

# **LIGHT SHINES IN DARKNESS**



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## **SURPRISED BY GRACE**

The priests of the diocese gathered recently at Dundrum, supported, I know, by the prayers of many people in their parishes. On one day we were joined by members of diocesan committees and groups, and on another by representatives from the parishes of the diocese. Their presence was an enormous contribution to the richness of the reflection that took place and to the formulation of the next steps on our journey into the new century.

We were gathering at a painful time. We were faced by the horror of the suffering inflicted on innocent children whose trust was cruelly betrayed. We recognised the terrible truth that some of that abuse was inflicted by priests. We had heard again the accusation that the Church had not responded decisively.

As we approached our few days of reflection, I greatly feared that morale would be low. But we were surprised by grace. Because we gathered at a time of darkness, we were able to see the light more clearly. Because we felt our own weakness we were more ready to rely on the strength of God and to seek God's strength in prayer. Because we felt helpless there was a greater understanding of the grief, anguish and searching of our times.

The great blessing of the assembly in Dundrum was that it helped us to know in a deeper way than ever, the truth of St Paul's extraordinary proclamation:

I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions and calamities for the sake of Christ; for whenever I am weak, then I am strong (2 Cor 12:10)

## **HOLINESS AND CONTEMPLATION**

Trusting in God is not an excuse to be complacent. Pope John Paul tells us that, "all pastoral initiatives must be set in relation to holiness"<sup>1</sup>. And he spells that out in a way that leaves no doubt about how demanding that is:

It would be wrong to think that ordinary Christians can be content with a shallow prayer that is unable to fill their whole life. Especially in the face of the many trials to which today's world subjects faith, they would be not only mediocre Christians but 'Christians at risk'... It is therefore essential that *education in prayer* should become in some way the key-point of all pastoral planning<sup>2</sup>.

Every Christian is called to proclaim that the living God is close to us, that Jesus has a unique relationship with every person, that human life is a gift of God and a fruit and sign on his love<sup>3</sup>. But in order to proclaim and celebrate that Good News, we have to develop what the Pope calls 'a contemplative outlook', that is,

... the outlook of those who see life in its deeper meaning, who grasp its utter gratuitousness, its beauty and its invitation to freedom and responsibility. It is the outlook of those who do not presume to take possession of reality but instead accept it as a gift, discovering in all things the reflection of the Creator and seeing in every person the Creator's living image<sup>4</sup>.

The task of the Church and of every Christian is to reflect the light of Christ and to make his face shine in the world, but our witness "would be hopelessly inadequate if we ourselves had not first contemplated his face"<sup>5</sup>.

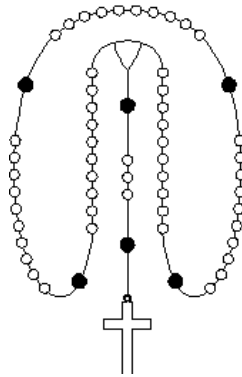
"Contemplation" is a word that may frighten us – the kind of thing that only great saints do! That is certainly not what the Holy Father is saying to us. He expressed the task for the whole Church in the new millennium in the challenging but encouraging words of Jesus to the apostles when they were tired and frustrated after a night of fruitless fishing: "Put out into the deep water" (*duc in altum*). He tells us that we can only rise to that challenge by learning to contemplate the mystery of Christ:

The *duc in altum* of the Church of the third millennium will be determined by the ability of Christians to enter into the 'perfect knowledge of God's mystery, of Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge' (Col 2:2-3)<sup>6</sup>.

The call to live as a Christian is a high and demanding one, but it is a welcoming call. It is a call not for some elite but for everyone. The call of Jesus invites us to be his friends; it is a call to the love which casts out fear (1 Jn 4:18). The frequent refrain of God's messengers in the Bible is, "Do not be afraid."

In October this year, the Pope issued a letter that put the call to contemplation in more familiar and less frightening terms: "The Rosary belongs among the finest and most praiseworthy traditions of Christian contemplation". "In effect, the Rosary is simply a *method of contemplation*"<sup>7</sup>. He declared the twenty-fifth year of his pontificate (October 2002 to October 2003) **the Year of the Rosary**.

## THE ROSARY



The Rosary brings us to the core of what the Church is because in it we contemplate the face of Christ with Mary, his Mother.

We are accustomed to think of the Church as if it were primarily an institution. The structures of the Church have only one purpose – to bring us closer to Christ, to enable us to grow in holiness as God's people. The really important 'hierarchy' is measured in terms of holiness, and in that 'hierarchy of holiness' Mary comes before everyone else:

Mary Immaculate precedes all others, including obviously Peter himself and the Apostles... their triple function [teaching, sanctifying and shepherding] has no other purpose except to form the Church in line with the ideal of sanctity already programmed and prefigured in Mary<sup>8</sup>.

Like any mother Mary knew her child's face intimately and understood better than anyone what his face revealed – the face of the newborn Infant, the compassionate face of the One who announced God's healing and forgiveness, the agonised face on the cross, the glorious face of her risen Son. No one contemplated the face of Jesus as she did. She followed him, physically and spiritually, more closely than anyone else – ready to obey the will of God (Lk 1:38), treasuring and pondering the events of his life in her heart (Lk 2:19, 51), requesting him to help the couple at Cana in the first of his signs (Jn 2:1-11) hearing the word of God and keeping it (Lk 11:28), standing beside his cross (Jn 19:26).

The heart of the Rosary is quiet contemplation of the mystery of Christ through the eyes of his Mother. Without that contemplation, it would be just a mechanical formula:

By its nature the recitation of the Rosary calls for a quiet rhythm and a lingering pace, helping the individual to meditate on the mysteries of the Lord's life as seen through the eyes of her who was closest to the Lord<sup>9</sup>.

The Holy Father makes a number of practical suggestions about how we might improve our recitation of the Rosary.

- The words and images that are used to announce each decade, especially in public recitation, can help to focus our attention on the mystery we are recalling. We might think,

for instance of a suitable icon or a few words which would set the mystery in its time and place.

- Each decade might be introduced by a suitable biblical text, long or short according to the situation. The Rosary is not a substitute for reading and praying the Bible, for instance through *lectio divina* or the seven-step method which we are using in the diocese this Advent. In fact, the Rosary "presupposes and promotes"<sup>10</sup> reflection on the Gospels.
- Because the Rosary is a prayer of 'quiet rhythm and lingering pace' it would be good to pause before the recitation of each decade for some moments of silent recollection.
- The *Our Father* reminds us that Jesus was sent from the Father and that he is now at his Father's right hand in the glory which he had with his Father before the world was made (Jn 17:5). Each decade begins with the prayer that Jesus taught his disciples. It is a prayer which we make to our common Father in heaven, remembering Jesus who taught us to call God our Father and aware that the Holy Spirit is poured into our hearts crying Abba, Father (Gal 4:6). It is a prayer we make with all our brothers and sisters in Christ.
- The central 'hinge' of the *Hail Mary* is the name of Jesus. The first part expresses the wonder of creation, even, as the Pope suggests, "a glimpse of God's own wonderment as he contemplates his 'masterpiece' – the incarnation of the Son of God in the womb of the Virgin Mary"<sup>11</sup>. The second part of the prayer entrusts our lives and our deaths to her maternal intercession. This focus on Jesus can be highlighted by the custom of adding a clause after the Holy Name, recalling the mystery being celebrated<sup>12</sup>.
- The *Glory be to the Father* "is the goal of all Christian contemplation"<sup>13</sup>. It is not just "a perfunctory conclusion" for each decade. It points to where contemplation leads us – into the presence of the mystery of God, One in Three.
- Finally, the Pope recognises that, in many places, it is the custom to conclude each decade with a short prayer. While not wishing to devalue these customs, he suggests that a brief concluding prayer *for some grace specific to the particular mystery* could be very fruitful. In the case of each mystery we would pray that we might imitate what it contains and obtain what it promises.

These suggestions are not intended to make our prayer more complicated. Rather, they are ideas that may help us to focus more effectively on contemplating the face of Christ with Mary.

## THE MYSTERIES OF LIGHT



The most surprising element in the Pope's letter on the Rosary was his statement that "it would be suitable to make an addition to the traditional pattern which, while left to the freedom of individuals and communities, could broaden it to include *the mysteries of Christ's public ministry between his Baptism and his Passion*"<sup>14</sup>.

This new development received little enough attention, though one British newspaper saw fit to trivialise it by suggesting that it rendered all existing rosary beads obsolete!

In the public ministry of Christ, the light shone in the world – the light of truth, the light of healing, the light of hope. Our contemplation of the face of Christ with Mary can be enriched and deepened by reflecting and praying on the events of his public life. This central part of his life was not directly addressed in the traditional pattern of the fifteen decades. Each of the new mysteries of light shows us a ray of the light of Christ shining in his life and in ours. The Holy Father says that this addition of new mysteries to the Rosary is meant "to give it fresh life and to enkindle renewed interest in the Rosary's place within Christian spirituality as a true doorway to the depths of the heart of Christ, ocean of joy and light, of suffering and glory"<sup>15</sup>.

The Pope suggests that the traditional allocation of the joyful, sorrowful and glorious mysteries to days of the week might be adapted as follows:

Sunday: Glorious Mysteries

Monday: Joyful Mysteries

Tuesday: Sorrowful Mysteries

Wednesday: Glorious Mysteries

*Thursday: Mysteries of Light*

Friday: Sorrowful Mysteries

Saturday: Joyful Mysteries

I want to offer a few points for reflection about each of the new mysteries of light and to indicate how some of the Holy Father's suggestions for more fruitful contemplation might be applied. The texts and suggestions given below should obviously be adapted and varied according to what best suits the individual or the group reciting the Rosary.

#### THE FIRST MYSTERY: *THE BAPTISM IN THE JORDAN*



**Scripture:** It was at this time that Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptised in the Jordan by John. And at once, as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit, like a dove, descending on him. And a voice came from heaven, 'You are my Son, the Beloved, my favour rests on you' (Mk 1:9-11).

**Added clause in Hail Mary:** "who was proclaimed by John as the Holy One of God" (Jn 1:34).

As Jesus emerges from the Jordan, the Father, who dwells in unapproachable light, points to his beloved Son, the image of the invisible God (Col 1:15). The light of God, in whom there is no darkness at all (1 Jn 1:5), shines in darkness and darkness cannot overpower it. Jesus, the Word who was with God in the beginning, who is God, is the real light that gives light to everyone (Jn 1:5,9).

The Holy Spirit hovers over the waters of the Jordan as the divine Spirit hovered over the waters at the creation (Gen 1:2). This is the beginning of a new creation. The God who said, "let there be light" (Gen 1:3) has begun to make the whole of creation new (Rev 21:5).

The mission of Jesus begins at the Jordan. The Father tells us that his favour rests on Jesus and we see that the Holy Spirit is with him to bring good news to the poor, liberty to captives, sight to the blind, comfort to those who mourn and to proclaim the Lord's coming (Is 61: 1-1-3, Lk 4:16-22).

John resisted when Jesus asked to be baptised: "It is I who need to be baptised by you" (Mt 3:14). The Lamb of God needed no repentance, but was taking upon himself the sins of the world.

- This mystery challenges us in a number of ways. It asks us really to believe that the light is shining and that God has spoken through his Son. That is not easy when times are dark for us, whether as a community or as individuals. But those are the times when we may learn to see the light more clearly than we had thought possible.
- It asks us to recognise that our baptism, and the coming of the Spirit on the Church at Pentecost, and on us in Confirmation, calls us to bring good news to the poor, liberty to captives and to proclaim the Lords' year of favour. The world of the twenty-first century is strange, and complex; it poses new possibilities and new obstacles for faith. If Christian individuals and groups do not bring their faith to bear on the many spheres indicated in the third part of the booklet, "*How Can We Know the Way?*", how can these areas of our lives, of our society and of the wider world hear the good news of Christ?

**Concluding Prayer:**

Almighty, eternal God,  
when the Spirit descended upon Jesus  
at his Baptism in the Jordan,  
you revealed him as your own beloved Son.  
Keep us, your children born of water and the Spirit,  
faithful to our calling,  
through the same Christ our Lord. (Mass of the Baptism of the Lord).

**THE SECOND MYSTERY: THE WEDDING FEAST OF CANA**



**Scripture:** The mother of Jesus said to him, "They have no wine." Jesus said, "Woman, what do you want from me? My hour has not come yet." His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you." There were six stone water jars standing there, meant for the ablutions that are customary among the Jews: each could hold twenty or thirty gallons. Jesus said to the servants, "Fill the jars with water," and they filled them to the brim. Then he said to them, "Draw some out now and take it to the president of the feast. They did this; the president tasted the water, and it had turned into wine (Jn 2:3-9).

**Added clause in Hail Mary:** "who thanks to your intervention turned water into wine."

When he spoke at Cana in the first year of his pontificate, Pope John Paul focussed on the only instruction Mary is ever recorded as giving in the Gospels. She said to the servants at Cana: 'Do whatever he tells you.' Mary is a teacher, leading us as she led the servants to understand and follow the word of her Son.

The joy of the wedding celebration was about to turn into humiliation for the newlyweds. They faced the embarrassment of having to send the guests home because they had run out of wine. The Gospel does not tell us whether they approached Mary or whether she noticed the problem. Either way it shows us Mary as someone who is sensitive to people's needs and quick to respond.

Contemplating the face of Christ by no means turns our minds away from the real problems of real people. *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* says, "Some people see prayer as a flight from the world in reaction against activism; but in fact, Christian prayer is neither an escape from reality nor a divorce from life"<sup>16</sup>. Jesus himself made it clear that we must reach out to the hungry the thirsty the sick and the imprisoned, for his face is to be seen in them (Mt 25:31-46). Contemplating the face of Christ is a call to justice and to generosity.

Jesus produced an astonishing abundance of wine – at least 120 gallons! It was a sign of the new creation in which all that is good will be 'illuminated and transfigured'<sup>17</sup> and in which nothing will be lacking to the happiness of God's people. A document from the time of Jesus describes the plentiful flourishing of God's Kingdom in these words, "... on each vine there shall be a thousand branches, and each branch shall bear a thousand clusters, and each cluster produce a thousand grapes, and each grape produce a cor"<sup>18</sup>. A cor is equal to about 120 gallons!

- This mystery invites us to trust more and more fully in the abundance of God's love for us. One of the hardest lessons we have to learn is that our own cleverness, our own resources, our own plans, cannot ultimately give us what we long for. What we long for is a gift that no creature could ever demand or deserve, that we cannot create for ourselves, that we cannot even imagine. The Good News is that this unimaginable gift, the fulfilment of longings we do not even recognise and could never adequately express, is precisely what God offers to us.
- The mystery also calls us to respond justly and generously to our brothers and sisters who are in any kind of need. As often as we fail to do something for one of them, we fail to do it for Jesus himself. We hope that, in their name, Jesus may welcome us into the kingdom prepared for us since the foundation of the world (Mt 25: 34).

#### **Concluding Prayer:**

Lord Jesus Christ,  
in the miracle of Cana we have seen  
the abundant generosity of your Father's Kingdom.  
May we learn the lesson taught by your Mother –  
to do whatever you tell us –  
loving one another as you have loved us  
and behaving justly to all your brothers and sisters.

### THE THIRD MYSTERY: *THE PROCLAMATION OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD*



**Scripture:** After John had been arrested, Jesus went into Galilee. There he proclaimed the gospel from God, saying, 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is close at hand. Repent and believe the good news' (Mk 1:14,15).

**Added clause in Hail Mary:** "who proclaimed the good news of the Kingdom" (Mt 4:23).

To our ears the two instructions, 'repent' and 'believe the Good News' may seem contradictory. 'Repentance' sounds hard and negative; 'the Good News' sounds warm and welcoming. The truth is that the Good News is so full of wonder that we cannot begin to grasp it unless we change and grow. We repent, that means we turn our attitudes and our lives around, we try to recognise and renounce our short sightedness, our selfishness and our self-deception in order to be able to believe the Good News.

Jesus is the light of the world (Jn 8:12, 9:5) and the message he preaches is a message of light: "I have come as light into the world, so that everyone who believes in me should not remain in the darkness (Jn 12:46). Light reveals the truth. That is why it demands repentance: "For all who do evil hate the light and do not come to the light, so that their deeds may not be exposed. But those who do what is true come to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that their deeds have been done in God" (Jn 3:20,21).

Jesus presents the Kingdom of God as a tiny seed which is destined to grow into a great tree into which all will be gathered like the birds of the air or as something which, like yeast, works invisibly but which will be a leaven for whole of creation (Mt 13). "God's power is made perfect in weakness" (2 Cor 12:9).

Having been the first to receive the Word Incarnate, Mary, from the beginning, ponders the words and events of his life in her heart (Lk 2:19, 51). She is the first of his disciples. Already, while Jesus was still in her womb, Elizabeth proclaimed: "Blessed is she who believed that the promise made her by the Lord would be fulfilled" (Lk 1:45).

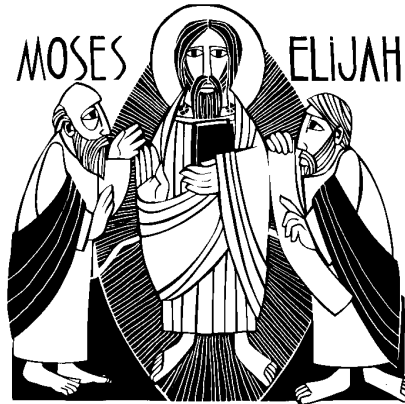
- This mystery calls on us to change, to be converted. We should change because the Good News of God's merciful love has been brought to us in Jesus Christ. It asks us, therefore, to renew our appreciation of the Sacrament of Penance or Reconciliation, where we confess our sins, bring them into the light of God's unlimited love.
- It asks us whether we welcome God's message for what it really is (1 Thess 2:13), or is it just one thing among many in our lives? Do we understand, especially when our worst fears come true, that this is the darkness in which God's light shines? God's kingdom does not remove evil and death from our lives; but it is stronger than evil and death.



**Concluding Prayer:**

God, our Father,  
in the life and preaching of your Son,  
the light which darkness cannot overpower  
has shone in our world.  
Grant that we may come to that light  
with sorrow for our sins and hope in your mercy.  
May we follow Christ with joyful and generous hearts  
and so come with him to the fullness of your kingdom.

**THE FOURTH MYSTERY: THE TRANSFIGURATION**



**Scripture:** He took with him Peter, John and James and went up the mountain to pray. And it happened that, as he was praying, the aspect of his face was changed and his clothing became sparkling white. And suddenly there were two men talking to him; they were Moses and Elijah appearing in glory and they were speaking of his passing which he was to accomplish in Jerusalem (Lk 9:28-31).

**Added Clause in Hail Mary:** proclaimed by the Father as his Son, his Chosen One.

Pope John Paul describes the Transfiguration as 'the mystery of light *par excellence*'<sup>19</sup>. Here, on the mountain, the face of Christ shone gloriously. The apostles saw that the real light, which gives light to everybody, had come into the world (Jn 1:9). The Father spoke, saying: 'This is my Son, the Chosen One. Listen to him' (Lk 9:35). The light that they saw was the glory of the only Son, the glory that he had with his Father before the world was made (Jn 17:5).

The transfiguration is '*an icon of Christian contemplation*'<sup>20</sup>. In the face of Christ the apostles see the mystery that lies at the heart of reality. The person who contemplates the face of Christ learns to see the glory of the Lord in every aspect of life and in each person, in the events of each day. When that happens, "All of us, with our unveiled faces like mirrors reflecting the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the image that we reflect in brighter and brighter glory" (2 Cor 3:18).

The presence of Moses, who led the Jews out of Egypt and to whom God revealed his name and his Law, and of Elijah, representative of the prophets through whom God spoke to his people, shows that in Jesus all the expectations and hopes of the Chosen People are being fulfilled. The law of God is a light for our way (Ps 118:105); the prophets speak God's truth. All of the Old Testament points to Jesus, the Way, the Truth and the Life (Jn 14:6).

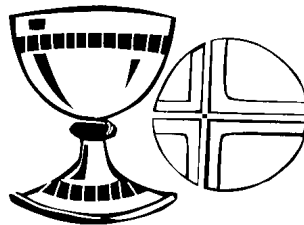
The glory the apostles saw on Mount Tabor was intended to 'strengthen them for the scandal of the cross' (Preface of the Transfiguration). Jesus was speaking with Moses and Elijah about his passing, which was to happen in Jerusalem. The Transfiguration gave them a realisation of the truth about Jesus and it gave them a vision of the glory that awaited Jesus and his followers.

- This mystery summons us to develop the 'contemplative outlook', which discovers in all things the reflection of the Creator and sees in every person the living image of the Creator<sup>21</sup>. There is a temptation to live life in a shallow, breathless way, not having time for others or for God. This is a call to take the time to pray and to be more real, more fully human, more in harmony with the deepest truth of our creation and redemption. In the Transfiguration we see the mystery of the three divine Persons, the goal of all Christian contemplation<sup>22</sup>: "The whole Trinity appeared; the Father in the voice, the Son in the man, the Spirit in the shining cloud"<sup>23</sup>
- The Transfiguration strengthens us to face darkness and suffering. In the lives of the saints there are moments of great testing and bleakness. St Thérèse speaks of "a great wall stretching up to the sky and blots out the stars! When I write poems about the happiness of heaven... I'm simply talking about what I'm determined to believe". But she knew that this trial was purging away things that were distractions from the real truth: 'The only thing I want badly now is to go on loving until I die of love'<sup>24</sup>.

#### **Concluding Prayer:**

Lord Jesus Christ,  
 may the glory which shone in you on the mountain  
 give us strength in trials and joy in following you.  
 May we learn to see your glorious face in every person we meet,  
 and may we recognise that you are supreme in every way  
 because your eternal Father wanted all fullness to be found in you (Col 1:19).

#### **THE FIFTH MYSTERY: THE INSTITUTION OF THE BLESSED EUCHARIST**



**Scripture:** The tradition I received from the Lord and also handed on to you is that on the night he was betrayed, the Lord Jesus took some bread, and after he had given thanks, he broke it and said, 'This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me'. And in the same way, with the cup after supper, saying this cup is the new covenant in my blood. Whenever you drink it, do this as a memorial of me'. Whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you are proclaiming the Lord's death until he comes (1 Cor 11:23-26).

**Added clause in Hail Mary:** who gives us his Flesh to eat and his Blood to drink.

The final Mystery of Light brings us to the threshold of the Sorrowful Mysteries. In a few hours, Jesus will undergo the Agony in the Garden. The Last Supper foreshadows what is to come: the apostles receive the Body of Christ given up for us, and his Blood poured out for the forgiveness of sins. Yet this is the climax of the Mysteries of Light. In the Eucharist we are in the presence of Jesus crucified but now risen. He stands in the New Jerusalem, which "has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God is its light, and its lamp is the Lamb" (Rev 21:23).

The Eucharist is the light which draws us into unity as God's People. It is only through our relationship with Christ and in his Holy Spirit that we can grow into the family of our common Father and therefore grow in our unity with one another. We pray, "Grant that we, who are nourished by his body and blood, may be filled with his Holy Spirit, and become one body, one spirit in Christ"<sup>25</sup>.

In our celebration of the Eucharist, we look to Mary. As we hear the Word of God proclaimed we try to ponder it in our hearts as she did (Lk 2:19, 51). In the presence of his death and resurrection, we stand at the foot of the cross as she did (Jn 19:25) and we experience the joy and wonder of the resurrection as she did. We contemplate the face of Christ in his life, death and resurrection as his mother did<sup>26</sup>.

The Eucharist is the summit of all Christian prayer. It is a prayer of *thanksgiving*, of *making present the sacrifice of the cross* and of *Christ's presence* to us<sup>27</sup>. The recitation of the Rosary should in its own way seek to reflect the essential characteristics of that model of worship. The Rosary is an act of *thanksgiving* to God for the early years, public life, death and resurrection of Christ, reflected on with his Mother. The Rosary is a prayer in which we *remember* the love of God at work in the life, and the sacrificial death of Jesus and recognise that love as active in our lives now. The Rosary, especially when recited before the Blessed Sacrament, is the worship of Christ *present* to us in the Eucharist, in his word, in his Church and in his people.

- This mystery reminds us that the Eucharist is the summit and the source of the Church's life<sup>28</sup>. Christians are called to carry the cross with Christ; Christians are called to love others as Christ loves us and giving themselves without limit as he did<sup>29</sup>; Christians are called to pass through death with Christ and to be with him forever in his risen life.
- The *Our Father* tells us that we have one Father, the *Hail Mary* that we are poor and mortal sinners, the *Glory be to the Father* that we are all creatures in the presence of the infinite and glorious Trinity. The Eucharist reinforces that sense that we are vulnerable, interdependent and utterly reliant on the mercy of God. The celebration of the Eucharist commits us to recognising that we are brothers and sisters. St John Chrysostom tells us bluntly: "You dishonour this table [the Eucharist] when you do not judge worthy of sharing your food someone judged worthy to take part in this meal"<sup>30</sup>.

#### **Concluding Prayer:**

God our Father,  
may our celebration of the Eucharist  
increase our awareness of the hunger for you  
which is the deepest truth of our being.  
May we recognise in every human being  
a brother or sister called to share with us  
in the joy and the glory of Christ's risen body –  
the Body given up for us,  
the Body which we receive,  
the Body which we are,  
the Body in which we make our prayer,  
through Christ our Lord.

#### **A PRAYER FOR PEACE**

The Rosary is a prayer in which we contemplate Christ, the Prince of Peace. Today, peace is threatened and violated, not least in the land where the mysteries recalled the Rosary took place.

Contemplating the face of Christ in the mysteries of his life, death and resurrection in union with Mary, Queen of Peace, is a powerful prayer for peace in the world.

In contemplating the mysteries of his early life we learn to appreciate the wonder and dignity of human life. When we reflect on ourselves in the light of the Incarnation and the Redemption, that reflection bears fruit not only of adoration of God but also of deep wonder at ourselves, a wonder which can be named 'the Gospel'<sup>31</sup>. Such a deep understanding of human dignity is a call to and the basis for true peace.

In contemplating the proclamation of the Kingdom of God, we are lead to a deeper understanding of the call of the Beatitudes to act in ways that lead to God's peace, God's justice, God's comfort, God's kingdom – to be peacemakers.

In the suffering and death of Jesus we learn to see in those who suffer and are oppressed the suffering face of Jesus and to respond to them, knowing that what we do or fail to do for them, we do or fail to do for him.

In reflecting on the glory of Christ, shared with his mother and promised to us, we learn that no effort to seek the peace of God is ever wasted: "(Jesus) assures those who trust in the charity of God that the way of love is open to all and that the effort to establish a universal communion will not be in vain"<sup>32</sup>.

The Rosary has traditionally been a prayer that deepened the peace of *families*. It can still be a way which allows a family to think together about the most fundamental truths that give meaning to our lives. One might perhaps start in a small way, with one decade well prepared, perhaps by a younger member of the family. Perhaps grace might surprise us!

May the Year of the Rosary be a time when all of us seek to reflect, pray and contemplate on the mystery of God's love revealed in Jesus Christ: "What is really important is that the Rosary should always be seen and experienced as a path of contemplation"<sup>33</sup>.

It is God who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' that has shone in our hearts to enlighten them with the knowledge of God's glory, the glory on the face of Christ (2 Cor 4:6).

+Donal Murray  
Advent 2002

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<sup>1</sup> *Novo Millennio Ineunte* [NMI] (At the Close of the Great Jubilee), 30.

<sup>2</sup> NMI, 34.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. *Evangelium Vitae* [EV] (The Gospel of Life), 81.

<sup>4</sup> EV, 83.

<sup>5</sup> NMI, 16.

<sup>6</sup> John Paul II, *Rosarium Virginis Mariae* [RVM] (The Rosary of the Virgin Mary), 24.

<sup>7</sup> RVM, 5, 28.

<sup>8</sup> John Paul II, *Mulieris Dignitatem*, [MD] (The Dignity and Vocation of Women) 27n.

<sup>9</sup> Paul VI, *Marialis Cultus* [MC], (Devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary), 47.

<sup>10</sup> RVM, 29.

<sup>11</sup> RVM, 33.

<sup>12</sup> E.g:

Annunciation: "who became flesh and dwelt amongst us."

Visitation: "at whose coming the Baptist leapt for joy."

Nativity: "whom you wrapped in swaddling clothes and laid in a manger."

Presentation: "whom you took up to Jerusalem to present to the Lord."

Finding: "whom you found in his Father's house."

Agony in the Garden: "whose sweat fell to the ground like great drops of blood."

Scourging: "wounded for our sins."

Crowning with Thorns: "who was mocked and crowned with thorns."

Carrying of the Cross: "who carried his cross to Calvary."

Crucifixion: "crucified for us."

Resurrection: "who rose on the third day."

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Ascension: "who was taken from the Apostles' sight into heaven."  
Descent of the Spirit: "who sent the Holy Spirit as he promised."  
Assumption: "who brought you, body and soul, into his new creation"  
Coronation of the BVM: "beside whose throne you reign in heaven"

<sup>13</sup> RVM, 34.

<sup>14</sup> RVM, 19.

<sup>15</sup> RVM, 19.

<sup>16</sup> Catechism of the Catholic Church, [CCC] 2727.

<sup>17</sup> VATICAN II, *Gaudium et Spes* (The Church in the Modern World) [GS], 39.

<sup>18</sup> 2 Baruch 29, quoted in The Collegeville Bible Commentary, Collegeville 1988, p. 984.

<sup>19</sup> RVM, 21.

<sup>20</sup> RVM, 9.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. EV, 83.

<sup>22</sup> RVM, 34.

<sup>23</sup> St Thomas Aquinas, quoted in CCC, 555.

<sup>24</sup> St Thérèse of Lisieux, Autobiography of a Saint, Fontana 1960, p. 202.

<sup>25</sup> Third Eucharistic Prayer.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. JOHN PAUL II, *Dies Domini*, On Keeping the Lord's Day Holy, 86.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. CCC, 1356-1381.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. VATICAN II, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, Liturgy Constitution, 10.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. JOHN PAUL II, *Redemptor Hominis*, [RH] At the Beginning of his Papal Ministry, 20.

<sup>30</sup> Quoted in CCC 1397.

<sup>31</sup> RH, 10.

<sup>32</sup> GS, 38

<sup>33</sup> RVM, 38.