

Wednesday of last week was the Feast of Our Lady of the Rosary. The feast's original title was Our Lady of Victory, having been established by Pope St Pius V in 1571 to acknowledge the role of Mary's intercession in the victory of the combined fleet of the Papal States over that of the Ottoman empire in the Gulf of Petras off the west coast of Greece.

The Pope had asked all of Rome to pray the Rosary at the time its navy engaged the more powerful Ottoman flotilla in battle. And, in fact, at a crucial moment in the lead up to the confrontation, a change in the direction of the wind had favoured the Papal fleet, enabling its squadrons to take up their planned positions before making contact with the opposition.

The praying of the Rosary in Rome in October 1571 was associated with great need, and as Pope St John Paul II noted in his *Letter on the Rosary* of 2002, "the Church has always attributed particular efficacy to this prayer, entrusting to it the most difficult problems." At a time of pandemic, with all its related challenges, it is good to recall this.

St John Paul II attributed to the Rosary both "the simplicity of a popular devotion [and, as well] the theological depth of a prayer suited to those who feel the need for deeper contemplation." He also drew attention to its remote origins "in the prayer ropes used by the desert fathers of the 4th century to count the repetitions of the Jesus prayer [Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner] and thus its correspondence to the form of prayer which took root in the soil of the Christian East."

For John Paul II the Rosary enables a person to "sit at the school of Mary, contemplate the beauty on the face of Christ, and to experience the depths of his love." He thus reminds us of the ultimate context of the Rosary, a prayer that, while seeking Mary's help, draws us into the love of God in Christ.

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