

2-1962

089 - Jucunda Semper

Leo XIII

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Recommended Citation

Leo, XIII, "089 - Jucunda Semper" (1962). *Marian Reprints*. Paper 88.
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MARIAN LIBRARY STUDIES



Jucunda Semper

POPE LEO XIII

No. 89 — February, 1962

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ABOUT THE DOCUMENT

Through the kindness of the editors of *The Pope Speaks* and Rev. Eamon R. Carroll, O. Carm., S.T.D., Assistant Professor of Theology at the Catholic University of America and member of the International Pontifical Marian Academy, we are able to bring to our readers a translation of the Encyclical Letter "*Jucunda semper*" by Pope Leo XIII (September 8, 1894). The commentary which follows is by Father Carroll.

"After two successive encyclicals on the rosary and the formation of Christian virtues, Pope Leo offers the Catholic world a doctrinal exhortation on the mediation of Mary. In the judgment of some experts, this letter of Pope Leo explains better than any other the inner nature of the rosary. Blending vocal and mental prayer, the rosary sets before us the role of the Mother of God as mediatrix — as our powerful intercessor before God. The mysteries, joyful, sorrowful and glorious, all show the bond between Christ and Mary. In the joyful mysteries, she brings us Jesus, presents Him to shepherds and Wise Men, to His Father in the temple; Jesus does all through her consent. In the sorrowful, Mary shares in spirit the sufferings of the Passion and is present on Calvary to offer her Son for the salvation of mankind. The glorious decades show her participation in her Son's glory, yet remaining for a while on earth to instruct and strengthen the Church, hastening for the infant Church the coming of the Holy Spirit. Finally, she joins, body and soul, the risen Christ, to plead our cause in heaven. Towards the close there is an allusion to a blasphemous play, *Christo alla festa di Purim* (Christ at the Feast of Purim), which in spite of protests was being performed in Italy these troubled years. The pope urges recitation of the rosary for the needs of the Church."

The MARIAN LIBRARY STUDIES is published monthly eight times a year, October through May, with ecclesiastical approval, by the Marian Library of the University of Dayton. All changes of address, renewals, and new subscriptions should be sent to the circulation office located at the Marian Library, University of Dayton, Dayton 9, Ohio. Second-class postage paid at Dayton, Ohio. Subscription price is \$2.00 a year. Printed by Marianist Press, Dayton 30, Ohio.

Jucunda Semper

Pope Leo XIII

Joyfully, expectantly, and with high hopes We always look forward to the return of October, the month which, at Our urging and by Our order, has been dedicated to the Most Blessed Virgin. Now for many years this has been the season for the brilliant flowering of devotion to the rosary everywhere throughout the Catholic world. We have spoken more than once of the reason which motivated Our exhortation. The disastrous experiences of the Church and of society urgently demanded the help of God; We thought it should be sought through the intercession of His Mother, and especially by the rosary, the form of supplication which Christian people know by experience has always been most beneficial.

From the very beginning of the devotion of Mary's rosary its benefits have been evident, both in protecting holy faith from the vicious assaults of heretics and in assuring proper honor to the virtues, which needed vigorous renewal in an age of bad example. Its benefits have been evident ever since in the constant cycle of private and public answers to prayers, which are remembered in the noble institutions and monuments everywhere dedicated to her. Our age has to contend with a variety of evils, but We rejoice that We can also point to fruitful results of devotion to the rosary. However, you can see for yourselves, venerable brethren, that the reasons still remain and, in fact, are growing more serious why We should in this year again exhort you to encourage among your people a warmth of devotion in prayer to the Queen of Heaven.

Rosary increases confidence in prayer

There is this to be said too, that when we fix our thoughts on the essential nature of the rosary, the more clearly we discern its excellence and advantages, the more keen becomes Our desire and hope that Our recommendation of it may result in a remarkably increased and flourishing practice of this most holy prayer. This will be realized when souls have greater knowledge of it and when the habit of saying it grows. In making Our exhortation We will not go back over the various instructions We have given on this subject. We prefer instead to begin Our instruction by drawing attention to Divine Providence, how excellently it ordains that confidence in prayer very sweetly comes into the souls of those who pray the rosary, and how it makes the compassion of our Virgin Mother for men respond with the utmost kindness in helping us.

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In our prayer we look to Mary for help. We do so on the grounds that it is her office to win grace for us. She always enjoys this privileged office with God; because of her dignity and worth she is His most beloved; she is more powerful than all the saints of heaven. In no other form of prayer, perhaps, is this privileged office so clearly manifested as in the rosary, for in the rosary the part Our Lady had in winning salvation for men is so recalled that it seems to be unfolding with a reality that is of the present. This living quality of the rosary brings with it the gift of holiness, whether one proposes the sacred mysteries to oneself, or recites the words of the rosary devoutly.

Joyful Mysteries

First come the joyful mysteries. The eternal Son of God comes down to men, Himself made Man; Mary gives her consent and she conceives Him of the Holy Ghost. John, by a remarkable favor of God, is sanctified in the womb of his mother and endowed with gifts chosen by God for preparing the way of the Lord. It is the greeting of Mary that does all this, for she had been inspired by God to go and visit her cousin. Finally she brings Christ forth, Him for whom the nations had been waiting, and she is a Virgin still. Devout shepherds and Magi, the first to believe, hurry to His crib and find the Child with Mary His Mother. Then, in order to offer Himself in a formal ceremony to God the Father as a Victim, the Child desires to be brought to the temple, and there He has His Mother offer Him for presentation to the Lord. Mary experiences the mystery of losing her Child; she searches for Him, worrying and wondering; she finds Him with great joy.

Sorrowful Mysteries

The sorrowful mysteries are just as meaningful. In the Garden of Gethsemane, where Jesus undergoes His agony of fear and sadness even to the point of death, and in the Roman headquarters where He is scourged, crowned with thorns, condemned to death, we do not find Mary. But she had known these things would happen and had already gone through them in her heart. For when she showed the devotion of a handmaid in becoming the Mother of God, and when she offered herself completely with Her Son in the temple, then it was that she took her place at His side in the work of making expiation for the human race. Because of her consecration she suffered with Him intensely in her heart throughout the bitter agony of her Son's torment — there is no doubt about it. Finally, that divine sacrifice was to be accomplished before her very eyes; she had borne Him and brought Him up to be the Victim. At the end of these mysteries we have the still more sorrowful sight of Mary the Mother of Jesus standing by His cross. She had such great love for us that she wanted to take us as her sons; and so she made

a voluntary offering of her own Son to Divine Justice, and in her heart died with Him, pierced through by a sword of sorrow.

Glorious Mysteries

In the glorious mysteries which follow we see again the most merciful mediation of the noble Virgin, more efficacious still. She tastes with quiet joy the glorious triumph of her Son over death. She follows Him with a Mother's love as He returns to His throne in heaven, but, though she is worthy of heaven, she remains upon earth to comfort and guide the infant Church as no one else could, for she had "gone deeper into the most hidden secrets of divine wisdom than anyone would have believed."¹ Since the mystery of redeeming mankind would not have been fully realized until the Holy Spirit promised by Christ had come, we see her in that upper room which brings back such memories, as she prays with the apostles and for them (a prayer of such feeling that it cannot be described), and for the Church she hastens the coming of the fullness of the Paraclete, Christ's greatest gift, the treasure that will never fail. She then entered into eternal life. But her mediation was heightened still more; she undertook to plead our cause till the end of time. We see her taken up out of this valley of tears into the heavenly Jerusalem with choirs of angels all around her. We venerate her, the most glorious of the saints, for she wears a crown of stars bestowed on her by God her Son, and by His side she reigns as sovereign queen of the universe

In all of this, venerable brethren we see the plan of God, a plan of wisdom, a plan of solicitude.² At the same time the great merits won for us by the Virgin Mary shine forth and must fill the hearts of each of us with joy as we realize that through the mediation of Mary we have the certain hope of finding God's mercy and pity.

The Hail Mary and Our Father

Vocal prayer fits admirably into contemplation of the mysteries and shares its purpose. Fittingly enough, the first prayer of the rosary is Christ's own prayer to the Heavenly Father. Passing from the remarkable series of petitions in the Our Father, addressed to the throne of God's Majesty, one turns next to Mary with words of prayer. And with good reason, for here one is following the law of merciful mediation which we are talking about and which Saint Bernardine of Siena puts this way: "Every grace which is communicated to this world comes to us by a three-fold course: for from God to Christ, from Christ to the Virgin, and from the Virgin to us grace is communicated in ordered descent."³ These are the essentially different stages, as it were, of the descent of grace. On this last one we prefer somehow to linger, and at some length, due to the nature of the rosary. We continue the Angelic Salutation through each decade, as if we would more confidently attain to the other stages this

way, going to God the Father through Christ. This is why we pour forth the Angelic Salutation so often to Mary, that our weak and halting prayer be given the confident strength that it needs; we plead with her that she intercede with God for us and that she become our advocate. The prayers we say will find great favor and efficacy with Him if they are commended by the prayers of the Virgin; for He addresses to her this gracious invitation: "Let your voice sound in my ears, for your voice is sweet" (Cant. of Cant. 2:14). For this reason the glorious titles that we address to her come back again and again in our prayer. We hail her who "has found favor with God" (Lk. 1:30), who was made by Him extraordinarily "full of grace" (Lk. 1:28), in order that the fullness of grace might pour forth upon all. We hail her to whom the Lord is united in the closest possible way. We hail her "blessed among women" (Lk. 1:42), who "alone has taken away the curse and borne our blessings,"⁴ the blessed Fruit of her womb, the Blessing of all the nations. We hail her, Mother of God. With this exalted dignity to rely upon, what will she not be sure to obtain for us sinners? With her to rely upon, what may we not hope for throughout this life and in the last agony of the soul?

Power of Mary

When one applies oneself in all seriousness and faith to prayerful consideration of the rosary's mysteries, one cannot fail to marvel at the divine purpose manifested in the great Virgin for the salvation of all nations. One will have lively confidence and will exult to take refuge in the citadel of her heart. This is practically what Saint Bernard says: "Remember, O most gracious Virgin Mary, that never was it known that anyone who fled to thy protection, implored thy help, or sought thy intercession, was left unaided."

The rosary has the power to instill in those who say it a confidence of approach to Mary which in turn has the power of exciting her virginal heart to pity for us. It is obvious what a thing of joy it is for her to see us and to listen while we devoutly weave heartfelt petitions and beautiful titles into a rosary for her. When we pray together like this, we desire to give back to God the glory that is due to Him; the only thing we desire is that His will, His desires, be done. Glorifying His goodness and His generosity, we call Him Father, and, though we are not worthy, we even ask for His best blessings. All this gives wonderful delight to Mary; in fact she magnifies the Lord through our devotion. We speak to God with worthy prayer indeed when we address to Him the Our Father.

To the proper and ordered petitions of the Our Father, which are such fitting manifestations of Christian faith and hope and charity, is added the weight of a certain counsel very dear to the Virgin Mother. For with our voice the voice of Jesus her Son seems to be joined, since He it was who composed and entrusted to us this formula of prayer and bade us

use it: "Thus shall you pray" Mt. 6:9). When we obey this command in reciting the rosary, we need have no doubt that she will be all the more willing to expend on us the love which is hers to dispense for a heart full of love. She will graciously accept this mystical garland of prayers, and she will be very generous with gifts in return.

A distinctive devotion

This distinctive devotion of the rosary, so ideal for praying well, is a remarkable basis for having greater certainty that we are right when we assure ourselves of Mary's generosity and goodness to us. Man is so weak that many different things keep distracting him from his prayer with God and keep disrupting his faithful purpose. But if he has the right outlook, he will see right away how effective the rosary is for helping us to concentrate, to overcome spiritual sloth, to excite in us wholesome sorrow for sin, to raise the mind to the things of God.

Meditation and vocal prayer

As is well known, there are two elements in the rosary. They are distinct, but they are joined together. They are meditation on the mysteries and vocal prayer. This combined kind of prayer requires a special kind of attention on our part, not just to direct our minds to God somehow, but, more than this, to enable us so to reflect and meditate that we will profit by the example of the better life and find ourselves growing in holiness all the time. There is nothing greater, nothing more admirable than these mysteries; the essence of Christian faith is found in them. Truth, justice, and peace have come into the world by the light and power of these mysteries; because of them there is a new order of things in the world, and the effects are of great joy.

Living the Mysteries

What we have said is borne out by the manner in which these solemn mysteries are proposed to those who say the rosary. The rosary is so made up that it does not require learning or talent to pray it well. For the mysteries are not proposed as articles of faith and doctrines to be speculated upon, but rather as living events to be seen and relived. The more realistically they are presented, with the proper circumstances of place, time, and persons, the more they grip our souls and the more effective is their influence on us. Since the mysteries are usually impressed deeply on our hearts from infancy, anyone who really wants to pray does not have to strain his imagination at all when the individual mysteries are named; he simply goes through them with familiar and loving reflection, and, through the goodness of Mary, he accumulates a wealth of heavenly grace.

There is something else in the rosary litany of praise which makes the rosary garlands more acceptable to her and more meritorious. For when we devoutly recall the three groups of mysteries, we make it still more clear how affectionate and grateful we are to her; we prove to her that we never tire of recalling her favors which are a token of her boundlessly charitable resolve to save us. We frequently recall her great goodness. We kneel before her and faithfully commemorate her favors. We can scarcely imagine how much joy this always gives her blessed soul and what feelings of motherly concern this arouses in her. As a result of these heartfelt considerations, our prayer acquires a more ardent spirit of devotion and a confidence in making petitions. This is clear from the fact that whenever we go through the individual mysteries, matter for the prayer of petition always comes in – and this prayer is always effective with the Blessed Virgin. Yes, we fly to you, holy Mother of God; do not despise the wretched children of Eve. We are your suppliants, O powerful and merciful advocate for our salvation. We urge and beseech you, by the sweet joys which come to you from your Son Jesus, by the mysterious sorrows which you shared with Him, by the splendor of His glory which is reflected in you, to hear us, although we are not worthy. Hear us with mercy!

A mark of Christianity

We have considered the excellence of Mary's rosary, venerable brethren, and We have praised it for two main reasons. It should now be all the more clear why it is Our concern never to cease to commend it, to promote it. As We pointed out at the beginning, our own age needs the help of heaven in a special way, especially since the Church is suffering so much in so many places and her rights and her liberty are threatened. In so many places there are so many attempts to overturn completely the prosperity and peace of Christian nations. Again we assert positively that we have in the rosary the best source of hope for winning the help we need. It is Our wish that the rosary be honored again everywhere as it used to be, and as it should be; in accordance with Our wishes. Let it be loved and cherished, in cities and towns, in families and factories, throughout all classes of society, as nothing less than a distinguishing mark of the profession of Christianity, and a very sure way to draw down the mercy of God.

Everyone should follow up this idea more intensely day by day, in these times when there is a vicious perversity which drives men on to contrive and dare anything. They rouse the wrath of God Himself, and draw down upon their own homelands His just and terrible vengeance. All good men share with Us this sorrow, among others, that in the very heart of Catholic countries there are so many who rejoice to see religion suffer insult in any way at all. There are too many of them. They seem to

make it their occupation to hold up to contempt and popular ridicule the holy things of the Church and the traditional confidence of Catholics in the intercession of the Blessed Virgin. They have the incredible effrontery to publicize whatever they do. In recent months they have not even spared the most august person of Jesus Christ the Savior. They were not at all ashamed to drag Him on the stage of the theatre which is now often tainted with scandal, and to portray Him stripped of the majesty proper to His Divine Nature. Take away the Divinity, and the very redemption of mankind is done away with. They were not ashamed to manifest a desire to save from eternal disgrace the man guilty of this crime, a perfidy more hateful and gross than any in the history of man, the betrayal of Christ. At this, which took place or was scheduled to take place throughout the cities of Italy, there was vigorous universal protest. Men were indignant, and vehemently so, that the sacred rights of religion were violated, violated and trampled on, in the country which has, with justice, the privilege of glorying in the name Catholic. The bishops were concerned, as they should have been, and lost no time. They made very just representations to those whose sacred task it was to protect the honor of the religion of the country. They not only warned the faithful about the seriousness of the danger, but also urged them to make reparation, by outstanding religious observances, for this disgraceful outrage to our most loving Saviour. Good men left no doubt at all in Our minds as to their promptness, which was remarkably evidenced in many ways, for they succeeded in relieving the bitterness that had so deeply affected Us in this affair.

Another reason

On account of what has happened, it is time We spoke out. It is Our sacred office to do so; We cannot but speak out. We join Our representations in the most solemn manner to those of the bishops and their people. In the zeal of Our apostolic heart We grieve over this scandalous sacrilege; with the same zeal We execrate it; and with the same zeal We strongly urge on Christian nations, and especially the Italian people, that they keep inviolate their ancient religion, which is their most precious heritage. Let them defend it vigorously, and never cease to enrich it by living in a spirit of true piety. This is another reason why We desire that throughout the month of October individuals and groups vie in honoring the great Mother of God, powerful advocate of Christendom and most glorious Queen of Heaven. And We confirm with all Our heart the holy indulgences already granted for Marian devotions.

Venerable brethren, may God "who in His loving mercy has given us such a mediatrix"⁵ and who "wanted us to receive everything through Mary,"⁶ look with favor on our united prayers. With her gracious prayers may we come to realize our hopes. To this prayer We add Our Apostolic

Benediction as a sign of assurance; We impart it to you, to your clergy, and to your people, lovingly in Our Lord.

Given in Rome, at St. Peter's, on the eighth day of September, in the year eighteen hundred and ninety-four, the seventeenth of Our pontificate.

Leo XIII, Pope

Notes

- 1 St. Bernard, *On the Twelve Prerogatives of the Blessed Virgin Mary*, n. 6.
- 2 St. Bernard, *Sermon on the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary*, n. 6.
- 3 *Sixth Sermon for Feasts of the Blessed Virgin Mary, on the Annunciation*, I, 2.
- 4 St. Thomas Aquinas, *On the Angelic Salutation*, n. 8.
- 5 St. Bernard, *On the Twelve Prerogatives of the Blessed Virgin Mary*, n. 2.
- 6 St. Bernard, *Sermon on the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary*, n. 7.

The original Latin text of this document is available in *Acta Sanctae Sedis* 27 (1894-95) 177-84.

The above English translation by Walter M. Abbott, S.J., and William J. Burke, S.J., is reprinted from *Mary and the Popes*, ed. T.J.M. Burke, S.J., (American Press: 1954), pp. 94-107.

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