

ON THE FIRST SUNDAY OF OCTOBER.

THE FESTIVAL OF THE ROSARY.

THIS festival* was instituted to implore the divine mercy in favour of the church and of all the faithful, and to thank the Almighty for the protection he has afforded them, and for the innumerable benefits he has conferred upon them, particularly for his having delivered Christendom from the arms of the Infidels by the miraculous victory of Lepanto in 1571,(1) through the patronage and intercession of the Mother of God, implored with extraordinary fervour in the devotion of the Rosary. To the same means Pope Clement XI. acknowledged the church to be indebted for the wonderful victory which prince Eugene of Savoy obtained over the Turks near Belgrade in 1716. Upon which account his holiness caused one

(1) See the life of St. Pius V. vol. v. p. 70.

* In thanksgiving for the great victory gained at Lepanto, on the 7th of October, the first Sunday of the month, in 1571, St. Pius V. instituted an annual commemoration under the title of St. Mary de Victoriâ. Gregory XIII. in 1573, changed this title into that of the Rosary, and granted an office of the same to all churches, in which there was an altar bearing the title of our Lady of the Rosary. Clement X. extended this festival to all churches subject to the Spanish monarchy. The army of the Emperor Charles VI. having defeated the Turks near Temeswar, on the feast of our Lady at Nives, in 1716, and those infidels having raised the siege of Corcyra the same year on the octave of the Assumption, Clement XII. made the office of this festival general.

As for the use of beads, the ancient anchorets and others frequently counted the number of their prayers by little stones, grains, or other such marks; as is clear from Palladius's Lausaic History, from Sozomen, &c. (See Benedict XIV. de Canoniz. par. 2, c. 10, n. 11.) Those who could neither read nor recite the Psalter by heart, supplied this by a frequent repetition of the Lord's Prayer; and the many illiterate persons performed, at all the canonical hours of prayer, regular devotions, corresponding to those of the Psalter recited by the clergy and many others. When the number of *Our Fathers* was told by studs fastened on the belts which people then wore, these prayers were reckoned by so many belts. See the council of Chalchyth in 816. (Conc. t. 7, p. 1489.) The ordinary use of the angelical salutation in this manner was not so ancient. (See Mabillon, sæc. 5, Ben. n. 127. Theophilus Raynaud, t. 7, in Dyp-ticis Marianis, p. 231.) Erimannus, in the twelfth age, mentions a lady who recited every day sixty angelical salutations. (l. de restaurat. 11. Martini Tornac. ap. Dacher. Spicileg. t. 12, p. 414.) B. Alanus de Rupe recommends the Hail Mary, and calls it an ancient devotion. See Trithemius, de Script. et Sixtus Sinens. Bibl. Sanct. v. Alanus, et Benedict XIV. de Canoniz. l. 4, par. 2, c. 10, n. 11.

of the five standards which were taken from the infidels, and which was sent him by the emperor, to be hung up in the Dominicans' church of the Rosary in Rome. At that time the infidels, with an army of two hundred thousand men, held the Christian army, as it were, besieged near Belgrade, and had a garrison of twenty thousand men in that strong city, then the bulwark of their empire. The isle of Corfu was also beleaguered by an army of forty thousand of the same infidels. The victory of the Christians was followed by the taking of Belgrade, and the deliverance of Corfu, and also the preservation of all Germany and Italy, which were next threatened.

The Rosary is a practice of devotion, in which, by fifteen *Our Fathers*, and one hundred and fifty *Hail Marys*, the faithful are taught to honour our divine Redeemer in the fifteen principal mysteries of his sacred life, and of his holy Mother. It is therefore an abridgment of the gospel, a history of the life, sufferings, and triumphant victory of Jesus Christ, and an exposition of what he did in the flesh, which he assumed for

St. Albert of Crespín, and Peter the Hermit are mentioned long before St. Dominic, to have taught those among the laity who could not read the Psalter, to say a certain number of *Our Fathers* and *Hail Marys* in lieu of each canonical hour of the Church-office; but the method of reciting fifteen decades or tens of the angelical salutation, with one *Our Father* before each decade, in honour of the principal mysteries of the Incarnation, including two peculiar to the Blessed Virgin, is ascribed to St. Dominic. The Bollandists dispute problematically whether this saint instituted, or only propagated the practice of the Rosary, in order to restore the assiduous use of prayer, and to stir up the devotion of the people to the mystery of the Incarnation, which was then impiously blasphemed in Languedoc by the Albigenses and other heretics; but that St. Dominic was the first institutor of this devotion, called the Rosary, is affirmed by several popes in a great number of bulls and briefs, and is proved by the constant tradition of that Order, and by several other convincing proofs, produced by F. Echard. (Bibl. Script. Ord. Prædic. t. 1, p. 352, t. 2, p. 271.) See also Malvenda, (Annal. Ord. Prædic.) Justinus Miecoviensis, (De Litanis B. M. Virg.) Monelia, (Diss. de Origine Rosarii. Romæ, an. 1725,) and principally Benedict XIV. (De Festo Rosarii, l. 2, c. 10; Op. t. 12, p. 523,) who nevertheless observes that the works of Luminosi of Aposa, Austin Anelli, and Galvini Bragia are certainly adulterated, though Touron lays great stress upon their testimonies, (Vie de S. Domin. c. 14,) misled by the authority of the author of a dissertation on this subject, printed at Ferrara in 1735, under the title of Vindicæ, by Alex. Machiar. It is a just remark of Spinelli, (l. de Maria Deiparâ, c. 39, n. 5,) that this repetition of one hundred and fifty angelical salutations was instituted by St. Dominic, in imitation of the hundred and fifty Psalms; on which account the Rosary has been often called the Psalter of the Blessed Virgin.

our salvation. It ought certainly to be the principal object of the devotion of every Christian always to bear in mind these holy mysteries, to return to God a perpetual homage of love, praise, and thanksgiving for them, to implore his mercy through them, to make them the subject of his assiduous meditation, and to mould his affections, regulate his life, and form his spirit by the holy impressions which they make on his soul. The Rosary(1) is a method of doing this, most easy in itself, and adapted to the slowest or meanest capacity; and, at the same time, most sublime and faithful in the exercise of all the highest acts of prayer, contemplation, and all interior virtues. These are admirably comprised in the divine prayer which our Lord himself vouchsafed to teach us, which pious persons who penetrate the spirit of each word in those holy petitions, can never be weary in repeating, but must recite every time with new fervour, and with more ardent sentiments of love and piety. To obtain mercy and all graces, no prayer certainly can be offered to God more efficacious or pleasing than that which was indited, and is put into our hearts and mouths by his divine Son, our blessed Redeemer himself. Neither can any acts of humility, compunction, love, or praise be thought of more sublime. All other good prayers are but paraphrases or expositions of this. It is more especially agreeable and honourable to God, and beneficial to us, when it is offered in honour of the most holy mysteries of our redemption, to pay the homage of our love and thanksgiving for them, and to implore God's tender mercy, love, and compassion by the same. To honour explicitly each mystery, some express it in the prayer, as adding to the name Jesus in the *Hail Mary, who was born, crucified, &c. for us*: but this is better done by representing to God in our minds, the mysteries implied in those words. Thus, in repeating *Our Father, &c.* we bear in mind, by whose decree his eternal Son was born in a stable, or sweat blood in his agony, &c.: at *Hallowed be thy name*, we add in thought, particularly for his Son's nativity, crucifixion, &c.

The Angelical Salutation is often repeated in the Rosary, because, as it contains a form of praise for the Incarnation, it best suits a devotion instituted to honour the principal parts of

(1) See the life of St. Dominic, vol. 8, p. 57.

that great mystery. Though it be addressed to the Mother of God, with an invocation of her intercession, it is chiefly a praise and thanksgiving to the Son, for the divine mercy in each part of that wonderful mystery. The Holy Ghost is the principal author of this holy prayer, which the archangel Gabriel, the ambassador of the Blessed Trinity in the most wonderful of all mysteries, began; St. Elizabeth, another organ of the Holy Ghost, continued, and the Church finished. The first and second part consist of the sacred praises which were bestowed on the Blessed Virgin by the archangel Gabriel,(1) and by St. Elizabeth inspired by the Holy Ghost.(2) The last part was added by the church, and contains a petition of her intercession, styling her Mother of God, with the general council of Ephesus against the blasphemies of Nestorius.

We add to the angel's salutation the name of this holy Virgin, this being a name of veneration and sweetness to every devout Christian. The word *Miriam* or *Mary* is expounded by St. Jerom, from different etymologies, to signify, in Hebrew, a Star of the sea, or Bitter sea, and in Chaldaic, *Lady*.(3) Both the names *Lady* and *Sea-star* admirably agree to her who is the glorious queen of heaven, and our star and patroness in the stormy sea of this world. Other Hebrew women had borne this name, as the sister of Moses; but in them it was only a shadow; in the Mother of God it expressed the sublime dignity of her sacred person. We are not to pass over as insignificant those words of the evangelist: *And the name of the virgin was Mary*.(4) For her very name is not without a mystery, and ought to be to us most amiable, sweet, and awful. "Of such virtue and excellency is this name, that the heavens exult, the earth rejoices, and the angels sound forth hymns of praise when Mary is named," says St. Bernard.(5) That devout client of Mary and holy father observes,(6) that she is truly the star which arose from Jacob, and which being placed above this wide tempestuous sea, shines forth by the merits and example of her life. "O you," goes on that devout father, "who find yourself tossed in the tempests of this world, turn

(1) Luke i. 28.

(2) Ib. i. 42

(3) S. Hieron. l. de Nomin. Hebraic. ed. Ben. t. 2, p. 62.

(4) Luke i.

(5) Hom. 2, super Missus est.

(6) Ibid.

not your eyes from the brightness of this star, if ye would not be overwhelmed by storms. If the winds of temptations rise; if you fall among the rocks of tribulations, look up at the star, call on *Mary*. If you are tossed by the waves of pride, ambition, detraction, jealousy, or envy, look up at the star, call on *Mary*. If anger, covetousness, or lust beat on the vessel of your soul, look up on *Mary*. If you begin to sink in the gulf of melancholy and despair, think on *Mary*. In dangers, in distresses, in perplexities, think on *Mary*, call on *Mary*; let her not depart from your mouth; let her not depart from your hearts, and that you may obtain the suffrage of her prayers, never depart from the example of her conversation. Whilst you follow her, you never go astray; whilst you implore her aid, you never sink in despair; when you think on her, you never wander; under her patronage, you never fall; under her protection, you need not fear; she being your guide, you are not wearied." Such are the sentiments of confidence, devotion, and respect with which the name of *Mary* ought always to inspire us. Out of veneration it has been sometimes an established custom in certain places that no women should take the name of *Mary*. When Alphonsus VI., king of Castile, was about taking a young Moor to wife, he made it a condition that she should not, at her baptism, take that name. Among the articles of marriage stipulated between Mary of Nevers and Uladislav, king of Poland, one was, that laying aside the name of *Mary*, she should be called Aloysia. From the time that Casimir I., king of Poland, upon marrying *Mary*, daughter of the duke of Russia, obliged her to change that name, it became a custom in Poland that no woman should bear the name of *Mary*:(1) though this is now changed, and on the other hand, many adopt it with humility, out of devotion to this powerful advocate and patroness.

Next to this holy name, the words of the salutation come to be considered. *Hail* is a word of salutation, congratulation, and joy. The archangel addressed it with profound reverence and awe to this incomparable and glorious virgin. It was an-

(1) See Theoph. Raynaud, in *Dypticis Marianis*, Op. t. 7, punct. 2, n. 12, and Benedict XIV. l. De Festis, Sect. De Feste nominis Mariæ, Op. t. 10, p. 519.

ciently an extraordinary thing if an angel appeared to one of the patriarchs and prophets, and then he was received with great veneration and honour, being by nature and grace exalted above them; but when the Archangel Gabriel visited Mary, he was struck at her exalted dignity and pre-eminence, and approached and saluted her with admiration and respect. He was accustomed to the lustre of the highest heavenly spirits; but was amazed and dazzled at the dignity and spiritual glory of her whom he came to salute Mother of God, whilst the attention of the whole heavenly court was with ravishment fixed upon her. With what humility ought we, worms of the earth and base sinners, to address her in the same salutation! The devout Thomas à Kempis gives of it the following paraphrase: (1) "With awe, reverence, devotion, and humble confidence do I suppliantly approach you, bearing in my mouth the salutation of the angel, humbly to offer you. I joyfully present it to you, with my head bowed out of reverence to your sacred person, and with my arms expanded through excessive affection of devotion; and I beg the same may be repeated by all the heavenly spirits for me a hundred thousand times, and much oftener; for I know not what I can bring more worthy your transcendent greatness, or more sweet to us who recite it. Let the pious lover of your holy Name listen and attend. The heavens rejoice, and all the earth ought to stand amazed, when I say, *Hail Mary*. Satan and hell tremble when I repeat, *Hail Mary*. Sorrow is banished, and a new joy fills my soul, when I say, *Hail Mary*. My languid affection is strengthened in God, and my soul is refreshed when I repeat, *Hail Mary*. So great is the sweetness of this blessed salutation, that it is not to be expressed in words, but remains deeper in the heart than can be fathomed. Wherefore I again most humbly bend my knees to you, O most holy virgin, and say, *Hail Mary, full of grace*.—O, that to satisfy my desire of honouring and saluting you with all the powers of my soul, all my members were converted into tongues and into voices of fire, that I might glorify you, O Mother of God, without ceasing! And now prostrate in your presence, invited by sincere devotion of heart, and all inflamed with veneration for your sweet name, I represent to

(1) Sol. c. 23.

you the joy of that salutation when the Archangel Gabriel, sent by God, entered your secret closet, and honoured you with a salutation unheard-of from the beginning of the world, saying, *Hail, full of grace*, our Lord is with you: which I desire to repeat, were it possible, with a mouth pure as gold, and with a burning affection; and I desire that all creatures now say with me, *Hail,*" &c.

In the like sentiments of profound respect and congratulation with the angel, we style her, *Full of grace*. Though she is descended of the royal blood of David, her illustrious pre-eminence is not derived from her birth, or any other temporal advantages; but from that prerogative in which alone true excellency consists, the grace of God, in which she surpasses all other mere creatures. To others, God deals out portions of his grace according to an inferior measure; but Mary was to be prepared to become mother of the author of grace. To her, therefore, God gave every grace and every virtue in an eminent degree of excellency and perfection. Mary "was filled with the ocean of the Holy Ghost poured upon her," says venerable Bede.(1) It was just, that the nearer she approached to the fountain of grace, the more abundantly she should be enriched by it; and, as God was pleased to make choice of her for his Mother, nothing less than a super-eminent portion of grace could suit her transcendent dignity. The church therefore applies to her that of the Canticles: *Thou art all fair, and there is no spot in thee.*(2) In those words, *Our Lord is with thee*, we repeat with the angel another eulogium, consequent of the former. God, by his immensity or omnipotence is with all creatures, because in him all things have their being. He is much more intimately with all his just, inasmuch as he dwells in them by his grace, and manifests in them the most gracious effects of his goodness and power; but the Blessed Virgin being full of grace, and most agreeable in his eyes above all other mere creatures; having also the closest union with Christ as his Mother, and burning with more than seraphic charity, she is his most beloved tabernacle, and he favours her

(1) In Matt. c. 1.

(2) Cant. iv. 7. See St. Thomas, *Expositio Salut. Angelicæ* in

with the special effects of his extraordinary presence, displaying in her his boundless munificence, power, and love.

The following praise was given to her in the same words, both by the Archangel Gabriel and St. Elizabeth, *Blessed art thou amongst women*. Mary is truly called blessed above all other women, she having been herself always preserved from the least stain of sin, and having been the happy instrument of God in converting the maledictions laid on all mankind into blessings. When Judith had delivered Bethulia from temporal destruction, Ozias, the prince of the people, said to her: *Blessed art thou, O daughter, above all women upon the face of the earth.*(1) And *The people all blessed her with one voice*, saying: *Thou art the glory of Jerusalem, thou art the joy of Israel, thou art the honour of our people.*"(2) How much more emphatically shall we from our hearts pronounce her blessed above all women, who brought forth Him who is the author of all manner of spiritual and eternal blessings to us! She most justly said of herself, in the deepest sense of gratitude to the divine goodness, *Behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed.*(3) By bestowing these praises on Mary we offer principally to God a profound homage of praise for the great mystery of the Incarnation. The pious woman mentioned in the gospel, who, upon hearing the divine doctrine of our Redeemer, cried out with admiration, *Blessed is the womb that bore thee, and blessed are the breasts which gave thee suck,*(4) meant chiefly to commend the Son. In like manner the praises we address to Mary in the angelical salutation are reflected in the first place on her divine Son, from whom, and by whom alone she is entitled to them; for it is for his gifts and graces, and for his sake, that we praise and honour her. On which account this prayer is chiefly an excellent doxology for the great mystery of the Incarnation. Whence, having styled the Mother blessed above all women, we pronounce the Son infinitely more blessed, saying, *And blessed is the fruit of thy womb*. He is the source and author of all her graces and blessings; she derives them only from him; and to him we refer whatever we admire and praise in her. There-

(1) Judith xiii. 23.

(3) Luke i. 48

(2) Ib. xv. 10.

(4) Luke xi. 27.

fore, in an infinitely higher sense of praise, love, and honour, and in a manner infinitely superior to her, we call him blessed for ever by God, angels, and men; by God, as his well-beloved Son, and in his divinity, co-equal and co-eternal with the Father; by the angels, as the author of their being, grace, and glory, inasmuch as he is their God; and in his Incarnation, as the repairer of their losses by men, as their Redeemer. We, considering attentively the infinite evils from which he has delivered us, the pains and labours which he sustained for us, the ransom which he has paid with his precious blood to redeem us, the everlasting and infinite advantages which he has purchased for us, with the boundless felicity of heaven, the excess of his goodness, love, and mercy, and his infinite majesty and perfections; we, I say, bearing all this in mind, ought, in a spirit of love and praise, ever to call her Blessed through whom we receive this so great a Saviour; but him infinitely more blessed both for his own adorable sanctity, and for all the graces of which he is the source to us.

The most holy and glorious name of Jesus which is added to this doxology, is a name of unspeakable sweetness and grace; a name most comfortable and delightful to every loving soul, terrible to the wicked spirits, and adorable with respect to all creatures; so that at its very sound every knee, in heaven, earth, and hell shall bend, and every creature be filled with religious awe, and profound veneration and respect. The last part of this prayer is a supplication. The prayer of the blessed spirits in heaven consists chiefly in acts of adoration, love, praise, thanksgiving, and the like. We, in this vale of tears and miseries, join sighs even to our hymns of praise and adoration. So extreme are our spiritual miseries and wants that we never present ourselves in prayer before Almighty God, but we make it one part of our addresses to implore his mercy and graces with the greatest earnestness possible, and the deepest sense of our wants. It is in this sincere feeling of our sinful necessities, and the most humble and earnest cry of our heart that the fervour and very soul of our prayer consists. God knows, and with infinite tenderness compassionates the depth of our wounds, and the whole extent of our numberless and boundless spiritual miseries. But our insensibility under them

provokes his just indignation. He will have us sincerely to feel and to acknowledge the weight of our evils; our extreme spiritual poverty and total insufficiency, the baseness of our guilt, the rigour of his judgments, the frightful torments of an unhappy eternity which we deserve for our sins, and the dangers from ourselves and the invisible enemies with which we are surrounded. He requires that we confess the abyss of miseries in which we are sunk, and out of it raise our voice to him with tears and groans, owning our total dependance on his mercy and infinite goodness. If a beggar ask an alms of us, his wants make him eloquent; he sums them all up to move us to compassion; sickness, pains, hunger, anguish of mind, distress of a whole family, and whatever else can set off his miseries in the most moving manner. In like manner when we pray, we must feel and lay open before our heavenly Father our deep wounds, our universal indigence, inability, and weakness, and, with all possible earnestness, implore his merciful succour. We must beg that God himself will be pleased to form in our hearts such continued sincere desires, that he inspire us with so deep a sense of all our miseries, and teach us to display them before him in such a manner as will most powerfully move him to pity and relieve us. We have recourse to the angels and saints to beg their joint intercession for us. For this we address ourselves in the first place to the Blessed Virgin, as the refuge of the afflicted and sinners. In this prayer we repeat her holy name to excite ourselves to reverence and devotion. By calling her Mother of God, we express her most exalted dignity, and stir up our confidence in her patronage; for what cannot she obtain for us of a God, who was pleased himself to be born of her! We at the same time remember, that she is also spiritually *our* mother; for, by adoption, we are brothers and co-heirs of Christ. She is to us a mother of more than paternal tenderness; incomparably more sensible of our miseries, and more ready to procure us all mercy and assistance than carnal mothers can be, as in charity she surpasses all other mere creatures. But to call her Mother, and to deserve her compassion, we must sincerely renounce and put an end to our disorders, by which we have too often trampled upon the blood of her Son.

These words, *Holy Mary, Mother of God*, are a kind of preface to our petition, in which we humbly entreat her to pray for us. We do not ask her to *give* us grace; we know this to be the most precious gift of God, who alone can bestow it on us. We only desire her to *ask* it for us of her Son, and to join her powerful intercession with our unworthy prayers. We mention our quality of sinners, to humble ourselves in the deepest sentiments of compunction, and to excite her compassion by laying our extreme miseries and necessities before her, which this epithet of sinners expresses beyond what any created understanding can fathom. Mary, from her fuller and more distinct knowledge of the evil of sin, and the spiritual miseries of a soul infected with it, forms a much more distinct and perfect idea of the abyss of our evils than we can possibly do, and in proportion to them, and to the measure of her charity, is moved to compassionate us under them. But we must mention our sins with sincere sentiments of contrition and regret; for the will which still adheres to sin provokes indignation, not compassion, in God, and in all the saints who love sovereignly his sanctity and justice. How dare impenitent sinners present themselves before God with their hands yet stained, as it were, with the adorable blood of his Son, which they have spilt, and which they still continue, in the language of St. Paul, to trample upon? We must, therefore, mention our guilt with the most profound sentiments of confusion and compunction. In proportion to their sincerity and fervour we shall excite the pity and mercy of God, and the tender compassion of his Mother. Mary, having borne in her womb the Author of grace and mercy, has put on the bowels of the most tender compassion for sinners. By this mention of our quality of sinners, we sufficiently express what it is that we beg of God; namely, the grace of a perfect repentance, the remission of all our sins, and strength to resist all temptations to sin. We ask also for all graces and virtues, especially that of divine charity. All this is sufficiently understood by the very nature of our request, without being expressed; for what else ought we to ask of God, through the intercession of her who is the mother of the Author of grace? We beg this abundance of all graces, both at present, because we stand in need of it every moment of our lives; and for the hour of

our death, that great and most dreadful moment, which must be a principal object in all our prayers. The whole life of a Christian ought to be nothing else but a constant preparation for that tremendous hour, which will decide our eternal lot, and in which the devil will assail us with the utmost effort of his fury; and our own weakness in mind and body, the lively remembrance of our past sins, and other alarming circumstances and difficulties, will make us stand in need of the strongest assistance of divine grace, and the special patronage of her who is the protectress of all in distress, particularly of her devout clients in their last and most dangerous conflict. *Amen*, or *So be it*, expresses an earnest repetition of our supplication and praise. As the heart, in the ardour of its affections, easily goes far beyond what words can express, so neither is it confined by them in the extent and variety of its acts. In one word it often comprises the most perfect acts of faith, hope, charity, adoration, praise, and other such virtues. Thus, by *Amen*, it with ardour repeats all the petitions and acts of the Lord's Prayer and Angelical Salutation. Some devout persons have made this short but energetical and comprehensive word one of their most frequent aspirations to God, during the course of the day; meaning by it to assent, confirm, and repeat, with all possible ardour and humility, all the hymns and most perfect acts of profound adoration, humility, love, praise, zeal, thanksgiving, oblation of themselves, total resignation, confidence in God, and all other virtues, which all the heavenly spirits offer to God, with all their power and strength, and with the utmost purity of affection, without intermission, to eternity. In these acts we join by the word *Amen*, and desire to repeat them all with infinite fervour, were it possible, for ever; and with them we join the most sincere sentiments and acts of compunction, and a particular humility, condemning ourselves as infinitely unworthy to join the heavenly choirs, or faithful servants of God, in offering him a tribute of praise; most unworthy even to pronounce his most holy name, or mention any of his adorable perfections, which defiled lips and faint divided affections rather profane and depreciate than praise and honour.