

ORIGIN OF THE FRANCISCAN CROWN ROSARY

Do not fear, Mary, for you have favor with God. Behold, you will conceive and bear a son, and shall name him Jesus. Luke 1:30-31

From the very beginning, Christians continued the Jewish tradition of praying and singing the 150 psalms as part of their sacred routine of daily prayer.

By the Middle Ages, however, a largely illiterate population could neither appreciate the historical events to which the psalms referred, nor could they memorize and recite the psalms in Latin.

Therefore, in the early 13th century a scriptural meditation was thoughtfully adapted for those who desired to participate in the sanctification of daily life through a cycle of prayer meant to complement the Divine Office chanted by the more educated monks and nuns.

What became known as the rosary was the recitation of the Aves and Paters (the Our Father and Hail Mary) that were counted off on a ring of beads numbering 150. The mysteries of the New Testament were meditated upon within this “mirror” of the 150 Old Testament psalms. Hence, Salvation History itself permeated this simple method of prayer. The repetition allowed for a rhythmic breathing, leading the participant to an inner realm of peace and calm. The rosary eventually became a favoured personal devotion among many people, including the learned laity and religious.



The name *rosary* was derived from the rose, a flower having a great depth of symbolism. One of the spiritual titles given to the Virgin Mary, *Mystical Rose*, referred to her womb as the developing flower of Christ the Saviour. Moreover, the patient unfolding of the five concentric petals of the rose was likened to our own patient mastery of the five senses, the integration of all the creative and life-communicating energies of a human person. Yet, the blossoming of the spiritual life could only be achieved and maintained by the defensive “thorn” of daily perseverance.



Through the centuries, the Dominican Order has been very influential in the promotion of the rosary, as we know it today. Other religious communities also developed and practiced their own particular form of this prayer.

The Franciscan rosary, or as it is properly called, *The Franciscan Crown*, dates to the early part of the 15th century. At that time a young man who found spiritual joy in weaving a crown of wild flowers for a beautiful statue of Mary decided to enter the Franciscan Order. After entering the community, however, he was saddened when he no longer found the time to gather flowers for his personal devotion. One evening, while feeling tempted to abandon his vocation, he received a vision of the Blessed Virgin Mary. The Virgin Mother encouraged the young novice to persevere by reminding him of the joyfulness of the Franciscan spirit. She also instructed him to meditate daily on seven joyful events from her own life as a new form of the rosary. Instead of a crown of flowers, the novice would now weave a crown of prayers. Before long, many other Franciscans began to pray the *Crown* and soon it spread to the entire Order, becoming officially established in 1422.



In addition to developing this Marian devotion, the Franciscans are credited with adding the final words to the Hail Mary, *Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death*. In 1263, Saint Bonaventure, Minister General of the Order, encouraged liturgical devotion honoring the mystery of the Visitation. Saint Bonaventure also popularized the daily triple recitation of the *Angelus*, which it is believed Saint Francis initiated after visiting the Holy Land. Francis was deeply impressed by the Muslim practice of stopping to pray several times a day, and desired to Christianize this pious custom. A Franciscan pope, Sixtus IV (1471-1485), introduced the feast of the Immaculate Conception and the feast of Saint Joseph as *husband* of Mary. He also issued the first papal pronouncement encouraging the rosary as an invaluable instrument of personal and societal conversion.



[Taken from the Introduction of *The Franciscan Crown: The Joyful Mysteries in the lives of the Virgin Mary and Saint Francis of Assisi*. Robert Melnick, O.F.M. Conv. & Joseph Wood, O.F.M. Conv. (A beautiful booklet available in most Catholic Book stores, courtesy of *The Franciscan Friars of Marytown*); Compiled by Deacon Dave & Thérèse Ream, O.F.S., Revised July 2017]