

New Mysteries of the Rosary

In October of this year our Holy Father declared the Year of the Rosary to be celebrated from October 2002 to October 2003. In the encyclical *Rosarium Virginis Mariae* he also announced the addition of 5 new mysteries to be meditated on during the praying of the Rosary. These mysteries ~ The Mysteries of Light ~ which the pope describes as “particularly significant (moments) in (Christ’s) public ministry” all reveal the Kingdom now present in the very person of Jesus. The Pope offers the following meditations on these mysteries:

The Baptism of Jesus in the Jordan



Here, as Christ descends into the waters, the innocent one who became “sin” for our sake, the heavens open wide and the voice of the Father declares him the beloved Son, while the Spirit descends on him to invest him with the mission he is to carry out.



The Miracle at the Wedding in Cana

At Cana Christ changes water into wine and opens the hearts of the disciples to faith, thanks to the intervention of Mary, the first among believers.

The Proclamation of the Kingdom of God

Jesus preaches and proclaims the coming of the Kingdom of God, calls to conversion and forgives the sins of all who draw near to him in humble trust. He inaugurates that mystery of mercy, which he continues to exercise until the end of the world, particularly through the Sacrament of Reconciliation, which he has entrusted to his Church.



The Transfiguration

On Mount Tabor the glory of the Godhead shines forth from the face of Christ. The Father commands the astonished Apostles to “listen to him” and to prepare to experience with him the agony of the Passion, so as to come with him to the joy of the Resurrection and a life transfigured by the Holy Spirit.



The Institution of the Eucharist

Christ offers his body and blood as food under the signs of bread and wine, and testifies “to the end” his love for humanity, for whose salvation he will offer himself in sacrifice.

In these mysteries, apart from the miracle at Cana, *the presence of Mary remains in the background.* The Gospels make only the briefest reference to her occasional presence at one moment or other during the preaching of Jesus, and they give no indication that she was present at the Last Supper and the institution of the Eucharist. Yet the role she assumed at Cana in some way accompanies Christ throughout his ministry. The revelation made directly by the Father at the Baptism in the Jordan and echoed by John the Baptist is placed upon Mary’s lips at Cana, and it becomes the great maternal counsel which Mary addresses to the Church of every age: “Do whatever he tells you”. This counsel is a fitting introduction to the word and signs of Christ’s public ministry and it forms the Marian foundation of the “mysteries of light”.

Popular Devotions

In the Spring, the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments released a **Directory on Popular Piety and the Liturgy: Principles and Guidelines.** The whole document in English can be found at:

http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/ccdds/documents.rc_con_ccdds_doc_20020513_versdirettorio_en.html.

For a number of years after Vatican II it seemed that celebrating the Eucharist was our only liturgical expression. Much of the devotional life of the Church disappeared. Perhaps this was necessary to effect a renewal of the celebration of the Eucharist with a focus of “full, conscious, and active participation”. However, in recent years an awareness has arisen that celebrating the Eucharist without preparation for the celebration through a life of prayer, meditation and private devotion will not accomplish the true purpose of the Eucharist ~ the transformation of the assembly. As Godfrey Diekman was fond of saying: “What difference does it make if the bread and wine are changed into the Body and Blood of Christ and we are not?”

Even as this Directory encourages a return to popular devotions:

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“...popular piety can neither be ignored nor treated with indifference or disrespect because of its richness and because in itself it represents a religious attitude in relation to God. However, it has to be continually evangelized, so that the faith which it expresses may become more mature and authentic. The pious exercises of the Christian people and other forms of devotion can be accepted and recommended provided that they do not become substitutes for the Liturgy or integrated into the Liturgical celebrations. An authentic pastoral promotion of the Liturgy will know how to build on the riches of popular piety, purify them and direct them towards the Liturgy as an offering of the people.”

It also sets out some principles to guide the Church lest we fall into the practice of the past in which devotions, not liturgy, became the focus of the prayer life of the people.

Some Principles

1. *The Primacy of the Liturgy*

“Every liturgical celebration, because it is an action of Christ the Priest and of his Body, which is the Church, it is a sacred action surpassing all others. No other action of the Church can equal its efficacy, by the same title or to the same degree. Priests and faithful are to give preeminence to liturgical prayer and to the liturgical year over any other form of devotion.”

2. *Evaluation and Renewal*

The Gospel is the measure against which all expressions of Christian piety ~ both old and new ~ must be measured. The task of evaluating devotional exercises and practices, and of purifying them when necessary, must be conducted against this criterion so as to ensure their proper relationship with the Christian mystery.

Popular piety should be permeated by:

- a **biblical spirit**, since it is impossible to imagine a Christian prayer without direct or indirect reference to Sacred Scripture
- a **liturgical spirit** if it is to dispose properly for or echo the mysteries celebrated in the liturgical actions
- an **ecumenical spirit**, in consideration of the sensibilities and traditions of other Christians without, however, being restricted by inappropriate inhibitions
- an **anthropological spirit** which both conserves symbols and expressions of importance or significance for a given nation while eschewing senseless archaisms

3. *Distinct from and in harmony with the Liturgy*

The formulae proper to pious exercises should not be commingled with the liturgical actions. Acts of devotion and piety are external to the celebration of the Holy Eucharist and of the other sacraments. Precedence must always be given to Sunday, solemnities, and to the liturgical seasons and days.

Responsibilities and Competencies

Manifestations of popular piety are subject to the jurisdiction of the local Ordinary. It is for him to regulate such manifestations, to encourage them as a means of assisting the faithful in living the Christian life, and to purify and evangelize them where necessary. He is also to ensure that they do not substitute for the Liturgy nor become part of the liturgical celebrations. The local ordinary also approves the prayers and formulae associated with acts of public piety and devotional practices. Hence, the faithful ~ both clerics and laity ~ either as groups or individuals, may not publicly promote prayers, formulae or private initiatives without the permission of the ordinary.