

# A Brief History of the Rosary

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# Welcome to Our Family

The Year of Saint Joseph offers a unique lens through which to celebrate the month of October—a month customarily devoted to a renewed appreciation for the Rosary.

Why is Saint Joseph a fitting guide for us as we seek to discover (or rediscover) the Rosary? Saint John Paul II, in his letter on the Rosary, expressed the depth and simplicity of this beloved prayer when he described it as “the school of Mary.” In this school, Mary introduces us to her Son and shares her memories of His life with us. Saint Joseph, the foster-father of Jesus and the husband of Mary, lived in this school more concretely and intimately than anyone else.

In Saint Joseph, every member of your family can find a companion for praying the Rosary. His ceaseless prayer, his tender attentiveness to Jesus and Mary, and his trust in God in the face of obstacles will inspire fathers, mothers, and children to meet the daily joys and challenges of family life with prayer, love, and faith.

This October, enroll your family in the school of Mary! With Saint Joseph as your guide, experience the blessings of praying the Rosary as a family. Family Rosary is here to support you along the way.

## A Little History

*Venerable Patrick Peyton began his ministry in 1942 with the goal of building family unity through daily prayer of the Rosary. Inspired by his own father who had a deep appreciation for family prayer, praying the Rosary became the foundation for the life of Father Peyton (1909-92).*

*We at Family Rosary are ever so grateful Father Peyton's family instilled in him the importance of family prayer. Now it can be part of your family's tradition so you can fulfill Father Peyton's vision, "The Family That Prays Together Stays Together."*



**Family Rosary**

HOLY CROSS  
FAMILY MINISTRIES

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# A Brief History of the Rosary

The Rosary is like the air we breathe or God's grace, it is everywhere! No need to look far to spy it around the necks of Lady Gaga or Mark Wahlberg or dangling from the rearview mirror of countless cars and trucks. Blessed Rosary beads help millions to pray every moment of every day. Rosary devotees hail from different ages, races, ethnicities, cultures, social classes, and lifestyles. Except for the Holy Eucharist, there isn't a more popular or iconic instrument of prayer than the Rosary anywhere on God's good earth.

## Where does it come from and why is it so popular?

The Rosary has existed for over 600 years as an important devotion in Catholic life, perhaps much longer.

The history of the Rosary is an adventure featuring numerous unexpected twists, turns, mysteries and miracles. Since this is a 'brief' history of the Rosary there is no space to share more than the following barebones accounts.

The Rosary's ancient sources range far back to the misty early history of Judaism and Christianity: (1) the 150 Psalms in the Hebrew Scriptures of the Old Testament; (2) the near universal religious practice of keeping track of prayers by counting with beads, pebbles or marks on wood or stone.

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The Psalms emerged from early Hebrew oral traditions and later writings. Observant Jews prayed the psalms especially in the liturgy and in private devotions when Jesus was alive (Jesus prayed them, too!). This practice continued into the early Christian centuries. Monks escaping worldly distractions (or things that made them lose focus) fled to the desert and its tranquility to grow in silent relationship with God. Soon they were praying together in community with Psalms written on scrolls.

Many monks could not read or understand Latin, Greek or Hebrew/Aramaic, the languages of the early Christian Psalms. Most ordinary people were not literate and did not have access to psalm scrolls. Still, they wished to participate in the beautiful, inspiring prayer-life of the early Church. Rather than memorize the 150 Psalms, they began substituting other more common prayers for the Psalms, such as the “Our Father.” They grouped the prayers into sets of 50’s and counted small pebbles to keep track of how many they prayed.

The earliest accounts of the Rosary as we know it today arise around the time of Saint Dominic, {1170-1221}, founder of the order of Preachers. He is called by many the ‘Father of the Rosary’ because he was key to its origin and creation. He was the first to implement the widespread teaching of this sacred devotion. Dominican Friars and many popes share an account of a mystical experience in which Saint Dominic receives a Rosary from the very hands of the Virgin Mary in the year 1208. Dominicans and many others question the authenticity of this account but not Dominic’s role as ‘Father of the Rosary’ devotion.

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Rosary prayer continued growing and evolving through the centuries. In 1571 the Church recognized it as an official prayer following a historic event. In that year, Pope Saint Pius V asked all Christians to pray the Rosary for help in defending Christian Europe from being invaded (or taken over) by Ottoman Turks. At a major engagement at sea, called the Battle of Lepanto, on October 7, the smaller Christian armada unexpectedly and spectacularly triumphed over the much larger Ottoman fleet. With this victory, the Christian people recognized the power of the Rosary. Since then, they have celebrated October 7 annually as the Feast of the Holy Rosary.

Many popes and saints have endorsed the Rosary as a magnificent means of growing spiritually, alone and with others. Among them are Saint Louis de Montfort {1673-1716}. He stands out as a champion of “True Devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary” through the creation of his confraternity of the Rosary.

Pope Leo XIII, 1810-1903, is the greatest champion of the Rosary ever to sit in the Chair of Peter {1878-1903} During his pontificate, he wrote 11 encyclicals on the Rosary, promulgated numerous apostolic letters on the Rosary, and gave countless messages on the Rosary to various dioceses and religious institutes. His Rosary encyclicals contain a summary of all the statements previous popes had made about St. Dominic’s role as the ‘Father of the Rosary’ and the founder of the Confraternity of the Rosary.

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However, Venerable Patrick Peyton, C.S.C. {1909-1992} is preeminent among modern apostles of the Rosary as a devotion able to save the family, the Church and society. He founded the Family Rosary ministry in 1942 reaching around the globe and proclaiming to more than 28 million persons live in huge Rosary rallies that “The family that prays together stays together” and, “A world at prayer is a world at peace.”

Finally, Saint John Paul II {1920-2005} is the great theologian/philosopher/saint who proclaimed in his first week in the Chair of Peter, “The Rosary is my favorite prayer.” John Paul’s Apostolic Exhortation Rosarium Virginis Mariae raised up for all to ponder anew the Rosary as a magnificent instrument of grace endowing it with fresh theological and spiritual heft. He reformed the Rosary for the first time in 500 years by adding the five Luminous Mysteries focused on the public ministry of the Lord Jesus.

**"The Rosary is my favorite prayer.  
A marvelous prayer! Marvelous in  
its simplicity and its depth. "**

*-Pope Saint John Paul II*

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Among the highlights of Pope John Paul's contributions are the following spiritual benefits derived from the Rosary:

1. The Rosary is the School of Mary,
2. The Rosary is a Christ-centered prayer,
3. The Rosary is a powerful way to contemplate the Face of Christ,
4. The Rosary is a memorial by which Mary constantly sets before us the mysteries of her Son,
5. The Rosary is an invaluable source of self-discovery and integration,
6. The Rosary is a sublime encounter of Friendship,
7. The Rosary unites us to the bond between Jesus and Mary,
8. The Rosary is a supreme source of comfort and solace,
9. The Rosary is a condensed version of the Gospels.

To summarize the contributions of Pope John Paul to our understanding of the history of the Rosary, consider his phrase that the Rosary is a "simple yet profound" way for people of all ages to walk through the events {Mysteries} in the life of Christ, guided by the pure love and sure confidence of Mary, our Mother.

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On a personal note, I benefit from two profound aspects of the Rosary: First, as Romano Guardini says, “To pray the Rosary is to linger in the domain of Mary.” Mary is truly our Mother and she blesses us with her maternal love and joy every time we invoke her assistance in the Rosary. Second, Praying the Rosary before celebrating the Eucharist is the best preparation I know to focus on our Lord and His Mystical Body, the Church. The Rosary helps to clear away distractions and open my heart to the Holy Spirit’s fire and love in the Mass. Praying the Rosary before Mass has enhanced my entire being.

-Father Wilfred J. Raymond, C.S.C.

O Jesus, living in Mary,  
come and live in Your servants,  
In the spirit of holiness,  
In the fullness of Your power,  
In the perfection of Your ways,  
In the truth of Your virtues,  
In the communion of Your mysteries.  
Rule over every adverse power in Your Spirit  
for the glory of the Father.  
Amen.

*Jean-Jacques Olier, S.S.*



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**This October, the Month of the Rosary, “Go to Joseph.”**

Grow in the faith with your family.

For a wealth of daily prayer resources for you and your family, join our Global Prayer Campaign filled with videos, eBooks, podcasts, prayers, reflections, and social posts—everything you need for a rich, faith-filled month.

**Keep an eye on:**

Family Rosary@ [familyrosary.org](mailto:familyrosary.org)

Catholic Mom@ [catholicmom.com](mailto:catholicmom.com)

Museum of Family Prayer@ [museumoffamilyprayer.com](mailto:museumoffamilyprayer.com)

and on our Facebook and Instagram sites too!

**#IteadJoseph #YearOfStJoseph #StJoseph**

**#GoToJoseph #RosaryMonth**



## Bringing Families Together In Prayer

We hope the time you’ve spent reflecting with this material has been enriching. Continue to pray with your family every day, wherever you are.

For additional online resources for family prayer including additional e-books and the mobile Rosary App, please visit our website at [www.FamilyRosary.org](http://www.FamilyRosary.org).

This e-book and all our resources represent a culmination of Father Peyton’s passion for family unity through prayer. We hope our services will enhance your family’s prayer life particularly remembering Father Peyton’s famous words, “The family that prays together stays together.”

The family that prays together stays together

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