

In Defense of the Rosary

Background

It is my personal opinion that we are entering a new time in history and it is likely we will see the triumph of Mary, the Mother of God, as foretold. This triumph will not come without turmoil and our role in it could demand a greater perseverance than previously encountered.

As the enemies of God see defeat on the horizon, their resistance will increase. Their objections will become more apparent and better defined.

For us as Dominicans, as preachers of the rosary, the rosary will surely be one of their targets. Personally, I have experienced a particular vein of attack from casual acquaintances and even family as I recommend prayer to them especially the rosary. Several will say that “praying on beads is done by many individuals and faiths so what is new with the rosary”.

It is this avenue of objection that is addressed by Fr. Skelly in his articles and which we address here. The objections to the origin of the rosary which were directed at Fr Skelly originated in the “Catholic Encyclopedia”. For those of you not too familiar with this encyclopedia and encyclopedias in general I point out that the content is much like Wikipedia. It is written by “contributors” who are supposedly experts in the subject matter. The publication then assembles this “knowledge” and publishes it as “fact”. The writer who challenges the origin of the rosary also objects to the origins of the brown scapular and the house of Loreto. Much of the objections are based on the work of the Bollandists (Jesuit scholars), who engaged themselves in trying to trace, to its source, the origin of current traditions.

Fr Skelly takes up this issue with comments made within the encyclopedia concerning the rosary and its origin. It really is of very little importance of where the rosary originated. More importantly is its value before God. That being said some people we speak to may find it difficult to begin praying the rosary if they feel its origin is strictly an evolution of old prayers.

Objection #1- Many religions use beads

1. The use of pebbles and knotted rope was used for millennia to count prayers.
 - a. Chains of beads traces back over 40,000 to 120,000 years, beginning with our ancestors’ stringing shells, bones, and stones for personal adornment and spiritual rituals. Over millennia, these functional ornaments evolved into status symbols, early currency. It clearly aides in counting.
 - b. Yes, and they still do this today. – but the rosary JOINS a vocal and element together with specific prayers and meditations on historical events. The fact that a cord s used indicates the simplicity that Mary uses to promote this devotion.
2. Father Skelly admits that the practice of counting 150 Hail Mary’s or Aves can be shown to be older than Saint Dominic's time is true but not with the meditations and purpose that St Dominic preached.

Objection #2- Was St Dominic the founder of the Rosary?

1. Basis: no single verifiable passage has yet been produced which speaks of the Rosary as instituted by St. Dominic, or which even make “much” of the devotion as one specifically dear to his children."
 - a. This is untrue. First printed publications in 1250 AD were rare as the printing press was not invented until 1440, so records would only have been handwritten. And there are written records of the rosary in monasteries at the time.
 - b. In a biography of Blessed Clara Gambacorta (1362) taken from a manuscript belonging to the Convent of St. Dominic at Pisa, is to be found, “she frequently gathered around her bands of young girls, and after making them be seated around her would first read to them from a pious work, and then, when their hearts were thus moved to piety, she would bid them, sometimes to sing the praises of God, and at other times say the Rosary on their knees.”
 - c. Fr. Francis Willam, in his book THE ROSARY, ITS HISTORY AND MEANING (p. 26), speaks of the “Confraternity of Prayer” founded by the Dominicans in Piacenza in 1259 (38 years after the death of St.

Dominic), the members of which also prayed the 150 HAIL MARYS daily. Fr. Benedict Ashly, O.P. speaks of this Militia as having been founded by a Dominican Bishop of Breganza who died in 1271.

- d. At any rate, we have the Marian Psalter actively employed during the life of St. Dominic and shortly after. In this we have the 150 HAIL MARYS which constitute the “body” of the Rosary, i.e., the vocal prayer. What is wanting is the “soul” of the Rosary, i.e., the praying of these Hail Marys joined with reflection on the mysteries of our salvation. And yet, as Fr. Ciappi pointed out, a common method of preaching of St. Dominic was to preach on the life of Christ, interspersing his reflections with the Marian Psalter.
2. Papal tradition is given utterance to in no less than 214 bulls, decrees, and encyclicals, the acts of no fewer than 39 Popes. Several popes and many encyclicals refer to St Dominic receiving the rosary, including Leo X, St. Pius V, Gregory XIII, Sixtus V, Clement VI, Alexander VII, Innocent XI, Clement XI, Innocent XIII, and Benedict XIII.
3. Tradition does hold that St. Dominic (d. 1221) devised the Rosary as we know it. Moved by a vision of our Blessed Mother, he preached the use of the Rosary in his missionary work among the Albigensians, who had denied the mystery of Christ’s incarnation
4. Many written documents were destroyed during rebellions of the Middle Ages are apt to be obscured by the fact that so many documents have been lost, especially during the ravages of the Black Plague.”

THE EVOLUTION OF THE ROSARY

We have to keep in mind that over the centuries there has been a considerable evolution in the form that this devotion called the Rosary has taken. We have to remember that in the time of St. Dominic:

1. The **HAIL MARY** did not exist as we pray it today. Only the first half of it was then used. The word JESUS was not added until the 14th century, and the second half of the prayer came later still.
2. The **OUR FATHER** and the **GLORY BE TO THE FATHER** were not then part of the Rosary.
3. The **Mysteries of the Rosary** were not fixed as they are now. Even in the 15th century in the time of ALAN DE RUPE, O.P., who was responsible for the revival of the Rosary devotion 250 years after the time of St. Dominic, the Rosary he preached was the **Marian Psalter** of 150 Hail Marys and 150 mysteries. These were divided into three groups of fifties dedicated to the Joyful, Sorrowful and Glorious mysteries. The fifteen mysteries in use today were officially established by Pope Pius V in 1569.
4. There was **no pendant** (the cross and five extra beads) as we have now.
5. The very word “**Rosary**” taken from the Latin word “*rosarium*” meaning rose garden, or bouquet of roses, was not used in the time of Dominic as applied to this devotion. So obviously there would be no reference to that term in documents of his time.

ALAN DE RUPE (aka Blessed Alan)

1. Alan de Rupe (also Alan de la Roche) (1428-1475) was a great apostle of the Rosary.
2. Wrote his APOLOGIA for the Rosary, and preached in widely spread places. He founded the Rosary Confraternity in 1470 in Douai, and did much to popularize the Rosary.
3. Mentioned in the 54 day Rosary Novena Book
4. Some years after the death of St. Dominic, the devotion of the Rosary (as he promoted it) began to decline. Among the causes of the decline were the great plague of the Black Death which swept through Europe wiping out great portions of the population, and the great Western Schism . The devotion did not completely disappear, and much of its resurgence can be attributed to Blessed Alan.
5. Jesus famously appeared to Blessed Alan de la Roche (a 15th-century Dominican theologian) while he was saying Mass. Speaking directly from the Sacred Host, Jesus rebuked Alan for his reluctance to preach the Holy Rosary, warning him that his inaction was spiritually "crucifying" Him again. This miraculous encounter, famously recorded by St. Louis de Montfort, served as a massive turning point for Blessed Alan. After this vision, Alan dedicated his life to preaching and reviving the Confraternity of the Holy Rosary

Our next meeting will be a sharing of faith experiences