

4th SUNDAY OF ADVENT

St. Luke 1:26-38

The name Rosary comes from the Latin *rosarium* meaning “rose garden”. Tradition accords St. Dominic with the honour of receiving from the Blessed Virgin the Rosary in A.D. 1214 in the church in Prouille. It is said that it was revealed to him at a time of great frustration as he tried in vain to convert those holding to heresy. Complaining in prayer to the Holy Mother it is recorded that he heard in reply: “Wonder not that you have obtained so little fruit by your labours, you have spent them on barren soil, not yet watered with the dew of Divine grace. When God willed to renew the face of the earth, He began by sending down on it the fertilising rain of the Angelic Salutation.” That is, the greeting of the Archangel Gabriel to the Most Blessed Virgin Mary, when he said: “Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee. Therefore,” said the Blessed Virgin to St. Dominic, “preach my Psalter composed of 150 Angelic Salutations and fifteen Our Fathers, and you will obtain an abundant harvest.” To this was added, at Our Lady’s command, the fifteen mysteries of our salvation.

Mystery is embedded in the Faith. In the Old Testament the Greek word *mysterion* is used as an equivalent for the Hebrew word meaning “secret.” In the New Testament the word mystery is applied ordinarily to the revelation of the Gospel and to the Incarnation and life of our Lord and His manifestation by the preaching of the Apostles. So mystery does not mean that which is unknowable but rather supernatural truths which are beyond the powers of natural reason.

The Mass in both eastern and western rites is imbued with mystery. In some forms of the eastern Divine Liturgy the iconostasis separates the sanctuary and the nave and it conceals the great act of consecration. In the west we have a

similar tradition with rood screens that separate the congregation from the choir and the sanctuary. More so we have the Latin language. Whereas in the East the holy of holies is concealed visually by icons in the West it is concealed verbally by language. Both iconostasis and Latin are a means to hold the mystery in esteem by placing it behind walls, whether visual or verbal.

Praying the Mass is a great act of faith. The Mass should be prayed in fear and trembling because it is a reminder that the Mass is a divine act not a human act and that I am merely an instrument in the worship of God. There is something healthy in that fear because it reminds us that this, and the Faith in its entirety, is not our work but God's and that we must humbly submit and co-operate with the grace of God.

That is what the Most Blessed Virgin Mary did when, as we pray in the Angelus, she said, "Be it done to me according to Thy will" (*Lk. 1:38*). Grace was offered and Mary co-operated. Grace was offered by the own free will of God and Mary co-operated by her own free will. In doing so she entered ever more deeply into the mystery of salvation, in fact, she became the Mother of Salvation, and so the Mother of Mystery. The "no" that Eve said to God in the garden of Paradise gave way to the "yes" said by the Most Blessed Virgin Mary in a poor village of Galilee, so that, Eve, the mother of all who die, gave way to Mary, the mother of all who live. The "I will not serve" (*Jer. 2:20*) of Satan was answered with the "Be it done to me according to Thy will" (*Lk. 1:38*) of Mary.

That which is unknown can be frightening because for all our talk on the wonder of spontaneity we still crave certainty. But Faith, as the epistle to the Hebrews says, "Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen" (11:1). So when we honour the Blessed Virgin and when we meditate on the mysteries of the holy Rosary we behold the great mysteries of our salvation—mysteries not unsolvable but mysteries that demand an abandonment in faith so that our fear becomes awe and wonderment at the promises of God which are fulfilled in a small child lying in a manger.