

HEIGHTH STRING

THE ROSARY TO THE VIRGIN MARY

BIBLICAL COMMENTARY

From the Gospel according to John (2,1-11)

On the third day there was a wedding at Cana in Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. Jesus also was invited to the wedding with his disciples. When the wine ran out, the mother of Jesus said to him, "They have no wine." And Jesus said to her, "Woman, what does this have to do with me? My hour has not yet come." His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you."

Now there were six stone water jars there for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons. Jesus said to the servants, "Fill the jars with water." And they filled them up to the brim. And he said to them, "Now draw some out and take it to the master of the feast." So they took it. When the master of the feast tasted the water now become wine, and did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew), the master of the feast called the bridegroom and said to him, "Everyone serves the good wine first, and when people have drunk freely, then the poor wine. But you have kept the good wine until now." This, the first of his signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and manifested his glory. And his disciples believed in him.

The wine used in Cana is a new one, a better wine than the previous ones, it is abundant, it is the result of an unprecedented and unexpected generosity. When we read about this first miraculous "sign" as recounted by the Evangelist John, we are encouraged to place it in the perspective of Easter, and this leads us to fix our gaze on the risen Jesus: the new and better wine is Jesus Himself, given after the despair of Calvary. Even the miracle itself, the transformation of water into wine, is to be seen as an Easter gesture, as it speaks of the new life given to us with baptism, of that transformation which makes us children of God.

The maternal presence of Mary which accompanies the life of the Church is presented as the watchful gaze of a mother who "realizes" that the wine has run out. The Virgin is the one who sees, even before we perceive the discomfort and the rupture due to sin or the suffering we encounter: Mary intercedes even before we ourselves turn to Her.

The Prayer Groups are called to a prayer of intercession, which just like Mary at Cana and in the Upper Room, becomes like a prophecy and it anticipates her requests to her Son. It is the mission of our Groups to know how we are to read the signs of the times and of history, to know how to look ahead and invoke the gift of the Spirit, so that the Kingdom of God can grow more and more and give the new wine of the presence of Jesus at all times and at any moment.

Through the category of joy, we can better understand the role that the Virgin Mary played in the life of Padre Pio. The Gospel describes her as the woman who rejoices at God's visit, but also the one who - on the occasion of the wedding at Cana - gets the water transformed into that wine, a sign of messianic joy.

SPIRITUALITY

From a letter from Padre Pio to Father Agostino (Ep. I, pp. 275-276)

My dear Father,

Oh, the lovely month of May! It is the most beautiful month of the year! Yes, my Father, this month is such a vibrant image of the tenderness and beauty of Mary! When I think of the innumerable benefits received from this dear Mother of mine, I am ashamed of myself, for I have never sufficiently appreciated her heart and her hand which bestowed these benefits upon me with so much love. What troubles me most is that I have repaid the affectionate care of this Mother of ours by continually offending her.

How often have I confided the painful anxieties that troubled my heart to my dear Mother! She so very often consoled me! And how did I show her my gratitude? In my greatest sufferings it seems to me that I

no longer have a mother on this earth, but a very compassionate one in heaven. However many times once my heart was at peace, I have forgotten all this almost entirely. I have even forgotten about my duty of gratitude towards this blessed heavenly Mother!

For the month of May has been a month of graces for me always and this year I am hoping just for two. The first is that she should take me to herself, or else, if I am to go on living, that all the consolations of this world be changed into sufferings for me if she can only prevent me from seeing those wicked faces of those...even for once more. The other grace I desire is that she obtains for me. .. you know what I mean, dear Father.

I don't dare ask her for this latter grace, because if it displeased her she would hide her lovely face from me again, as she has done on other occasions.

My dear, poor Mother; you love me so much! Once more I noticed this at the dawn of this beautiful month. What great care you took by walking to the altar by my side this morning. It seemed to me that you had nothing else to think about except myself as you filled my whole heart with sentiments of holy love.

I felt like a mysterious fire in my heart, which I could not understand. I felt the need to put ice on it, to quench this fire which was consuming me.

I wish I had a voice strong enough to encourage the sinners of the whole world to love Our Lady. But since this is not within my power, I have prayed and will pray to my dear angel so that he may perform this task for me.

Your eyes are brighter than the sun

In 1911 Padre Pio was in Venafro to complete his formation after his priestly ordination. After a few days he was seized by violent fevers and Father Agostino of San Marco in Lamis, who was with him, noticed a particular phenomenon: after receiving communion in his cell, he remained alone for thanksgiving and went into ecstasy. Together with the young friars he began to write down Padre Pio's words as he heard them during those visions. One day Padre Pio turned to Our Lady and said: «Ah, Mammina bella, my dear gorgeous Mammina... so you did have eyes and they were so incredibly beautiful!...Jesus was right... yes, you are beautiful... if there were no faith, men would call you a Goddess... your eyes are more resplendent than the sun... you are beautiful, Mommy, I find glory in you, and I love you» (AGOSTINO OF SAN MARCO IN LAMIS, Diary, p. 43).

Padre Pio is placed in the Christian tradition that looks at the Virgin Mary as playing a fundamental role in the whole mystery of Christ: She a sign of the Ark of the Covenant, because she carries the Lord, participates in the mystery of our salvation by suffering the pains of a Mother and pointing to Christ as the only Saviour of the world. She is then enlightened and made glorious by the power of His Resurrection as the first among all believers. For this she receives those titles that best describe the light of God with which she is clothed. When Saint Amedeo from Aosta refers to Her as Queen, he praises her splendour, her outstanding beauty, her holiness deriving from the virtues that the Holy Spirit pours on her.

In her Magnificat the Virgin expresses all her awareness of this mysterious action of God: «My soul magnifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour, because he looked at the humility of his servant. From now on all generations will call me Blessed. The Almighty has done great things for me, holy is His name" (Lk 1:46-48).

Also in the Magnificat Our Lady refers to the first Christian community, the one that lived with Her and assumingly heard from Her own words of the story of God's wonderful action, enlightened by the event of the Resurrection. They heard directly through Our Lady of the work of salvation accomplished from the very first pages of the Old Testament. Our Lady refers to Her humility as God's servant, to the power of God destroying the proud, to the hungry being satisfied and the rich going away empty-handed. These are all part of that one hymn of exaltation of the action of the Lord who defends, lifts up and enriches those who open themselves to him wholeheartedly.

While contemplating on this mystery, Padre Pio wrote the following explanation: «My daughters, in Latin, abjection is called humility, humility-abjection. When in the prayer of the Magnificat ("My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord..."), the most holy Virgin said: "For He has he has looked with favour on his

lowly servant" ("lowly" is sometimes replaced by "humble" in other translations, so Padre Pio would like to make clear that our Lady does not consider Hersefl as humble, on the contrary, as unworthy): Our Lady means to say because He saw my abjection and unworthiness. Nevertheless there is a difference between the virtue of humility and that of abjection, because humility is the recognition of one's abjection. Now the highest degree of humility is not only the acceptance of one's own abjection, but love of it, too. This is what I have recommended you should do» (Ep. III, 570).

Further on in the Epistolary, we can read an even more precise explanation of the concept of abjection and how important it is for believers: «Do not be discouraged nor frightened by your miseries and weaknesses, because God has seen even worse sins in you, and, by His mercy He did not reject you. God does not reject poor sinners and He will not reject you either. On the contrary, He will grant you his grace, and it is exact upon your abjection and iniquities that He will build the throne of his glory». (Ep. III, 996).

Padre Pio encourages us to contemplate our own weaknesses and even the wretchedness of our sin, so that we can understand how the Lord visits us in his mercy. If we welcome Him, He will place «the throne of his glory» within us.

The Virgin Mary is with us on this journey. Padre Pio once said to Father Pellegrino – «she rejoices when she manages to bend God's gaze towards the miseries of her children».

Queen of the Holy Rosary

Every year on the 7th of October, our Groups celebrate the giving of the Rosary. This is the moment when all members commit themselves to celebrating their bond with the Virgin Mary every day, according to the teaching received by Padre Pio. It is well known that he used to constantly hold a rosary in his hands, as if he wanted to give one to everyone. He used to refer to it as to "the weapon".

So as to explain the reason behind this definition, Padre Pio would tell of a dream, which, according to Father Tarcisio da Cervinara, Padre Pio had on the 7th of October, 1916, as soon as he had arrived in San Giovanni Rotondo. «In the dream I was at the window in the choir of the church of San Giovanni Rotondo and an immense crowd was crammed in the square in front of it. On noticing all that endless multitude of people, I peeped out of the window of the choir, and asked: "Who are you? What do you want?". And all that crowd, in chorus, with a massive and deafening voice, shouted out loud: "The death of Padre Pio!". I realized they were all demons! At these words - said Padre Pio - I entered the choir to pray. Our Lady immediately came towards me, and with a heartfelt maternal gaze and with a firm gesture she put a weapon in my hands saying: "With this weapon, you are going to be the winner!". I showed it from the window of the choir and all those people suddenly fell to the ground and remained stunned. I woke up! Then I fell asleep again, - continues Padre Pio -, and I found myself at the same window. Again I saw a large crowd. Surprised, and not without a certain disappointment, I cried out: "Ah! aren't you dead?!" And again I asked, "Who are you?" They answer: "We are Christians!". I said to everyone with relief: "You are children and followers of Jesus! Then come with me! Follow me and be obedient! And no one will ever harm you!". And I added: "Always squeeze Mary's weapon in your hand, and always and everywhere you will have the victory over your infernal enemies".

What this weapon was remained a mystery for some time, until one day Padre Pio, after going to bed, asked his niece's husband, Mario Pennelli: "Take my weapon" and pointed to the pocket of his dress. Mario rummaged around and found a rosary and as he handed it to him he said, a little confused: « I can't find anything, there is only the rosary ». And Padre Pio: "And isn't this a weapon?"

In the last years of his life, from the women's gallery where he used to pray, he looked at the people in the church and would wave down to them, showing the beads to his spiritual sons and daughters. One of the phrases that he repeated most often and that some believe to be his true spiritual testament was precisely this: so before dying, he entrusted his last will to his children: «We love Our Lady. Let us make her feel loved and say the holy rosary that she herself taught us».

According to Bartolo Longo's prayer to Our Lady of Pompeii, the Rosary is the "sweet chain that unites us to God". This is the eighth string, the sweet melody that makes us intercessors to the heart of God, through the heart of Mary.

THOSE SPECIAL BEADS THAT UNITE US WITH GOD

It was Giovanni Bardazzi who asked the question to Padre Pio. "Many say that certain prayers were abolished with the Council, including the rosary, because there are other more modern and incisive ways of praying". The Council had not abolished anything, unfortunately the abuses in the interpretations of the Council were many and frequent. The Fathers were often attributed their own personal views than the sentences that really came from their decisions. Padre Pio listened first, and finally answered, almost moved: «All prayers are good and Holy Mass - which is not just a prayer - is the most important rite. Everyone prays as they want, the important thing is prayer itself. But I must say that the graces I obtained from Our Lady with the rosary, I have never obtained with any other prayers".

A LIFE MADE OF PRAYER

Like all great men of God, Padre Pio himself had become prayer itself, in his body and in his soul. His days were like a living rosary, that is, a continuous meditation and assimilation of the mysteries of Christ in spiritual union with the Virgin Mary. This well explains the singular coexistence in him of many supernatural gifts alongside his human essence.

Everything found its peak in the celebration of Holy Mass. During Mass he was fully united with the dead and risen Lord. From prayer, as from an ever-living source, charity flowed. The love that he carried in his heart and passed on to others was full of tenderness, always attentive to the real situations of individuals and families. This was especially true towards the sick and the suffering, whom he united to the Heart of Christ. This was precisely the origin from which stemmed the great project dedicated to the "relief of suffering". This institution cannot be adequately understood or interpreted if it is separated from its inspiring source, which is evangelical charity, animated and supported by prayer (BENEDICT XVI, Homily during his visit to San Giovanni Rotondo, 21 June 2009).

Prayer for Casa Sollievo della Sofferenza

(House for the Relief of Suffering)

By Father Franco Moscone

O holy and glorious God,
so full of love for your children that you sent your Son to give us life and salvation,
we thank you because the Holy Spirit,
poured out on the Church by Jesus
continues to bring forth brothers and sisters
who put their own existence at the service of the poor,
the suffering and the needy, following the example of Christ.

Through the intercession of Padre Pio,
who carried the signs of Jesus' love on his body, grant to his Work,
the *Casa Sollievo della Sofferenza*,
the grace to be faithful to the charisma of its founder,
so that each one can bring your love to the bed of the sick: make of the Casa a temple of life,
guiding hearts to loyalty and transparency in their actions.

Instill feelings of gratitude and love
in the Prayer Groups and in the devotees of Padre Pio
so that even today they may be the sign of that Providence
which wanted this work as a testimony to all of the boundless trust in the Love and Mercy of God.