

ON THE HAIL MARY AND THE ROSARY

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QUESTION FIFTY-SEVENTH

On the recitation of prayers to the Virgin Mary in a determined number.

Jesuit Doctor:

Is it lawful to greet the Virgin Mary with a determined number of prayers?

Catholic Papist:

The Hail Mary, with which we greet the Virgin, is composed partly of the words of the angel Gabriel, partly of those of Saint Elizabeth, and partly of those added by the Church. It is holy to imitate the angels, follow the saints, and obey the Church. In this very prayer there is nothing to reproach or criticize. Only that phrase, “pray for us, Virgin Mary,” sounds harsh to the ears of the reformers, but for all antiquity it was sweet and gentle as honey. Saint Augustine says in his meditations: “Holy and immaculate Virgin, Mother of God Mary, Mother of our Lord Jesus Christ, deign to intercede before Him for me, of whom you were made His holy temple.” Saint Athanasius, in his *De sancta Deipara*, affirms: “Mary, Mother of God, is rightly greeted as lady of the world, mistress of the universe and queen of all; therefore, the Church invokes and honors her more than all the saints, commonly calling her ‘the most holy of the saints’.”

Some criticize the use of a fixed number of salutations, arguing that we should not invoke God and the saints a determined number of times. However, the number is not superstitious nor prohibited by God. His infinite goodness created all things with measure, number, and weight (Wisdom 11:21). Elisha ordered Naaman to wash seven times in the Jordan (2 Kings 5). David praised God seven times a day (Psalm 119:164). Daniel prayed three times a day confessing his sins (Daniel

¹ André Rivet (1582-1637) was a prominent Reformed scholastic theologian.

² The original Latin text can be consulted at:

<https://books.google.com.pe/books?id=wDZpAAAACAAJ&hl=es&pg=PA712#v=onepage&q&f=false>

6:10). Ezra and the people invoked God four times a day and night (2 Esdras 9:3). Thus it is seen that in numbers there are great mysteries. The prophet Elisha said to King Joash: "If you had struck the ground five, six or seven times, you would have completely defeated Assyria" (2 Kings 13:19).

If when praying the Rosary we frequently repeat the angelic salutation, are we doing wrong? Why do you reproach us? A good work, the more it is repeated, the better it is. Giving alms three or four times is better than just once. By repeatedly asking the Virgin to intercede for us before her Son, we honor both the Mother and the Son. When we direct our prayers to the saints, we ask them to act as messengers and mediators, offering them to God — the only end of our happiness — whom we all look to.

Orthodox Catholic:

1. If the Hail Mary is composed mainly of the words of the angel and Elizabeth, then it certainly cannot be properly considered a prayer. For neither the Angel nor Elizabeth, when pronouncing these words, intended to worship or invoke her. Therefore, if with those same words we invoke her, we are in no way imitating them. Furthermore, the assertion that "it is holy to imitate angels and follow saints" should not be taken universally. It is necessary to consider whether we have the same vocation and circumstance. If it were understood without exception, Jesuits would also have to pray [in the same way] to Abraham based on the fact that angels announced to him that his wife would bear a son! Approaching more closely to the words of the Angel Gabriel greeting the Virgin: if we follow this logic, every day one should direct to Gideon the same salutation and pray and pray insistently: "The Lord is with you," since that was what the Angel said to him.

The papists imitate here the Angel absurdly; in fact, they cannot imitate either the Angel or Elizabeth. To do so, the Virgin would have to be present before them and be seen, just as she was present for those who greeted her with those words. Elizabeth did not direct her words to the Virgin when one was in Nazareth and the other in the mountains of Judea, but only when they met in the same place.

Let us consider how ridiculous it is to imitate the words that in Hebrew express "שָׁלוֹם לָךְ" (shalom lach) and in Greek "χαῖρε" (chaire): "Ave" or "salve" (explains the Jesuit Maldonatus). The angel commands Mary to "rejoice," to be glad, not to fear, to be of good cheer; that is precisely "shalom lach": to show that the messenger is a friend, not an enemy, who brings good, not bad, news. This is how

the Hebrews greet each other, to dispel the fear of those they receive, as seen in Genesis 43:23, Judges 6:23 and 13:20.

Is it not, then, ridiculous to hear a superstitious person, while reciting their rosary, address these words to the Blessed Virgin: "Peace to you, do not fear, rejoice; I bring good news: I am a friendly angel, not an enemy," etc.? For exactly with those words, according to the Jesuits' own interpretation, they greet her.

2. As for the addition they say was incorporated by the Church [to the Hail Mary], we would not criticize it if the Holy Virgin were on earth today, as before with the Apostles. At that time, one could say to her: "Pray for us, Virgin Mary"; but now it is as absurd as saying to her: "Do not fear, rejoice," since she does not hear us. And those who attribute to her the power to listen and respond to all prayers everywhere render the honor due only to God, just as the Collyridians did, whom Epiphanius included in his catalog of heresies for committing acts much less serious than those practiced today by the Papists: certain women had images of the Virgin, before which they offered collyrides (cakes) and worshiped them.

To refute this idolatry, Epiphanius³ warns: «Is not this zeal for idols vain and a diabolical effort? Under the pretext of piety, the Devil always seeks to deify before human eyes a mortal nature, presenting images of persons created by artifice. The dead are objects of worship; their images — which never lived — are introduced to be venerated, thus corrupting the mind, which abandons the one true God to fall into the absurd fornication of multiple cults.»

Certainly, Mary's body was holy and chaste, but she is not God. She was a Virgin, an honored Virgin, but she was not given to us for worship. On the contrary, she herself worshiped Him who was born of her flesh but who came from heaven and from the lineage of the Father. That is why the Gospel protects us by recalling the Lord's words: «Woman, what have I to do with you? My hour has not yet come» (John 2:4). By calling her "woman," He does not demean her; He thus announced that no matter how exalted her holiness was, she remained a creature so that no one, dazzled by her holiness, would fall into this heresy and its delusions.

Shortly after, Epiphanius adds: «What Scripture narrates this? What prophet ordered worship to be given to a man, much less to a woman? Mary is an excellent vessel, but she remains a woman, without change in her nature. Scripture does not even allow worship of angels; how much less a woman born of Anna and Joachim,

³ Panarion, c. 79, 4, 3. <https://archive.org/details/panarionofepipha0000epip/page/624/>

granted by prayer and promise like any other human being? She was born like all: from human seed and from a mother's womb.»

And he concludes: «Mary be honored; the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit be adored. No one should worship Mary; do not say “woman” nor even “man.” This mystery belongs only to God. Not even angels receive such glory. Erase the deceptions written on the hearts of the lost. Turn away from their eyes the greed for wood [idol]. Although Mary is beautiful, holy and blessed, she must not be an object of worship. Mary be honored; God be adored.»

3. The adversaries believe they would be exempt if they said they worship her not as God but with an inferior cult. But let them tell us what Epiphanius says: “Mary's body is holy, but she is not God.” In reality, they act as if they want to contradict him directly.

Send for, as Pope Leo X⁴ said, good wood as soon as possible that can serve for this work; so that the works already begun are not interrupted, and thus neither we nor the Goddess (Deam) herself seem to have been deceived with the donation of useless wood. The archbishop of Malines and that of Cambrai, enthusiastic supporters of the delirious Lipsius, also approve that [he] formulates and consecrates his vows to the Goddess of Halle and directs them to the virgin of Aspricolli: [You] sweat blood, oh Goddess, I will invoke you!; from whom these sacred things are presumed: that she will be the one to crush the head of the evil serpent. You have done it, oh Goddess, and they accompany you singing:

Then to you, oh Goddess,

all sexes sing praises and erect altars

Let them tell us: do they not turn those images into objects of worship? Do they not burn incense to them? Do they not consecrate vows to her? Do not the religious offer, through rites, not only cakes but countless other gifts? Just as Lipsius, long before these words, would have dedicated the skin toga with which he could protect himself from the cold, saying: "I myself, and all that is of wit and style in me, I dedicate and consecrate wholeheartedly... already two years ago."

Do they not themselves repeat what in another time the pagans dedicated to a certain emperor? “Caesar, you have the empire divided with Jupiter.” Is this not

⁴ Epistolarum Leonis Decimi Pontificis Max, lib. 8.
https://archive.org/details/bub_gb_nt17gBFSCjoC/page/n203/mode/2up

said to attribute equal power to both? “We first take refuge (says Gabriel [Biel]) in the Blessed Virgin, Queen of the heavens, to whom the King of Kings, the Heavenly Father, gave half of his kingdom. This was signified in Queen Esther, who, having approached to appease King Ahasuerus, the King said to her: ‘Even if you asked for half of my kingdom, it will be given to you.’ Thus the Heavenly Father, having justice and mercy as the most important parts of his kingdom, reserved justice for himself and granted mercy to the Virgin Mother.” The same is read in Bernardo de Bustis’ Marial, Sermon 3 on nomination, where he adds: “And therefore, if someone feels overwhelmed by the tribunal of God’s justice, he can turn to the tribunal of mercy of his Mother.”

The idolatrous women [mentioned by] Epiphanius never imagined such excesses. But the Jesuits were not ashamed recently to divide the salvation of men and attribute a part to the mother’s milk and another part to the Son’s blood, and with these two mixed together, concoct a certain Antidote, about which someone speaks thus in the Amphitheater of error:

Placed in the middle, I do not know where to turn.

I hesitate, meditating between milk and blood,

Between the delights of the breast and of the side.

And I say (if I direct my eyes toward the breasts):

“Oh Divine Mother, I claim the joys of your breast!”

But I say (if then I direct my eyes to the wounds):

“Oh Jesus, I prefer the joys of your side!”

I know what I will do: I will take, if allowed, the breasts with my right [hand];

With my left I will take the wounds, if permitted.

I want to mix the mother’s milk with the blood of the born.

I cannot enjoy a nobler antidote.

In this rather long verse, this unfortunate Loyolaite strives that nothing be granted to the blood above milk, nor attribute to the Son something in which the mother cannot equal him.

But what? Did they not themselves say:

“Oh happy bearer, who with your tears atone for our crimes,

you impose by right of mother orders on the Redeemer”

And so that they do not say this has been omitted in some Missal, I will add what is found in another book, in the hymn that begins:

“Rejoice, celestial Lady,

you desired to call yourself

servant of Jesus Christ.

But, as divine Law teaches,

you are his Lady.

For law commands and reason demands

that the Mother be above the Son.

Therefore, pray humbly

and command with sublime authority,

so that at day’s end

she may lead us

to the supreme kingdoms of the world.”

“All the other saints,” says Bernardino in his second sermon on the coronation of Mary, “although they are exalted and worthy, are subject to God and do not precede Him. But the blessed Virgin, although she is subject to God as a creature, is said to be superior and preeminent above Him, insofar as she is His Mother.”

Did they not learn from Saint Augustine that Christ does not recognize carnal ties (human flesh) when He goes to perform divine works?

Under the name of Anselm (book "On the Excellence of the Virgin," chapter 7), they forged this blasphemy for us: that Christ, upon ascending to heaven, left the holy Virgin on earth “perhaps,” they say, “so that it would not be questioned in the heavenly court whom to greet first: you, Lord, or His Lady.” For, according to

them, it was not fitting that when the court met it would be divided between obeying you and obeying her, especially when the entire court is yours and, through you, equally hers. “You wanted the Virgin to precede, to prepare a place of immortality for her in your kingdom and thus, accompanied by your entire court, to go out to meet her more festively and exalt her more sublimely, as befits your mother.”

For this reason, Cardinal Peter Damian, in his sermon on the Assumption of the Mother of God, maintains that the Virgin’s retinue in her assumption was far more splendid than even Christ’s retinue in His ascension. “Raise,” he says, “your eyes to the assumption of the Virgin and, without detracting from the majesty of the Son, I find that the reception of the Virgin was with a pomp much more worthy. For only the Angels could go out to meet the Redeemer; but to the Mother, the Son Himself went out solemnly to meet her with the entire court, both Angels and righteous ones, and carried her to the blessed heavenly realm.”

They say (Barradas, Evangelical Harmony, Volume 1, book 6, chapter 13) that she is the Ark transferred to the heavens, upon which God’s mercy is placed as a propitiatory. Bernardino, in the cited sermon, attributes to her that she was able to make God a man and create the Creator, make the infinite finite, etc., and that with her enticements she obtained from God to descend from heaven to earth. That she is, by law of succession, lady of the world because, as Christ had no one on earth who succeeded Him by right when He died on the cross, His mother succeeded Him according to all laws, and for this reason she acquired dominion over all things. And this succession, moreover, we read nowhere has been revoked. Christ never spoke of the monarchy of the universe because without prejudice to the Mother it could not be established; furthermore, He knew that the mother can invalidate the son’s will if it harms her, even declare it null. From this it is concluded that no grace comes from heaven to earth if it does not pass through Mary’s hands.

What would Epiphanius and all the ancients with him have said if they had seen the Psalter of the Virgin Mary, in which, having removed the word “Lord” (Domine) every time it is attributed to God, they replaced it with “Lady” (Dominam), so as not to leave anything to God that did not also correspond to the Virgin?

4. From here arose the Rosaries, in which as many Hail Marys are recited as there are psalms, in an equitable manner. For each rosary consists of fifty-five beads, of

which five serve for the Lord's Prayer and fifty for Hail Marys; so that by counting three rosaries, one reaches a number of salutations to the Virgin equal to that of the psalms.

This method of prayer, says Polydore Vergil, was originally invented by Peter the Hermit, citizen of Amiens, using beads— I would say wooden ones—that people sometimes call “precarias” and sometimes “Our Fathers.”

These beads, he claims, number fifty-five and are arranged in such a way that after every ten, a larger one is placed on the string (since they are pierced), and depending on how many of these there are, the Our Father is repeated; and depending on how many of those, the angelic salutation. Reciting them three times completes the number and adds the abbreviated Creed three times, calling this the “Psalter of the Virgin Mother of God.”

Today, he says, this method using beads has achieved such great honor that they are made not only of aromatic wood or coral but also of gold and silver, serving women as adornment and hypocrites as instruments of feigned goodness. From here, the Mantuano recalls the following verses:

“Let her whisper complain with her beads
and count her murmur with her pearls.”

These hypocritical instruments, under great numerological mysteries, are recommended to us by the Jesuit, manipulating Scripture with incredible skill. To avoid dwelling on each of his absurd citations, we will say two things. First: although there may be something arcane in certain numbers, it does not come from the numbers themselves but from divine institution, something they will never be able to prove to us in the Rosaries or the Our Father, invented barely three or four centuries ago and completely unknown to the ancient Church. Second: in numbers (as the Jesuit Lorino says) no indefinite mysteries should be suspected.

Bede and the author of the *Glosa Ordinaria* respond, who seek mysteries in that Aeneas the paralytic was bedridden for eight years. “I venerate,” says this Jesuit, “as I must, the holy Fathers, but I have never approved those numerical fantasies (to tell the truth), since I understand that the same numbers can be interpreted by identical authors indistinctly for good or for evil; and especially the number eight, from which Pedro Bongo draws only good omen, although other authors we cite

interpret it otherwise.” Here Barengo writes about the mysteries of numbers, contributing many follies.

5. A single passage cited by the Jesuit is enough to prove his vanity. Elisha ordered Joash to strike the ground; he did so forcefully but only three times, for which the prophet was indignant, indicating that his enemies would be struck weakly, saying: “You should have struck five or six times (in the Hebrew text it is not 'seven'), and thus you would have defeated the Syrians (not 'Assyrians,' as the Jesuit writes) to their total destruction.” This clearly shows that there is no hidden mystery in numbers: five and six, according to arithmologists, do not mean the same thing, nor did the Pythagoreans in antiquity attribute them with the same symbolism. If these men continue like this, they will end up introducing the Goddess Numeria into Christian religion and, following the example of pagans, will consecrate even numbers to infernal gods and odd numbers to celestial ones.

Moreover, they took from the denarius—which admirers of numbers attributed to the Virgin—the custom of praying an Our Father on each bead as if they were ten Hail Marys. Jewish Kabbalah overflows with vain conjectures of this kind. But, as Peucero very well noted, the virtue attributed to numbers is either innate or comes from an external institution; it is not innate since numbers are either quantities formed by understanding when ordering sensible objects or painted characters or other signs that represent them. The latter express the multitude of individuals observed by us; the former only the collection of units without further meaning.

And if this invented mystery originates from an institution, it must be divine; otherwise, there is no mystery at all. Let them then prove to us the divine institution of the number 55 to recite fifty Hail Marys with five Our Fathers interspersed: it is nothing but pure babbling, forbidden by our Lord Jesus Christ: “When praying, do not repeat meaningless words over and over,” He says, “as the pagans do to be heard for their many words.” We do not disapprove of often repeating prayers to the one true God, day and night; but attributing efficacy to a fixed number is clearly magic (for God never instituted such a thing), or at least superstition, according to the judgment of the Council of Trent, which ordered bishops to eliminate from the Church all use of fixed numbers in Masses and in the blessing of candles invented more by superstitious worship than by true religion.

A good work repeated many times does not become bad; but if done with superstition, it ceases to be good. Whoever gives alms for vainglory or to be seen

by men loses their grace. Adding a specific number to prayers is Pharisaic ostentation.

6. Furthermore, I would like to know why more prayers are recited to the Virgin Mary than to God. Is it perhaps because the Hail Mary is more excellent than the Our Father? Or maybe because we are more obligated to the holy Virgin than to God? Why is she invoked ten times when God only once? "We 'honor,'" they will say, "the mother and the Son when we ask her to intercede for us before her Son." But rather, the Son is dishonored when an intercessor is sought in her, when one could address Him directly. For He said: "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened," not: "Go to my mother and the saints." And He promised us that "whatever you ask in my name, I will grant you," not what is asked in the name of His mother, the same who at Cana of Galilee said: "Do whatever He tells you." To Him we will obey, and everything He commands us, we will do — not what idolaters want to suggest to us.

Because we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who has been tested in all things as we are, yet without sin. Let us then approach μετὰ παρηγορίας, with confidence, the throne of grace.

Here it is fitting to recall what Saint Ambrose says (or whoever was the author of the commentary attributed to him on the epistles): "The imprudent usually excuse themselves miserably by saying that through these [saints], they can reach God, just as one reaches the king through his courtiers. But is there anyone so foolish or so far from salvation as to give the courtier the honor due to the king? Those who act thus are condemned for the crime of lese majesty. And do these not consider themselves guilty when they transfer God's honor to a creature and, rejecting the Lord, worship His servants as if there were something more reserved for God?" And he adds: "One approaches the king through ministers because he is only a man and does not know whom to entrust the kingdom. But with God, who knows everything (for He knows everyone's merits), no intermediary is needed, but a devoted heart."

"It is about God," Tertullian said, speaking on another matter, "for whom this is proper *par excellence*: not to admit any comparison with any example." He was speaking of kings. And yet, the Jesuits are not content with invoking only the Virgin as mediator, but go much further, openly asking her for grace and glory. They cannot deny it, since Costero, one of the leading members of the Society,

when commenting on the hymn Ave Maris Stella, did not hesitate to address the Virgin thus:

"Deliver us, Lady! Save those who beg you: free them by your merits, free them by your authority, free them by your command. With just a gesture and will, you can move all external chains. The penalties that remain for our sins, you reduce with your merits; and by your prayers and merits, you obtain that our very sins be forgiven."

And later it says: "You can do all things in heaven and on earth." And also: "What does it mean to be Mother of God? The Mother is the cause of the Son, the Mother is superior to the Son, the Son owes honor to the Mother, the Son owes reverence to the Mother." As if in the great mystery of the incarnation there were nothing that transcends the laws of nature! This is, without a doubt, the theology of the children of Loyola! Is this really looking at God as the only end? Those who aim so poorly at the target will never hit it. Did the ancients ever aim like this? What a distance between this theology and that of Epiphanius!

Saint Augustine is quoted as if asking for the Virgin's intercession, but who does not know that those meditations, from which the invocation is extracted, are not authentic works of Augustine, but inventions of monks who usurp the names of the Fathers to legitimize their fables? The true Augustine taught us that Jesus Christ is our only Advocate and Intercessor. Of the Virgin he said: "Mary is more blessed for believing in Christ than for conceiving His flesh." Finally, what use was that closeness to His brothers, that is, to His relatives according to the flesh, who did not believe in Him? Thus, Mary's motherhood would have been of no use if she had not carried Christ in her heart more happily than in her flesh. For both reasons she is most blessed.

Let her be honored, then, but let only Jesus Christ be regarded as Mediator. Let only the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit be invoked with religious worship, as our Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier, blessed forever.

Amen.