

Decades of Mystery, Circle of Joy

A Rosary Prayer and Meditation

Overview

This prayer uses the traditional form of the rosary to connect the prayer tradition of the church, the life of Mary, and the global experiences of girls and women. It involves short meditations on the Joyful Mysteries, placed in a contemporary context. This prayer is suitable for girls ages fourteen to eighteen. However if you are doing it with younger girls, review the alternative approaches at the end for ways to do the prayer that respect their attention span and developmental status.

Preparation

- Ask the girls to bring their own rosary or one that belongs to a family member. As an alternative, purchase an inexpensive rosary for each girl.
- Set up a simple prayer table with a candle and a globe. If you are providing the rosaries, add them to the prayer space.

Procedure

1. If the girls brought their own rosaries, invite them to show off their rosary and briefly explain the history of it. For example, some girls may have a rosary that they got for their first Eucharist, others may have brought their mother's rosary, and so forth.

2. As a way of reviewing the traditional rosary and explaining the method of this version of the prayer, make the following comments in your own words:

- The rosary is a circle of individual beads, a form that is reflected in the girls' circle around the prayer table. The circle is the preferred form of gathering among women of all ages and all cultures.
- The traditional rosary has five decades, that is, five sets of ten beads. Each bead represents one Hail Mary. The decades are separated by single beads that each represent one Lord's Prayer.
- The recitation of the rosary is accompanied by meditation on the mysteries of Jesus' life, death, and Resurrection and his mother's role in his life. The mysteries are divided into three sets and are known as the Joyful, Sorrowful, and Glorious Mysteries.

- The rosary we are going to say will take one set of mysteries, the Joyful Mysteries, and use the events in Mary's life as a way of connecting girls and women throughout the world. The five mysteries and their contemporary connections are listed here:
 1. *The Annunciation*: the mystery of answering God's call
 2. *The Visitation*: the mystery of connectedness among girls and women throughout the world
 3. *The Nativity*: the mystery and miracle of birth in all its forms
 4. *The Presentation of Jesus in the Temple and the Purification of Mary*: the mysteries of letting go and surrendering
 5. *The Finding of Jesus in the Temple*: the mystery of losing what is dear to us, only to discover something new

3. Light the candle. Slowly spin the globe if you are able to do so. Invite the girls to center themselves in God's presence, becoming mindful of girls and women throughout the world as the globe spins slowly.

Then lead the girls in the recitation of the rosary, following the process outlined below. You may want to have the girls themselves read the prayers, each girl taking one prayer or one decade.

Conducting the Rosary Prayer

Leader: *[Ask the girls to hold the cross in their hands.]*

We begin with the prayer known as the Sign of the Cross. It speaks of our rootedness in the God who created us, redeemed us, and continues to guide and inspire us to holiness. *[Lead the girls in making the Sign of the Cross.]*

The next prayer of the rosary is the Apostles' Creed, a sign of our connection with the Apostles and with all the women and men who followed Jesus during his earthly ministry, those who worked together to build the early church, and those who continue to do God's work today. *[Lead the girls in reciting the Apostles' Creed.]*

I believe in God, the Father Almighty, creator of heaven and earth. I believe in Jesus Christ, his only son, our Lord. He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit, and born of the Virgin Mary. He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried. He descended to the dead. On the third day he rose again. He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy Catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and life everlasting. Amen.

The creed is followed by the Lord's Prayer, the prayer of Jesus to the God he called Abba. We recite this prayer as a sign of oneness with Jesus and in solidarity with all Christians throughout the world. *[Lead the girls in reciting the Lord's Prayer.]*

Our Father who art in heaven
hallowed be thy name;
thy kingdom come,
thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread
and forgive us our trespasses
as we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil. Amen.

The next prayer is the Hail Mary, a prayer honoring the woman who said yes to God's call and gave birth to God's son—all while she was about the age of a first-year student in an American high school. She supported Jesus throughout his ministry, was there when he died, celebrated his Resurrection, and carried on his work after he ascended into heaven. *[Lead the girls in reciting three Hail Marys.]*

Hail Mary, full of grace,
the Lord is with you;
blessed are you among women,
and blessed is the fruit of your womb, Jesus.

Holy Mary, Mother of God,
pray for us sinners
now and at the hour of our death.
Amen.

The next prayer is the prayer of praise known as the Glory Be. It is an acknowledgement that God always was, still is, and always will be present in the world. It reflects our belief that God is all. *[Lead the girls in reciting the Glory Be.]*

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, as it was in the beginning is now, and will be forever. Amen.

The First Joyful Mystery: The Annunciation

Leader: We contemplate and celebrate the mystery of answering God's call. Mary's "yes" to God changed the world. The "yes" that God invites us to each day continues her work of bringing God to the world. How will you make God known today? *Our Father* . . .

1. We pray for the women who bring God to their children and their children's children by loving them totally and unconditionally. *Hail Mary* . . .
2. We pray for all the girls and women who bring God to the world by choosing life over death, birth over abortion. *Hail Mary* . . .
3. We pray for all the girls and women who sit in circles today, bringing God to one another. *Hail Mary* . . .
4. We pray for all the women who bring God to the world by mentoring and guiding girls to a life of holiness. *Hail Mary* . . .
5. We pray for all girls and women in the world who pray in churches, synagogues, temples, and other places of worship. *Hail Mary* . . .
6. We pray for girls and women who bring God to the places where grave injustices exist. *Hail Mary* . . .
7. We pray for girls and women who say yes to God by challenging leaders everywhere to recognize and abolish all forms of sexism. *Hail Mary* . . .
8. We pray for girls and women who bring God to the world as members of religious communities of women who are committed to sharing and living the Gospel. *Hail Mary* . . .
9. We pray for girls and women whose selfless compassion for others is a reflection of God's love for the world. *Hail Mary* . . .
10. We pray for all the girls and women in the world who joyfully announce and celebrate God's presence by their very being. *Hail Mary* . . .

For the courage to continue bringing God to the world we pray in faith, hope, and joy. *Glory Be* . . .

The Second Joyful Mystery: The Visitation

Leader: We contemplate and celebrate the mystery of connectedness among girls and women throughout the world. We are sisters, we are friends. We share the same joys, struggles, and hopes. We share the promise of possibility. As Elizabeth did, we open our hearts to one another in love and support. To whom will you open your heart today? *Our Father* . . .

1. We pray for our sisters—the girl your age someplace in America who is giving birth right now and the one who is having an abortion. *Hail Mary* . . .
2. We pray for our sisters—the girl your age in Central America who is making a new dress right now and the one who is sifting through a garbage dump for an article of clothing. *Hail Mary* . . .
3. We pray for our sisters—the girl your age in Africa who is dying of AIDS and the one who is celebrating her entry into womanhood with her family and friends. *Hail Mary* . . .
4. We pray for our sisters—the girl your age in Asia who is working as a prostitute and the one who is out having fun with her friends. *Hail Mary* . . .
5. We pray for our sisters—the girl your age in Europe who is experiencing abuse and the one who is praying for an end to such atrocities. *Hail Mary* . . .
6. We pray for our sisters—the girl your age in the middle East who is covering every inch of her body with the prescribed dress and the one who risks death by fighting for her rights. *Hail Mary* . . .
7. We pray for our sisters—the girl your age in Serbia who is planning her future and the one who tries to recover from the ravages of war. *Hail Mary* . . .
8. We pray for our sisters—the girl your age in Israel who is talking to her grandmother and the one who mourns for the family she has lost. *Hail Mary* . . .
9. We pray for our sisters—the girl your age in China who is studying for an exam and the one who works in a rice field with no hope for an education. *Hail Mary* . . .
10. We pray for our sisters—the girl your age somewhere in the world who is dreaming great dreams and the one who can see only hopelessness and despair. *Hail Mary* . . .

For all our sisters around the world with whom we dance the dance of life, we pray in faith, hope, and joy. *Glory Be* . . .

The Third Joyful Mystery: The Nativity

Leader: We contemplate and celebrate the mystery and miracle of birth and honor girls and women who give birth to ideas, nourish life, and nurture dreams. To what will you give life today? *Our Father* . . .

1. We celebrate with gratitude the women who gave birth to each of us and those who gave birth to them. *Hail Mary* . . .
2. We celebrate with gratitude the women and girls who grow our food by working in fields as migrant workers. *Hail Mary* . . .
3. We celebrate with gratitude the women and girls who enrich our life with all forms of creative and performing arts. *Hail Mary* . . .
4. We celebrate with gratitude the women and girls who give birth to ideas that will change the world. *Hail Mary* . . .
5. We celebrate with gratitude the women and girls who heal others in mind and body with their touch, their words, and their gentle care. *Hail Mary* . . .
6. We celebrate with gratitude the women and girls who welcome us with open arms. *Hail Mary* . . .
7. We celebrate with gratitude the women and girls who care for children in day-care centers and homes. *Hail Mary* . . .
8. We celebrate with gratitude the women and girls who teach others by their words and example what it means to be human and holy. *Hail Mary* . . .
9. We celebrate with gratitude the women and girls who use their voices to make the world a better place for all people. *Hail Mary* . . .
10. We celebrate with gratitude the women and girls who give life, nurture life, and sustain life. *Hail Mary* . . .

For all those who harbor miracles within them, we pray in faith, hope, and joy. *Glory Be* . . .

**The Fourth Joyful Mystery:
The Presentation of Jesus in the Temple and the Purification of Mary**

Leader: We contemplate and celebrate the mystery of letting go of those things that are not ours to hold on to as well as the need to overcome the things that hold us back from the fullness of life. What do you need to let go of today? *Our Father* . . .

1. We ask for courage to let go of our desire for material things in the midst of our cluttered life. *Hail Mary* . . .
2. We ask for confidence in our friends and family to give them the freedom that they need. *Hail Mary* . . .
3. We ask for strength to raise our voices in defiance of injustice. *Hail Mary* . . .
4. We ask for courage to let go of our need to be always right, always perfect, or always the best. *Hail Mary* . . .
5. We ask for fortitude to let go of our addictions to drugs, alcohol, tobacco, or anything else that does harm. *Hail Mary* . . .
6. We ask for a spirit of openness and fairness to dissolve our cliques and open our circles to include everyone. *Hail Mary* . . .
7. We ask for the gift of reconciliation so that we can make ourselves right with everyone and with God. *Hail Mary* . . .
8. We ask for humility so that we may recognize our limitations and welcome all experiences that will help us to live richer, deeper lives. *Hail Mary* . . .
9. We ask for open eyes so that we may always see the beauty that exists in all people, in all of nature, in all of life. *Hail Mary* . . .
10. We ask for the wisdom to surrender ourselves to God, totally and completely. *Hail Mary* . . .

For the dedication to a life of holiness and wholeness, we pray in faith, hope, and joy. *Glory Be* . . .

The Fifth Joyful Mystery: The Finding of Jesus in the Temple

Leader: We contemplate and celebrate the mystery of losing what is dear to us, only to discover a new realization, a new experience, a new relationship, a new dream. What have you lost lately? What have you found? *Our Father* . . .

1. We ask God's blessings on the women and girls who have lost their home. May they find a new start in a community that welcomes them. *Hail Mary* . . .
2. We ask God's blessings on the women and girls who have lost mothers, fathers, daughters, and sons. May they find peace in their memories. *Hail Mary* . . .
3. We ask God's blessings on the women and girls who have lost their sense of self. May they have the courage to reclaim their very being. *Hail Mary* . . .
4. We ask God's blessings on the women and girls who have lost close friends. May they be humble enough to seek reconciliation. *Hail Mary* . . .
5. We ask God's blessings on the women and girls who have lost their dreams. May they find the strength to dream again. *Hail Mary* . . .
6. We ask God's blessings on the women and girls who have lost their truth. May they know again that truth that is God. *Hail Mary* . . .
7. We ask God's blessings on the women and girls who have lost their voice. May they reclaim the power that is rightfully theirs. *Hail Mary* . . .
8. We ask God's blessings on the women and girls who have lost their self-respect. May they look deep inside themselves to find all that is good and holy. *Hail Mary* . . .
9. We ask God's blessings on those women and girls whose heart is broken. May they find peace in the comfort of friends. *Hail Mary* . . .
10. We ask God's blessings on the women and girls who have lost their way to God. May they find a path that will bring them face-to-face with the divine. *Hail Mary* . . .

For the determination to seek the truth in usual and unusual places, we pray in faith, hope, and joy. *Glory Be* . . .

This prayer service is loosely based on the book *Circle of Mysteries: The Woman's Rosary Book*, by Christin Lore Weber (Saint Paul, MN: Yes International Publishers, 1997).

Additional and Alternative Approaches

- Decorate the prayer space with pictures of girls and women from different cultures. You might also provide a tablecloth, and have the girls attach pictures to the cloth before draping it over the prayer table.
- If the girls brought their own rosaries, ask them to place their rosary in the prayer space after they share the history of it. Say a short prayer of thanksgiving and blessing over the rosaries before beginning the rosary prayer.
- Create similar rosary prayers based on the Sorrowful and Glorious Mysteries. Divide the girls into small groups and assign each group one of the mysteries. Ask them to work together to write ten short prayers that reflect the theme of the mystery and connect them to girls and women around the world.
- If you are working with younger girls, you may want to do one decade a day, because their attention span and developmental stage might make saying an entire rosary in a meaningful way difficult to do.
No matter what age-group you work with, if you have a limited amount of time, this prayer will work well when the decades are done separately.
- Several religious craft books and catalogs provide instructions for making rosaries. Consider having the girls make their own rosary and then use them for prayer. You also might have them make a rosary bracelet, that is, ten beads on string or leather cord that can be worn around the wrist. Another way to do it is to string five beads on the bracelet, each representing one decade.
- To shorten the prayer, read each introductory paragraph, followed by a recitation of the Lord's Prayer. Then have the girls read the ten short prayers consecutively, followed by a recitation of the Hail Mary and the Glory Be. They can use their rosary to keep track of the ten prayers, but a rosary is not necessary with this method.
- For another approach to saying the rosary, check out "A Justice Rosary" on page 73 in *Justice and Service Ideas for Ministry with Young Teens*, by Joseph Grant. The book is part of the HELP series, a collection of Heads-up, Easy, Low-Cost, and Purposeful ideas to use with young adolescents. Many of the ideas are useful with older teens also.

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