



# The Holy See

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## PASTORAL VISIT

### TO THE PONTIFICAL SHRINE OF POMPEII

#### RECITATION OF THE HOLY ROSARY

#### MEDITATION OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI

Pontifical Shrine of Pompeii  
Sunday, 19 October 2008

*Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate and in the Priesthood,  
Dear men and women religious,  
Dear Brothers and Sisters,*

Before entering the Shrine to recite the Holy Rosary with you, I paused briefly before the tomb of Bl. Bartolo Longo and, praying, I asked myself: "Where did this great apostle of Mary find the energy and perseverance he needed to bring such an impressive work, now known across the world, to completion? Was it not in the Rosary, which he accepted as a true gift from Our Lady's Heart?" Yes, that truly was how it happened! The experience of the Saints bears witness to it: this popular Marian prayer is a precious spiritual means to grow in intimacy with Jesus, and to learn at the school of the Blessed Virgin always to fulfil the divine will. It is contemplation of the mysteries of Christ in spiritual union with Mary as the Servant of God Paul VI stressed in his Apostolic Exhortation *Marialis cultus* (n. 46) and as my venerable Predecessor John Paul II abundantly illustrated in his Apostolic Letter *Rosarium Virginis Mariae* that today I once again present in spirit to the Community of Pompeii and to each one of you. You who live and work here in Pompeii, especially you, dear priests, men and women religious and lay people involved in this unique portion of the Church, are all called to make Bl. Bartolo Longo's charism your own and to become, to the extent and in the way that God grants to each one, authentic apostles of the Rosary.

To be apostles of the Rosary, however, it is necessary to experience personally the beauty and depth of this prayer which is simple and accessible to everyone. It is first of all necessary to let the

Blessed Virgin take one by the hand to contemplate the Face of Christ: a joyful, luminous, sorrowful and glorious Face. Those who, like Mary and with her, cherish and ponder the mysteries of Jesus assiduously, increasingly assimilate his sentiments and are conformed to him. In this regard, I would like to quote a beautiful thought of Bl. Bartolo Longo: "Just as two friends, frequently in each other's company, tend to develop similar habits", he wrote, "so too, by holding familiar converse with Jesus and the Blessed Virgin, by meditating on the mysteries of the Rosary and by living the same life in Holy Communion, we can become, to the extent of our lowliness, similar to them and can learn from these supreme models a life of humility, poverty, hiddenness, patience and perfection" (*I Quindici Sabati del Santissimo Rosario*, 27th edition, Pompeii, 1916, p. 27: cited in *Rosarium Virginis Mariae*, n. 15).

The Rosary is a school of contemplation and silence. At first glance, it could seem a prayer that accumulates words, therefore difficult to reconcile with the silence that is rightly recommended for meditation and contemplation. In fact, this cadent repetition of the *Hail Mary* does not disturb inner silence but indeed both demands and nourishes it. Similarly to what happens for the Psalms when one prays the Liturgy of the Hours, the silence surfaces through the words and sentences, not as emptiness, but rather as the presence of an ultimate meaning that transcends the words themselves and through them speaks to the heart. Thus, in reciting the *Hail Mary*, we must be careful that our voices do not "cover" the voice of God who always speaks through the silence like the "still small voice" of a gentle breeze (1 Kgs 19: 12). Then how important it is to foster this silence full of God, both in one's personal recitation and in its recitation with the community! Even when the Rosary is prayed, as today, by great assemblies, and as you do in this Shrine every day, it must be perceived as a contemplative prayer. And this cannot happen without an atmosphere of inner silence.

I would like to add a further reflection concerning the Word of God in the Rosary, particularly appropriate in this period in which the [Synod of Bishops](#) is taking place on the theme: "*The Word of God in the life and mission of the Church*". If Christian contemplation cannot leave the Word of God out of consideration, if it is to be a contemplative prayer, the Rosary must always emerge from the silence of the heart as a response to the Word, after the model of Mary's prayer. Seen clearly, the Rosary is completely interwoven with scriptural elements. First of all there is the enunciation of the mystery, preferably made, as it has been today, with words taken from the Bible. The *Our Father* follows; by giving the prayer a "vertical" orientation, the soul of who recites the rosary is opened to the correct filial attitude in accordance with the Lord's invitation: "When you pray say: Father..." (Lk 11: 2). The first part of the *Hail Mary*, also taken from the Gospel, lets us listen again each time to the words that God addressed to the Virgin through the Angel and to the words of her cousin Elizabeth's blessing. The second part of the *Hail Mary* resounds like the answer of children who, in addressing supplications to their Mother, do nothing other than express their own adherence to the saving plan revealed by God. Thus the thought of those who pray remains ever anchored to Scripture and to the mysteries presented in it.

Lastly, remembering that today we are celebrating World Mission Sunday, I wish to recall the apostolic dimension of the Rosary, a dimension that Blessed Bartolo Longo lived intensely, drawing inspiration from it to carry out on this earth so many charitable initiatives and works of human and social promotion. Furthermore, he wanted this Shrine to be open to the whole world as a centre of outreach of the prayer of the Rosary and as a place of intercession for peace among peoples. Dear friends, I would like to reinforce both of these aims: the apostolate of charity and prayer for peace, and I wish to confirm and entrust them once again to your spiritual and pastoral commitment. Following the example and with the support of the venerable Founder, never tire of working with enthusiasm in this part of the Lord's vineyard for which Our Lady has shown a special fondness.

Dear brothers and sisters, the time has come to take my leave of you and of this beautiful Shrine. I thank you for your warm welcome and especially for your prayers. I thank the Archbishop Prelate and Pontifical Delegate, his collaborators and those who worked to prepare my Visit in the best possible way. I must leave you, but my heart remains close to this region and to this community. I entrust you all to the Blessed Virgin of the Holy Rosary and I cordially impart the Apostolic Blessing to each one.

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*Before leaving the Shrine of Our Lady of the Rosary at Pompeii, the Holy Father spoke briefly to the faithful:*

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

The time has come for me to say "good-bye" but as I said, in my heart I shall always remain close to you, close to this most beautiful Shrine, to this people full of faith, enthusiasm and charity. Thank you! Let us stay faithful to Our Lady and thus we shall stay faithful to love and to peace. I bless you all in the name of Almighty God, Father, and Son and Holy Spirit. Good-bye until next time! Thank you!

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