Having a faith conversation with old and new friends is as easy as setting the table.

FAITH FEEDS GUEST GUIDE
THE ROSARY
CONTENTS

Introduction to FAITH FEEDS 3

FAQ 4

• Hail Mary by Billy Critchley-Menor, S.J. 5
  Conversation Starters 7

• How the Rosary Teaches Us to Pray
  by Thomas H. Groome 8
  Conversation Starters 10
  How to Pray the Rosary 11

• Gathering Prayer 12
The FAITH FEEDS program is designed for individuals in Catholic parishes who are hungry for opportunities to talk about their faith with others who share it. Participants gather over coffee or a potluck lunch or dinner, and a host parishioner facilitates conversation using the C21 Center’s bi-annual magazine, C21 Resources.

The FAITH FEEDS GUIDE offers easy, step-by-step instructions for planning, as well as materials to guide the conversation. It’s as simple as a parishioner deciding to host the gathering at the church hall and spreading the word.

This FAITH FEEDS themed conversation will be on the rosary. Selected articles have been taken from material published by the Church in the 21st Century Center.
"There is no problem, I tell you, no matter how difficult it is, that we cannot solve by the prayer of the Holy Rosary."
—Sister Lucia, of the seers of Fatima

Here are two articles to guide your FAITH FEEDS conversation. In addition to the original article, you will find a relevant quotation, summary, and suggested questions for discussion. We offer these as tools for your use, but feel free to go where the Holy Spirit leads.

This guide's theme is: The Rosary
The first time I met with my spiritual director after entering the Jesuits, he asked me how I pray. One of the things I mentioned was regularly rattling through Hail Marys. I told him that I tend to pray them throughout the day – on the bus, on walks, during dinner – whenever. I also tend to pray them during set times of prayer, and sometimes with the Rosary.

I remember being embarrassed by that response. I felt like I should have been engaged in “deeper” forms of prayer – meditation, contemplation, or imaginative prayer with Scripture. But I had little experience with those. I felt that my prayer was in some way inadequate.

I prayed Hail Marys because I didn’t know how else to pray. I’d had other experiences of prayer, but when it came down to it, rattling through some memorized words was the easiest way for me to pray when I knew I needed to or when I felt a desire. The Hail Mary and the Rosary were like training wheels, and I thought eventually they’d come off.

They haven’t yet.

I still say Hail Marys all the time. Most often, I say them in times of stress or anxiety. When I am walking into a room full of people, walking into a classroom the first day of the semester, or waiting to get feedback on a paper I worked hard to finish. I pray them when I finish conversations with people on the street, every morning when I look at the cover of the New York Times, or whenever I hear news of someone’s death.

It’s not uncommon for me to recognize myself going through Hail Marys and wondering, “How long have I been doing this for?” My Hail Marys can be subconscious. Praying them seems to be my first reaction to most things. My Hail Marys and my Rosaries are frequently unexciting, unmoving, imageless,
and emotionless.

Yet, there is a simple gratification in the touch of Rosary beads and the sound of ancient prayers. They don’t bring me into an immediate conscious connection with God or His Blessed Mother. They often fail to satisfy a never-ending desire to hear God speak or to feel His touch. Sometimes, it is hard to even sense His presence in the moment of my rote praying.

Nonetheless, I find that it continues to be a most valuable use of time and a sincere act of devotion. The Rosary is helping me learn that the fruit of prayer is quite often experienced outside of itself. Sometimes in completely unrecognizable ways.

I met Dorothy Day’s granddaughter once. She left the Catholic Church when she was younger and eventually came back. When I asked her why, she told me that some old priest told her to pray the Rosary every day. She took his advice, and there you have it.

St. Therese of Lisieux said that the Rosary is a long chain that links heaven and earth. That feels true for me. Hail Marys and the Rosary are indeed like training wheels, but ones that I will need forever. They train my mind, my body, my eyes, and my heart to live as though I am linked to heaven. Linked by things that may seem meaningless – touching beads and uttering words – but that do have a supernatural effect on my life.

It is often the moments outside of my Hail Marys when I can most feel their impact. I notice a deeper calm, less anxiety, and greater peace. I can more easily see God at work because my Hail Marys so frequently remind me of His existence.

And so, I continue rattle to Mary my needs, wants, and fears. In turn, she helps me remember the long vision, the deeper desire, and the Fruit of her womb. Through my rattling to Mary, I’m reminded that there is much more to life than the present.

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“Our prayers may be awkward. Our attempts may be feeble. But since the power of prayer is in the one who hears it and not in the one who says it, our prayers do make a difference.”
—Max Lucado

Summary
In this reflection, Billy Critchley-Menor, S.J., shares about his love for the Hail Mary, which has become his “go-to” prayer. Far from being a shallow or unthoughtful way of praying, he shares how this devotion has become almost as natural as breathing to him. This simple prayer has converted hearts in dramatic ways but has also provided steady comfort for so many people. As he shares, in this particular prayer the Blessed Mother reminds her children to gaze toward heaven from time to time.

Questions for Conversation
1. Do you have a “go-to” prayer? What are the prayers and devotions that you rely on in challenging moments? How do you pray for other people or for yourself?
2. When do you feel closest to God? When do you feel God most at work in your life?
3. One of the distinct features of Catholic devotion is cultivating a relationship with Mary. Is this practice a part of your faith? Are there particular prayers or devotions that you find comforting?
Like many Catholics, I grew up in a family that recited the rosary every night. And we knew why we did; as Mom would often assure us, the most effective person to take our prayers to Jesus was his own mother. As a good son, how could he refuse her?

As children, we often came to the nightly rosary with protest—“in a minute, Ma”—but having settled on our knees, it was a lovely, quieting time, one that bonded our family of nine kids at the end of a day of the usual sibling tensions. Years later, when we gathered for our parents’ wakes, and then for those of siblings, we prayed the rosary together and it bonded us still. The rosary crusader Father Paddy Peyton was right when he said, “The family that prays together, stays together.”

The gentle drone of the Hail Marys helped introduce me to what I later knew as meditation. My mother would encourage us to “just think about the mysteries.” How wise she was. In his lovely apostolic letter, Rosarium Virginis Mariae (RVM), Pope John Paul II called the rosary “a path of contemplation.”

If one of us missed the family recitation, our mother’s good night was always accompanied by “Be sure to say your rosary.” We knew that she kept her own beads under her pillow for waking moments. And my grandmother loved to assure us that if you start the rosary and then fall asleep, “the angels and saints finish it for you.”

From my childhood, then, I knew the rosary as both communal and personal prayer; as a quieting mantra-like mode of recitation and contemplation. It convinced me that we can go to Jesus through Mary, and that a great communion of saints prayers with us. It taught me the responsibility of praying by myself as...
well as with others; it taught me that I could pray just about any time and any place.

The rosary can have all of these catechetical benefits for postmodern people, in addition to its powerful efficacy as a mode of prayer. Its widespread popularity fell off after Vatican II—an unintended outcome of the Council’s efforts to refocus Catholics on Jesus, sacred Scripture, and the liturgy. But as Pope John Paul II noted in RVM, the rosary, “though clearly Marian in character, at heart is a Christocentric prayer” and “has all the depth of the Gospel message in its entirety.”

What garnered attention for RVM was that Pope John Paul II added five new mysteries to the rosary. For some 500 years, the full rosary consisted of fifteen decades, each one focused on some mystery from the life of Christ or Mary. Then, the fifteen decades were grouped into three sets of five—called a chaplet, meaning crown—designated as the Joyful, Sorrowful, and Glorious mysteries, and focusing on the incarnation, passion, and glorification of Jesus Christ, respectively.

Prior to RVM, there were no mysteries designated for the public life and ministry of Jesus—an enormous gap. I rejoiced when Pope John Paul II announced the addition of five new mysteries focused precisely on the life of Jesus. As Catholics pray these Mysteries of Light—or Luminous mysteries—we are likely to deepen our recognition of, and commitment to, living as disciples of Jesus now.

Historically, the rosary emerged from the instinct of ordinary Christians that they, too, were called to the practice of regular prayer and to sanctify their time and work throughout the day. They knew the monks and nuns were doing so with their recitation of the Divine Office of the Church. But the peasant people didn’t have the time to pause for choral reading. Their instinct was to insist on praying themselves. The rosary arose from the good sense of ordinary people that Baptism calls all to holiness of life, and this demands the regular practice of prayer.

What is the best way to say the rosary? The tradition is to meditate on the mystery of each decade rather than to focus on the words of each prayer. So, with the first Joyful mystery, the Annunciation, one can think about Mary’s openness to doing God’s will, and so on. Or, more contemplatively, one can imagine and enter into the setting as the Angel Gabriel appears to Mary, listen in to the exchange between them, and so on. The purpose of all such contemplation is to take the mystery into daily life to encourage Christian discipleship. As Pope John Paul II wisely commented, we have in the rosary “a treasure to be rediscovered.”

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HOW THE ROSARY TEACHES US TO PRAY

“The Rosary is a prayer that always accompanies me; it is also the prayer of the ordinary people and the saints... it is a prayer from my heart.”
—Pope Francis

Summary
In this reflection, author Thomas Groome recounts how praying the Rosary was a fundamental part of his childhood, drawing his family members together and providing a way for him to draw closer to Jesus through meditation. Groome shares that the Rosary is a prayer that also draws us closer to the communion of saints, who have all learned that we can be confident in Mary as our advocate. Throughout the ages, the Church has reformed the form of this practice according to the promptings of the Holy Spirit, to better help believers on their path of discipleship.

Questions for Conversation
1. Do you pray the Rosary? If so, when and why? If not, why not?
2. Have you had any prayers answered after praying the Rosary?
3. What mysteries do you find comforting to contemplate?
4. A typical rosary takes about fifteen minutes. How might you make time to pray the rosary more often?
HOW TO PRAY THE ROSARY

It is customary to assign each chaplet to a particular day of the week. Rosarium Virginis Mariae (RVM) suggests that the Joyful mysteries be prayed on Monday and Saturday, the Luminous on Thursday, the Sorrowful on Tuesday and Friday, and the Glorious on Wednesday and Sunday.

One popular opening prayer is the first verse of Psalm 70, “O God, come to my assistance. O Lord make haste to help me.” A variation of the opening prayer is to say the Apostle’s Creed.

This is followed by an Our Father, three Hail Marys, and a Glory Be. Then announce the chaplet and the first mystery, for example, “The five Joyful mysteries, the first mystery, the Annunciation.”

After announcing each mystery, pause for the proclamation of a related biblical passage, and silence for meditation. Then follow with the Our Father, the decade of Hail Marys, and the Glory Be for each of the five mysteries.

**The Joyful Mysteries**
1. Annunciation by Gabriel to the Virgin Mary
2. Visitation of Mary to Elizabeth
3. Birth of the Savior of the world
4. Presentation of Jesus in the temple
5. Finding of 12-year-old Jesus in the temple

**The Luminous Mysteries**
1. Baptism of Jesus
2. Jesus at the wedding of Cana
3. Jesus proclaims the Kingdom of God
4. Jesus’ transfiguration
5. Jesus institutes the Eucharist

**The Sorrowful Mysteries**
1. Anguish of Jesus in Gethsemane
2. Jesus is scourged
3. Jesus is crowned with thorns
4. Jesus carries his cross
5. Jesus dies on the cross

**The Glorious Mysteries**
1. Resurrection of Jesus from the dead
2. Jesus ascends into glory
3. The Spirit outpours upon Mary and the disciples at Pentecost
4. Mary is assumed into Heaven
5. Mary shines forth as Queen of the Angels and Saints

There are different ways to conclude. Typical, however, is to end with the Hail, Holy Queen or the Memorare.

**Hail, Holy Queen**

Hail, holy Queen, Mother of Mercy! Our life, our sweetness, and our hope! To thee do we cry, poor banished children of Eve, to thee do we send up our sighs, mourning and weeping in this valley of tears. Turn, then, most gracious advocate, thine eyes of mercy toward us. And after this our exile, show unto us The blessed fruit of they womb Jesus; O clement, O loving, O sweet Virgin Mary Pray for us, O holy Mother of God, that we may be made worthy of the promises of Christ.

**Memorare**

Remember, O most gracious Virgin Mary, That never was it known that anyone who fled to your protection, implored your help or sought your intercession was left unaided. Inspired with this confidence, I fly to you, O virgin of virgins, my Mother. To you I come, before you I kneel sinful and sorrowful. O Mother of the Word Incarnate, despise not my petitions; but in your mercy, hear and answer me. Amen
GATHERING PRAYER

Be With Us Today
St. Thomas More (1478-1535)

Father in heaven,
you have given us a mind to know you,
a will to serve you,
and a heart to love you.
Be with us today in all that we do,
so that your light may shine out in our lives.
Through Christ our Lord.

Amen.

For more information about Faith Feeds, visit bc.edu/c21faithfeeds

This program is sponsored by Boston College’s Church in the 21st Century Center, a catalyst and a resource for the renewal of the Catholic Church.

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