

INTRODUCTION

During Lent 1991 when I was 31-years-old, I was reading an account of Our Lady's appearances to some children in Fatima, Portugal. As I read on, coming as one is bound to do, to the children's account of the vision of hell granted to them by Our Lady, I was suddenly overwhelmed by an acute sense of my own sinfulness. I became profoundly aware that I was in serious danger of falling away from God not because my life was choc-a-bloc with sin (which it was), but because my love for God was lukewarm to cool at best. Despite having been a more or less practising Catholic for most of my life, this was a moment of true conversion. I was filled with shame, sorrow and, confusingly, joy. There followed a time of many tears as I re-evaluated my life, my priorities and, above all, my relationship with God. Out of this experience came an urgent call to pray the rosary, something which I had never done before, and I had to set about learning the ropes.

The rosary must be one of the most misunderstood prayers in the Christian world. For many people the very word 'rosary' conjures up thoughts of gabbled Hail Marys, Our Fathers and things called 'mysteries' which don't seem to have much relevance to our day-to-day lives. It would, on the face of it, appear to be a very long and dull way of praying.

The truth is so different.

When we pray the rosary, it is as if Mary takes us by the hand and leads us through the Gospels, teaching us how to relate our own lives to the important events in both her life and also her Son's life. It is in entering into the Gospels and, particularly, the events highlighted in the rosary, that we learn to live out the Gospel ourselves, and that is the call for all Christians: *to bring the Gospels to life.*

God wants us to learn to walk in his Son's footsteps in order that his love may be kept alive and active in today's world. We learn to walk in Jesus' footsteps and to enter into the Gospels by thinking about the Gospel stories in a much more profound, reflective, imaginative and quiet way than can be achieved by merely reading the Gospels, and the rosary is an excellent tool for this. I am not sure that the rosary is prayed well if it is recited without thought: it requires us to think and imagine more deeply.

For me, it was the start of an extremely exciting spiritual journey, with Our Lady always at the helm. She took me and my contemplative imagination to so many wonderful scenes: to her room at the time of the annunciation; her cousin Elizabeth's house; the stable of the nativity; the table of the Last Supper; the foot of the cross on Calvary. She showed me the wonder on Simeon's face as he held the promised Saviour in his arms; the awe and humility of John as he baptised Jesus in the waters of the Jordan; the fear of her Son in the Garden of Gethsemane; the cruelty of the soldiers who tortured him, and the overwhelming joy and victory of the resurrection. And so much else.

Above all, she has shown me that we are all involved, *personally* and *individually*, in the Gospels. It is for us through the praying of the rosary to learn to enter into the Gospels in order to bring them to life in our day-to-day experience.

This little book suggests contemplative ways into the various Gospel passages presented to us in the rosary. I do urge you not to be bound by the offerings I have given, but to use them as no more than a jumping off point for your own personal journey with Mary: she may want to show you something that she has kept hidden from me. Who knows?

In embarking upon the rosary, you may set out to say just one decade or, perhaps, the whole rosary, but in the event there is a mediation/reflection which really captures your imagination. In this case, allow Mary to lead you wherever she wants. You may

well find that an hour later you have not moved from the first bead, let alone finished the first decade. It doesn't matter! What really matters is that you have allowed Mary to guide your thoughts or to show you something about your own personal situation.

This book is dedicated to Mary who is our true Mother and most powerful advocate, who loves us more than we can imagine. It is written in the real hope that she will lead more people into the treasures and wonders of the Gospels in order that the world may come to understand more fully what it means to be a Christian in an increasingly challenging world.