

October is the month of the rosary. A traditional meditation in the Roman Catholic Church. Thus I hope this Sunday that I can be forgiven for not focusing upon the scriptures alone.

The Rosary like all popular devotions is open to interpretation and change. Thus anything any one person says is probably simply an element of the tradition and not a definition. Thus this is to be simply an element.

So what is the rosary?

Basically it is a meditation mantra. A prayer of repetition. The repetition leading the mind through a series of images creating a familiarity beyond the event.

The structure is based on a series of five verses of the prayers, The Our Father, followed by ten Hail Marys, followed then by glory be to the Father etc.

This is known as a decade. Perhaps a chapter

There are traditionally three such chapters which focus progressively upon three different sections of the New Testament. (Recently there has been a fourth Chapter, or set of five added in some traditions)

These Chapters are referred to as Mysteries

If we look at the first Chapter, or Mystery we are lead through the beginning of The Gospel of Christ.

Thus the mantra or repetition begins with the Our Father. For this first verse we are asked to consider The Annunciation. The point at which the Angel Gabriel visited the Blessed Virgin Mary to announce the conception of Christ. As a result of familiarity with the words that are repeated so the mind can consider the scene of the faith and commitment of the Mother of God.

There follows in this Mystery or chapter, other early New Testament images. The Visitation of Mary to Elizabeth, The Birth of Christ, (Christmas), The Presentation of the baby Jesus in the Temple, and the finding of the child Jesus when he went to speak with scholars in flurried gown.

There follows the five chapters of the Sorrowful Mysteries and the five Chapters of the Glorious Mysteries.

Coming with this prayer are the beads so associated with Catholicism. Beautiful and with familiarity a prayer of touch

Prayer is difficult

Meditation ids difficult

It is an art

A skill which must be learned

The rosary is a tool of such learning

The mind in thought does tend to wander. No doubt a few of you have wandered off as I have been speaking. So the repetition of the prayers in the rosary calls the mind back to the initial intention of simple prayer. Thus for example by the fourth Hail Mary, as the fingers flick over the beads and keep the pattern, the subconscious may have moved from the annunciation to thoughts of what will be eaten for dinner. Until reminded by the prayers of the intention of this exercise, and drawn back to the images in the Gospel.

The repetition reminding constantly of the intention

There are familiar images which root us in our traditions. The football fan wears a shirt or cries out a chant. Those who advertise products know well the value of burning into the minds of the public a catch phrase or slogan that draws them to familiar products. Regular practice of the rosary can have this effect and direct and strengthen sub-conscious thought to issues of faith. When terrified in the trenches about to go over the top how many men called out for strength using the rosary? When about to go down for the operation and nervous how many patients flicked their fingers in prayer.

When tokens of love are placed in the coffin how many loving thoughts are expressed in these beads. Such imagery is dependent upon the familiarity of practice

Then there is the conscious detachment of the rosary. Even in covid our days are full. We wake to the sound of the radio alarm. There are car journeys, jobs to be done, bills paid, and relatives to be cared for. It is humble but also true that you cannot say the rosary as you watch a soap opera, or prepare tea. To take out your rosary beads, recite the words, and go through the meditation means that you must step out of the natural momentum of your day and pay attention. Prayer is most fruitful as a conscious wish to seek out the love of God. Unconscious prayer can only really survive if there have been times of real focus and identity from which reserves can be drawn. Those who are not blessed with daily mass, need a structure which enables them to consciously take time out. The rosary is such a structure.

And so on. There is tradition. Community identity, focus, appreciation of scripture, relationship and so on.

So much that could be explored.

But for now it is enough to say that October is traditionally the month of the Rosary

The rosary is a very valuable tradition

Let us treasure what we have

And celebrate the gifts with sweet simplicity.