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The Story Of The Rosary

It is generally believed that the Rosary was given to the world through St. Dominic about the year 1216. Actually, the use of "beads" as a means of counting prayers was common long before that date. Nor is it even a Christian discovery; for this method of counting prayers was employed by the Mohammedans, Buddhists, and other pagan sects. The word "bead" is simply the past participle of the Saxon word, biddan, which means "to pray." When the custom sprang up of counting prayers by means of pebbles or dried berries loosely joined together, the word "bead" was applied to the counting instrument, which was called a "bead-string" or simply "the beads." There have been many controversies regarding the origin and institution of the Rosary as we know it today. The claim that it was first given to the world by St. Dominic has papal approbation. Whatever the origin, the Popes, from Alexander IV down to Pope Pius XII in our own day, have constantly urged the devotion of the Rosary. Since the time of Pope Alexander IV, more than 200 papal documents have been issued concerning the Rosary. They clearly ascribe to St. Dominic the institution of the Rosary for the Universal Church.

Perils that come from the East are no new thing. Today, with the dangers that threaten the Church from behind the Iron Curtain, we can still trust in Our Lady's intercession and protection; more than once in the past she has preserved the Christian world from being swamped by hordes from the East.

St. Pius V had to content with just such a threat as Pius XII. The Turks, and that meant Mohammedanism, were practically at the gates of Rome; they had attacked Malta and the neighboring islands. St. Pius V called on Catholic countries to organize a fleet to drive them back. But he did not stop there. He called, too, on the confraternities of the Rosary everywhere to pray for the Christian cause. On Sunday, October 7, 1571, as the battle between the opposing fleets raged, processions of the Rosary took place in many towns, particularly in Rome; the Pope was on his knees in his private chapel; the prayer of the Rosary stormed heaven from all sides. St. Pius's confidence in Our Lady's intercession was not disappointed. For that same Sunday, when most of Europe was at prayer, Don John of Austria in command of the Christian fleet won a resounding victory over the Turks under Selim, "a victory won," says the Roman Breviary, "not so much by arms as by prayers."

News traveled slowly in those days but before the glad tidings of the victory of Lepanto filtered through to Rome, St. Pius was rewarded for his confidence in Mary, Queen of the Rosary; for that same Sunday afternoon the result of the battle was miraculously revealed to him. It is in gratitude for the victory of Lepanto that still every year on October 7, we keep the Feast of the Rosary.

A Long, Long Trip

Tomorrow evening, at 7:30 in Sacred Heart Church, you are invited to witness the Departure Ceremony of the Holy Cross missionaries -- priests, Brothers, and Sisters -- for Bengal. Each autumn, a little group of Notre Dame men and women with brave hearts and a great love for God, turn their eyes from the campus, and home, and all that is dear to the human heart -- to set their sights on a goal that holds the poorest of God's poor. For a hundred years Notre Dame men have gone forth unflinchingly into their vineyard. Who knows, the sacrifices of these men and women missionaries might well account for much of the success that has crowned our efforts here at Notre Dame! Remember them in your prayers -- that God may keep them from loneliness, and sickness, and make their days on His frontier fruitful ones.

Ill: Aunt of Jim Feld of Dillon; wife of Lee Dondanville, '52 (operation).