

Efficacious Weapon against God's Enemies

Among the means within our reach for confronting the crisis of the contemporary world, the Rosary stands out for its extraordinary power in obtaining God's intervention in events.



João Luís Ribeiro

For many, the Rosary may appear to be a subject about which nothing further remains to be said.

It is a magnificent prayer, without a doubt. But could there be a single nook in this splendid pal-

ace which has not yet been thoroughly explored, mapped out and catalogued by the cohort of Saints and theologians who have so far ventured to enter it? What could possibly motivate someone to write a few pages on this subject, if they are destined to be lost among the thousands – perhaps millions – that have already been written?

Although there is some validity in these questions, they do not express the full reality. Our Lord compares

the scribe who becomes a disciple of the Kingdom of God to a father who brings out of his treasure things new and old (cf. Mt 13:52). In an analogous way, everything that Holy Church has engendered throughout the centuries always has an application for the present time, and it is the task of Catholics to point it out.

In this sense, it is not difficult to demonstrate that the Rosary is extremely timely. However, in order to appreciate the “new things” in this treasure, it will first be necessary to contemplate the quality of some of the jewels of venerable antiquity which compose it.

The excellence of the Holy Rosary according to the Popes

Do we really know the enormous power of this prayer, apparently so simple, so unassuming, so accessible and so widely spread by popular devotion?

Recourse to the papal Magisterium will certainly provide us with a firm foundation on which to base our answer.

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Our Lady reveals the devotion of the Rosary to St. Dominic of Guzman - Parish church of Riquewihr (France)



The Popes have called it “the perfect prayer,”¹ “the summary of Gospel teaching,”² the “badge of Christian piety,”³ “the sweet chain linking us to God, the bond of love uniting us to the Angels, the tower of salvation against the assaults of hell,”⁴ “the sure guarantee of divine power, the support and defence of our hoped-for salvation.”⁵



The Rosary has the “power to instil confidence into the hearts of those who pray,”⁶ to rekindle the Catholic Faith, revive hope and inflame charity; it preserves chastity and integrity of life.⁷ In short, it is “the great bulwark against heresy and vice”⁸ and “the way to attain every virtue.”⁹

Theologians give it first place

Yet if the superlative praise of the Popes is not enough to convince us that the Rosary is “the most beautiful prayer, the richest in grace and the most pleasing to the Heart of Mary,”¹⁰ we may still have recourse to the Doctors. There is a theological reason of great beauty which justifies the lofty position occupied by this prayer in relation to the others.

Broadly speaking, the types of prayer can be divided into two main groups: vocal and mental. Using an analogy with the human being, we could say that the first is to the second more or less as the body is to the soul. In vocal prayer, the words used to address God – whether they are found in a missal or breviary, in the case of an official prayer, or even from a book, a devotional card or any other source – constitute the “material” element of the prayer, which serves to stimulate mental prayer. The latter, in its turn, is properly the raising of the mind to God, that is to

The Rosary is “the great bulwark against heresy and vice” and “the way to attain every virtue”

say, it takes place when we use our intelligence and heart to contemplate and love heavenly realities, with the help of grace.

Now, among vocal prayers, what could surpass the Our Father, composed by the God-Man himself (cf. Mt 6:9-13), the Angelic Salutation (cf. Lk 1:28,42) and the Glory be to the Father, in honour of the Blessed Trinity? And in the field of mental prayer, what more sublime theme for meditation can be found than the mysteries of the life, Passion, Death and Resurrection of Our Lord Jesus Christ, contemplated throughout the Rosary?

Therefore, the renowned theologian Fr. Antonio Royo Marin, OP, sums up this prayer as “encompassing the advantages of mental and vocal prayer to the most perfect degree objectively possible.”¹¹

A great historical mystery

Another factor, perhaps even more sublime than the preceding ones, also points to the grandeur of the Rosary: its origin. Those who believe that it is a devotion descended from Heaven and given to mankind personally by the Blessed Virgin are not wrong. Yet there is controversy as to whether or not it

was first revealed to St. Dominic.

History, always bound to documents that have survived the passage of time, says merely that a great mystery hovers over the origins of the Rosary. There are no records from the thirteenth century attesting that St. Dominic was the initiator of this devotion, since it did not appear in the writings of popes and authors until the fifteenth century. They were preceded only by Catholic piety, which, it is true, always precedes in some manner the official proclamation of the most beautiful truths of Mariology.

In fact, long before the birth of that holy preacher, a pious custom was already in place among Christians of reciting the Hail Mary one hundred and fifty times in place of the Psalms of David, which were recited in the early days of the Church. This led to the prayer becoming known as the *Psalter of Mary*.¹²

Only in the XIII century – at the time when St. Dominic developed his apostolate – did this practice spread all over Christendom, and its main promoters were the Dominicans! Mere coincidence? Again, a mystery...

The only source capable of providing us with any information on the subject – less appealing to unbelieving spirits – is the voice of mysticism, which, especially in the person of

Blessed Alan de la Roche, presents an account imbued with the sense of the marvellous. Is it entirely veridical? A certain enigma remains, and perhaps will remain until the end of time... But what is certain is that the account of this Dominican religious is so in keeping with St. Dominic's prophetic vocation that, if it presents any inconsistency with reality, we are inclined to believe that events unfolded in an even more sublime manner.¹³

Narration of Blessed Alan de la Roche

St. Dominic of Guzman is labouring with great effort to convert the Albigensian heretics, who have been devastating Europe since the 12th century, especially in the Languedoc region in of southern France. His dedication, however, is not bearing much fruit, as the number of those who adhere to the Cathar sect only grows daily.

Distraught, the faithful devotee of Mary retires to a forest near Toulouse to beseech Heaven to put an end to this calamity. After three days of fasting and sacrifices, his strength fails him and he collapses.

But just when his physical forces have been pushed to their extreme limit, the Blessed Virgin approaches, enveloped in intense light, and asks him:

“My dear Dominic, do you know with what weapon the Blessed Trinity wants to reform the world?”



St. Dominic of Guzman - Sancti Spiritus Monastery, Toro (Spain)

The Blessed Virgin asked him: “My dear Dominic, do you know with what weapon the Blessed Trinity wants to reform the world?”

“You know better than I do,” replies an astounded Dominic.

“Know, then, that the principal arm of combat is the Angelic Salutation, cornerstone of the New Testament. If you want to win these hardened hearts for God, pray my Psalter.”

After these words, a furious storm suddenly breaks out, with lightning, thunder, torrential rain and earthquakes. Terrified, the population of the city takes refuge in the cathedral, to the sound of the bells that miraculously peal of their own accord.

The tempest continues to rage for some time, and only ceases with the prayers of St. Dominic, who is already in the cathedral, before the assembly. Consoled by the help of the Queen of Angels, he then proclaims the Holy Rosary to them. Almost all the inhabitants of Toulouse accept it, and abandon their evil ways.¹⁴

Thus, amidst stupendous miracles, this devotion was said to have arisen, a gift from Heaven brought by Our Lady herself for the benefit of men.

The Rosary at times of crisis

We promised, at the outset, to deal with the timeliness of the Rosary.

This year, we will observe the concurrence of three great commemorations, all of them connected with

¹ BENEDICT XV. *Letter “Di altissimo pregio”*, 18/9/1915.

² LEO XIII. *Amantissima voluntatis*.

³ LEO XIII. *Supremi apostolatus*.

⁴ PIUS XI. *Apostolic Brief*, 20/7/1925.

⁵ PIUS XII. *Letter “Philippinas insulas”*, 31/7/1946.

⁶ LEO XIII. *Iucunda semper*, n.3.

⁷ Cf. PIUS XI. *Ingravescentibus malis*.

⁸ BENEDICT XV. *Letter “In cætu sodalium”*, 29/10/1916.

⁹ PIUS XI. *Apostolic Brief*, 20/7/1925.

¹⁰ PIUS IX. *Letter “Pium sane”*, 24/3/1877.

¹¹ ROYO MARÍN, OP, Antonio. *La Virgen María. Teología y espiritualidad marianas*. 2.ed. Madrid: BAC, 1997, p.467.

¹² Cf. ST. LOUIS-MARIE GRIGNON DE MONTFORT. *Le secret admirable du très Saint Rosaire*. Montreal: Librarie Montfortaine, 1947, p.14-15.

¹³ Cf. GETINO, Luis G. Alonso. *Santo Domingo de Guzmán*.

Madrid: Biblioteca Nueva, 1939, p.172-185.

¹⁴ Cf. ST. LOUIS-MARIE GRIGNON DE MONTFORT, op. cit., p.2-4. This booklet by the great Marian doctor was praised by St. John Paul II as “an excellent work on the Rosary” (*Rosarium Virginis Mariæ*, n.8). It should also be noted that Blessed Alan and St. Louis de Montfort were the

this devotion. In the first place, it is the 850th anniversary of St. Dominic's birth, and the 800th anniversary of his death.¹⁵ In addition, the current month marks the 450th anniversary of the Battle of Lepanto, a key event in the history of Christendom, which led to the institution of the feast of Our Lady of the Rosary.¹⁶

Why is this important for the present moment?

The most crucial moments in the history of the Rosary were precisely those when calamity had reached a peak. During the time of St. Dominic, the Faith was being threatened by the Albigensian heresy, and the Saint employed the Rosary to safeguard orthodoxy. At Lepanto, the visible structure of the Church and Christian Civilization was on the verge of collapse. The Rosary of St. Pius V wrought for Don Juan of Austria the same victory that the arms of Moses, stretched out on the mountain top, won for Joshua against the Amalekites (cf. Ex 17:8-13).

In both cases, the pledge of victory was this same celebrated devotion.

Powerful weapon for our days

Today the Faith and the Holy Church would seem to be equally or even more endangered than in those times. Their worst enemies no longer use clear arguments in open debates, nor do they fight with weapons of iron or fire. Rather, they take ad-

vantage of darkness to grow, ambiguity to conquer and relativism to demolish.

We must therefore make use of every means within our reach to confront this crisis, and the Rosary, as we have seen, can obtain God's intervention in these events.

Just as St. Dominic and St. Pius V made use of it as a "weapon to defeat the enemies of God and of religion,"¹⁷ so the faithful of today, armed with this same instrument of warfare, will easily succeed in destroying the monstrous errors and impieties which are arising everywhere.¹⁸

This is why Mary Most Holy, on two occasions, at Lourdes and Fatima, instructed all of humanity to pray it. In the Cova da Iria – indeed, during the apparition of October – the Virgin affirmed: "I am the Lady of the Rosary." Under this standard Christians have triumphed in the past; and under it they will triumph today and always. ✧

"I am the Lady of the Rosary." Under this standard Christians have triumphed in the past, and under it they will triumph today and always



Our Lady of the Rosary of Fatima - Church of Our Lady of Fatima, Tocancipá (Colombia)

Juan Tomas Tavaréz

principal apostles of the Rosary in France, as the Dominican theologian Réginald Garrigou-Lagrange points out (cf. *La Madre del Salvador y nuestra vida interior*. 3.ed. Buenos Aires: Desclée de Brouwer, 1954, p.266).

¹⁵ As with ancient figures, there is disagreement among authors about the year of St. Dominic's birth. The fact that

he was born at the end of 1171 has been taken from the collection ECHEVERRÍA, Lamberto de; LLORCA, SJ, Bernardino; REPETTO BERTES, José Luis (Org.). *Año Cristiano*. Madrid: BAC, 2005, v.VIII, p.197.

¹⁶ The celebration of Our Lady of the Rosary was instituted by St. Pius V in thanksgiving for the triumph of the Christian

fleet at the Gulf of Lepanto on October 7, 1571, while the confraternities of Rome celebrated Rosary processions, one of them presided over by the Supreme Pontiff himself. Originally, however, the Blessed Virgin was invoked as Our Lady of Victories, which was gradually replaced by Our Lady of the Rosary. In 1716, Clement XI extended the

commemoration to the Universal Church. Leo XIII introduced it into the Liturgy, and St. Pius X fixed October 7 as the definitive date (cf. ROYO MARÍN, op. cit., p.507).

¹⁷ PIUS XI. *Ingravescentibus malis*.

¹⁸ Cf. PIUS IX. *Egregiis*, 3/12/1856.

Masterpiece of Catholic Spirituality

The devotion of the Rosary has tremendous power and substance. It does not involve merely emotions, but is serious and full of reflection. Through it, the spiritual life of the Catholic is built up as a solid and splendid edifice of certainties.



Plinio Corrêa de Oliveira

To fully understand the value of devotion to the Holy Rosary, let us examine it more closely.

After being given directly by Our Lady to St. Dominic of Guzman, devotion to the Rosary spread rapidly throughout the Church, going beyond the confines of the Dominican Order and becoming the hallmark of many other Orders who

began to wear it hanging from their cinctures.

There was a time when every Catholic habitually carried a rosary with him, not only as an object for counting Hail Marys, but as an instrument to attract God's blessings.

A prayer that intimately unites us to God

What is the Rosary?

Put briefly, it is a composition of meditations on the life of Our Lord Jesus Christ and of His Blessed Mother, combined with vocal prayers. This combination of vocal and mental prayer is truly splendid, for while a petition is uttered with the lips, the mind concentrates on a certain point.

By this means, man does everything he can in the supernatural order: by his intentions, he unites him-



Daniel Letelier

The Rosary is the prayer of the strong, the prayer of warriors, for it has such efficacy that it makes evil retreat and good advance

Priests, deacons, and laymen pray the Holy Rosary at Lumen Prophetæ House, Mairiporã (Brazil)

self to what his lips pronounce, and by his mind, he surrenders himself to what his spirit meditates upon.

In this mode of prayer, man unites himself intimately with God, especially since this union is formed through Mary, the Mediatrix of all graces.

Someone might ask: “What is the sense of praying vocally to Our Lady while meditating on something else? Could it not be something simpler? Would it not be easier to meditate first, and then to say ten Hail Marys?”

The answer is very simple. Each mystery contains, in its details, endless sublimities which our poor spirit seeks to fathom... Now, to do this perfectly, we need to be assisted by God’s grace, and this grace is given to us through the help of Our Lady. In short, we say the Hail Mary to ask the Blessed Virgin to obtain for us the graces needed to meditate well.

A powerful and serious devotion, full of reflection

In the Rosary, we discover small but precious theological treasures that make it a masterpiece of Catholic spirituality and doctrine.

This devotion has tremendous power and substance. It does not involve merely emotions; on the contrary, it is serious, full of reflection, with firm foundations. Through it, the spiritual life of the Catholic man is built up as a solid and splendid edifice of conclusions and certainties.

Moreover, meditation on the mysteries of the life of Our Lord and His Mother gives the faithful the opportunity to receive graces pertaining to the event that they are contemplating.



Our Lady of the Rosary - Monastery of St. Dominic of Guzman, Madrid (Spain)

The countless graces that Mary Most Holy distributes through this devotion show it to be superior to other acts of Marian piety

When we consider the countless graces that Mary Most Holy distributes through the recitation of the Holy Rosary, we see in it something that makes it superior to other acts of Marian piety. Now, why is this?

First of all, it is worth pointing out that Our Lady, as exalted Queen, has the right to set her preferences! And She wished to elevate this devotion above all others, distributing very

special graces through the recitation of the Holy Rosary.

Resolution to always pray the Rosary

An incident in the life of St. Alphonsus Maria de Liguori shows us that, particularly during a great struggle, the Rosary is a pledge of victory.

While the Saint was being guided in a wheelchair through the corridors of the convent by a brother of his Order, he asked if they had prayed the whole Rosary. The brother replied:

“I don’t remember.”

“Let us pray it, then” said St. Alphonsus.

“But you are tired! What harm is there in not saying the Rosary today?”

“I fear for my eternal salvation if I neglect to say it for just one day.”

This is precisely what we should think and feel: the Rosary is the great guarantee of our final perseverance. We must ask the Blessed Virgin for the grace to pray it every day of our life.

Let us never forsake it!

The Rosary is the prayer of the strong, the prayer of warriors, for it has such efficacy that it makes evil retreat and good advance. It binds the faithful to Our Lady and drives away the devil, who hates and fears Her.

To those who are tempted, I give this recommendation: hold on to a rosary! But physically hold on to it, never let it go.

Even when sleeping, try to keep the rosary close at hand, so that you can feel it with you. And if you are afraid that it will fall to the floor – for we must treat it with all reverence – hang it around your neck or put it in your pocket.

“I would like to resurrect with the rosary in my hands”

When our hands can no longer open or close, and when they are moved by others who assist us, let us have, as our last position of prayer, the rosary entwined between our fingers, so that when the resurrection of the dead takes place and our bodies are brought back to life, the Holy Rosary will be there in our revived fingers.

I hope that, at the moment when all the just are called to the resurrection, my first reverent kiss will fall on the rosary which I find in my hands.



Material and Symbolic Beauty of the Rosary

In my opinion, the beauty of the Rosary is not confined merely to the spiritual excellence it offers to souls.

Its marvellous impetrative power, as well as how pleasing it is to God and to Our Lady, are also expressed in the physical form of the Rosary, which is surrounded by imponderables that make us feel the pulchritude of this devotion. There is something beautiful and inexpressible in it that seems to me supremely appropriate and irreplaceable.

I remember when I was still a student at St. Louis School, at the beginning of the 1920s, and noticed that a new type of rosary was beginning to circulate, one that was “more discreet”, in the intention of its creators. It was an object similar to certain calculating gadgets of the time, with two

rows of superimposed beads: larger ones on which the Hail Marys and Our Father were counted, and smaller ones to mark the mysteries being meditated upon.

It was a small object, to take up the least space in the pocket and to be seen as little as possible by others. It had everything in its favour: it was practical, cheap, portable and “concealable” – which was a great advantage for Catholics with human respect. But it did not take hold...

Nothing could replace the old Rosary, the marvellous and timeless Rosary in all its various forms!

Small rosaries, graceful rosaries, elegant and delicate, for well-bred children. Modest rosaries, workers’ rosaries, heavy and rustic as manual labour so often is, but strong ros-

aries, their beads passing through the fingers of virile hands. Serious and manly rosaries, the rosaries of warriors. Rosaries of princesses, of queens, elaborated like veritable jewels, as are the precious rosaries that hang from the hands of the statues of Our Lady.

How many forms of rosary there are!

Some speak of grace and of charm; they show something of the regal sweetness and goodness of Mary. Others make us see Her as the protector of children; others as the helper of the poor and working man, like her princely husband, St. Joseph, descendant of David and a carpenter. Still others speak of the piety of the warrior, of the fighter for Catholic ideals, like St. Dominic of Guzman, who fought and

*I hope that,
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Msgr. João Scognamiglio Clá Dias
presents Dr. Plinio with a rosary to kiss,
during a ceremony on 11/12/1994

defeated the Albigensian heresy
with the Rosary.

Indeed, this attribute of the Rosary as a true weapon for Catholics has always attracted me in a very particular way, which is why it has always seemed to me that the Rosary together with a sword is a combination of exceptional beauty.

Once, while in Buenos Aires, I was invited to the house of a gentleman who possessed one of the most beautiful private collections of arms that I have ever seen. Exquisitely arranged in showcases and on shelves, there were all kinds of arms, but most especially, several types of swords.

As I contemplated them, this thought occurred to me: "If I were on familiar terms with this man, I would suggest to him to acquire a collection of rosaries as rich as that of his swords. And that each day, on a beautiful table arranged in the centre of the room and covered with a prestigious cloth, he would place a new sword and rosary in honour of an image of Our Lady that would preside over the whole collection."

Here, then, is a suggestion for after the resurrection. I have never heard of any counsel being given or any agreement being made for that moment, but I propose one.

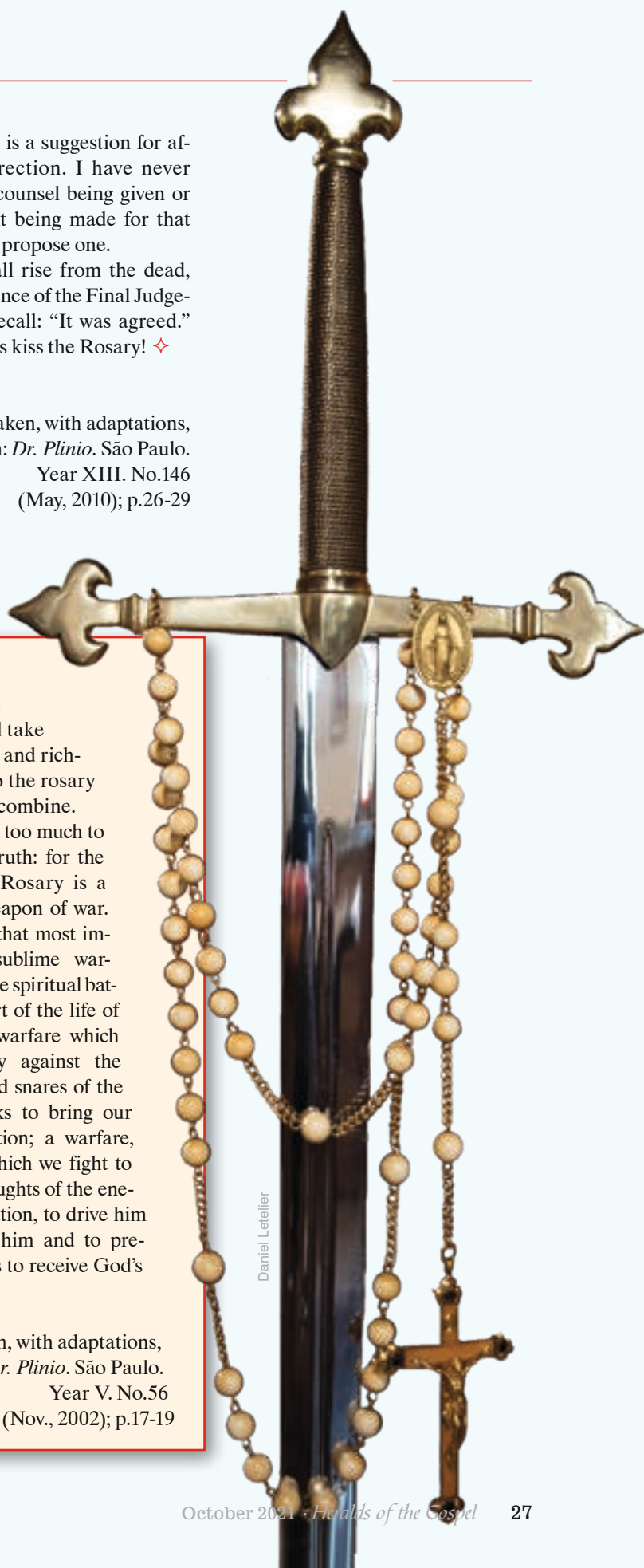
When we all rise from the dead, amid the radiance of the Final Judgment, let us recall: "It was agreed." And then let us kiss the Rosary! ✧

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I believe that his private museum would take on another life and richness, so well do the rosary and the sword combine.

And it is not too much to insist on this truth: for the Catholic, the Rosary is a magnificent weapon of war. A weapon for that most important and sublime warfare, which is the spiritual battle which is part of the life of every man; a warfare which we wage daily against the temptations and snares of the devil who seeks to bring our souls to perdition; a warfare, therefore, in which we fight to resist the onslaughts of the enemy of our salvation, to drive him out, to defeat him and to prepare our hearts to receive God's graces. ✧

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Daniel Letellier