him at the Annunciation, when she conceived Him by the power of the Holy Spirit. In the months that followed she began to sense His presence and to picture His features. Thereafter Mary's gaze, ever filled with adoration and wonder, would never leave Him. . . . Mary lived with her eyes fixed on Christ, pondering His every word." (*Rosary of the Virgin Mary*, Oct. 2002: 10)

Reflecting upon the Virgin of Luke chapter 2, Cornelius à Lapidè offers this fine résumé: "See here an extraordinary example of virginal silence and modesty; surely! of heavenly prudence . . . of the firmest faith of one captivated in wonder at things present, of one awaiting things which shall come to pass. She compared the deepest humility which she

beheld before her eyes, with what she knew of the highest majesty. She compared the stable to heaven; the swaddling clothes to the words of the psalm she knew so well: “*Thou art clothed with light as with a garment*”; the manger in which He lay to the throne of God; the animals with the Cherubim”

But such a perfectly Hebrew attitude of contemplative recollection and creative consideration perdured through Mary’s whole life! “The memories of Jesus, impressed upon her heart, were always with her, leading her to reflect on the various moments of her life at her Son’s side. In a way, those memories were to be the ‘rosary’ that she recited uninterruptedly throughout her earthly life.” (RVM: 11) These words show us just how it is that the Blessed Virgin herself, in her own daily life as shown us in the text of Scripture, is a *unique inspiration of the Holy Rosary* so many have come to know and love.

The Prayerful Virgin: Model “for Us Sinners”

“In the spiritual journey of the Rosary, based on the constant contemplation—in Mary’s company—of the face

of Christ, this demanding ideal of being conformed to Him is pursued through an association which could be described in terms of friendship. We are thereby enabled to enter naturally into Christ’s life and as it were to share His deepest feelings. In this regard, Blessed Bartolo Longo has written: ‘Just as two friends frequently in each other’s company, tend to develop similar habits, so too, by holding familiar converse with Jesus and the Blessed Virgin, by meditating on the mysteries of the Rosary and by living the same life in Holy Communion, we can become, to the extent of our lowliness, similar to them and can learn from these supreme models a life of humility, poverty, hiddenness, patience and perfection.’” (RVM: 15)

“The Rosary offers the ‘secret’ which leads easily to a profound and inward knowledge of Christ. We might call it *Mary’s way*. It is the way of the example of the Virgin of Nazareth, a woman of faith, of silence, of attentive listening. By making our own the words of the Angel Gabriel and St. Elizabeth contained in the *Hail Mary*, we find ourselves constantly drawn to seek out afresh in Mary, in her arms and in her heart, the ‘blessed fruit of her womb.’” (Lk. 1:42) (RVM: 24) ✠
