

## *Commemoration of the Holy Rosary of the Virgin Mary*

October 7, 2020 + Church of the Ascension, Chicago

The Very Rev. Patrick Raymond

Today's particular mass commemoration, the Holy Rosary of the Blessed Virgin Mary, is one with which, I admit, I have had little past familiarity. Unsurprisingly, this commemoration is *not* found in the calendar of the 1979 Book of Common Prayer, nor in any of the Episcopal Church's several subsequent calendar revisions.

Until I did a little digging, I would have guessed that this feast would have dated from the 1950s and the papacy of Pius XII. He is popularly remembered for promulgating Marian dogmas such as the Immaculate Conception, her bodily Assumption into heaven and her heavenly Queenship.

In fact, however, the feast of Our Lady of the Rosary far predates Pius XII, originating 400 years prior, in the papacy of Pius V. Pius had instructed Catholics everywhere to pray the rosary for the victory of Catholic troops at war with Ottoman Empire forces. Today's commemoration arose from a decisive 1571 naval victory in the Ionian Sea, the Battle of Lepanto. Who knew?

Leaving aside for the moment theological questions about prayers for military victories that result in tragic bloodshed and death, the 1571 date of the Battle of Lepanto reminds us today that the rosary has been prayed for centuries. And, in fact, according to religious legend, a vision of the rosary was given to Saint Dominic 350 years before the Battle of Lepanto, in 1214. (Not surprisingly, the vision came by way of an apparition of the Virgin Mary.) Historians now believe that forms of the rosary were actually being prayed in the 9<sup>th</sup> century, eleven hundred years before our own time.

We Anglicans are not nearly as consistent as our Roman Catholic brothers and sisters in terms of the place of the rosary in our early faith formation or our experiences of it if we came to the Episcopal Church as adults.

**Some of us** are native to the rosary, either because we were raised Roman Catholic or because praying the rosary, even the first time as adults, felt like coming home.

**Some of us** discover or have long known that praying the rosary can put us in what I might informally describe as a blessed zone of contemplation. Others look on, dumbstruck, wondering what all the fuss is about.

**Some of us** approach the rosary as a theological problem to be answered or solved. Others of us wonder *why question?* Or, maybe, the questions recede as we pray the rosary and experience that distinctive and blessed sense that Our Lady is with us, and alongside us.

Whatever role or roles we attribute to her, whatever theology or category or rationale, whatever words we do or do not use to describe the rosary, we often *know* that when we pray it, or because we have prayed it, Mary is with us and alongside us for our good.

If I may go out on a limb, I wonder if I may say of the rosary what we Episcopalians often say of Sacramental Confession, that is, *none must, all may, some should*. I might mix it up a bit and say *all* are welcome by Our Lady to take part; *none* should feel shamed if they are not edified by it. And then there are the *some*, some of us who do feel we *must*. Today's commemoration, I suppose, is mainly for those of us who feel we *must*. *Hail Mary. Amen.*