New look at how expanded Rosary offers refuge from din and strain of modern life

SAN FRANCISCO, July 28, 2003 – When Pope John Paul II reminded the world last year of the importance and power of the Rosary by adding five Luminous Mysteries to this centuries-old devotional prayer and proclaiming Oct. 2002 through Oct. 2003 as “The Year of the Rosary,” Fr. Benedict Groeschel, C.F.R. – the popular Catholic-priest speaker, psychologist, author, spiritual advisor and frequent guest on TV and radio worldwide – followed the Pope’s lead and developed a fresh look at reintroducing the Rosary’s meaning, history and mysteries for the embattled people of modern times.

The Rosary: Chain of Hope (Ignatius Press, June 2003) is a spectacular 170-page softcover volume containing profound meditations on all 20 mysteries of the Rosary, focusing on the theme of hope. Fr. Groeschel devotes a full chapter to explaining the history and origination of the Rosary – encompassing his own personal insights and experience as well as the grand traditions of the Church – and ending the book with the complete text of the Pope’s new Apostolic Letter on the Rosary, Rosarium Virginis Mariae. Each of the 20 inspiring meditations is lavishly illustrated with a full-color Renaissance painting.

Fr. Groeschel, founder of the Franciscan Friars of the Renewal, actually wrote the book while recuperating in bed from an illness.

“For some time, I’ve felt that we’ve lost a good deal of strength in the Catholic Church because we’ve lost a sense of devotion, such as through praying the Rosary,” says Fr. Groeschel. “People don’t really know what devotion to the Rosary means, and so it has gradually fallen out of practice. But the Rosary is among the more valuable aspects of the Catholic religion because it gets at the very core of people,” he says. Groeschel explains that because devotions like the Rosary intertwine the whole essence of a person – intelligence, emotion and heart – they invite him into a very deep interior recollection, meditation, and heartfelt expression of his feelings and emotions, even amidst the very disturbing circumstances of modern life.

As the Pope explains in Rosarium Virginis Mariae, “… Mary lived with her eyes fixed on Christ, treasuring His every word…” and those memories led her to always reflect on the moments of her life at her Son’s side … they were to become the “rosary” which she recited uninterruptedly throughout her life. In the recitation of the Rosary – now made more complete with the addition of the Luminous Mysteries highlighting
events during Christ’s public ministry – the Pope says “…this addition of these new mysteries…is meant to give it fresh life and to enkindle renewed interest in the Rosary’s place within Christian spirituality as a true doorway to the depths of the Heart of Christ, ocean of joy and of light, of suffering and of glory.”

Above all, the Rosary invites the faithful to pray to Christ through Mary and her intercession. This prayer-mindset is perhaps among those that sets Catholicism apart from other Christian traditions, and yet, sets it up for scorn and criticism. But the Rosary is essentially a “Gospel prayer,” drawing the person praying it into a deeper contemplation of the great mysteries in the life of Christ.

“And after all,” says Fr. Groeschel, “Our Lady, in her apparitions at Lourdes and Fatima, requested us to pray the Rosary.” And so the faithful should, he says.

Because repetitive prayer such as in the Rosary can be healing for the soul, says Fr. Groeschel, in desperate moments people can find the Rosary to be a lifeline. He mentions the recently discovered fact that Mother Teresa – who will be beatified in October 2003 – lived through decades of deep spiritual darkness and clung to the Rosary as a place of devotion and refuge.

“We live in a time when large numbers of people have lost any sense of mystery …and a time when many have lost almost all sense of hope,” says Fr. Groeschel. “It is important, therefore, to reaffirm today the mysteries of Christ … and to plumb things that are ultimately unfathomable….And we will kneel in awe and appreciation of the little that we do know through divine revelation of the transcendent mysteries of God.”

Pope John Paul II has been the Pontiff of hope, says Groeschel, pointing out that this Pope has written extensively on the subject of hope. So it stands to reason, he says, that if Mary is the icon of hope in a world losing its grip on that, “…those who are accustomed to praying for the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary know that she, as the Mother of our Savior, is truly our life, our sweetness, and our hope.”

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