

Mary's title of "Mystical Rose"

from the Litany of Loreto

It is a simple fact that no flower best depicts Mother Mary's attributes and who she is as the "Rose Flower." It is said the rose is one of the most beautiful flowers in all of creation. The rose in relation to the Blessed Mother displays perfect love, form, fragrance, and color. So, as the rose is considered the queen of flowers, so Mary is invoked as Queen of All Saints. As described by spiritual writers, she is the "mystical rose without thorn", the "rose of paradise", and the "rose bringing salvation to all who call upon her." In the fourteenth century the poet Dante called Mary "the Rose, in which the divine Word became flesh...." And in the Litany of Loreto, the Blessed Virgin Mary is invoked as the Rosa Mystica or "Mystical Rose."

The word "mystical" can have a number of meanings. It may mean "hidden" or "mysterious." It can also mean a likeness to something else, and analogy. Here, when we say that Our Lady is a "Mystical Rose," we mean she is like a rose.

The title "Mystical Rose" expresses well the fact that Mary was without spot or blemish. She was consecrated wholly to the Lord, her soul exhaled without ceasing, and her life was an exquisite perfume as of a sweet rose. She therefore pleased the King of kings to such a point that she was dearer to Him than all other creatures put together. Thus, she merits the name Rosa Mystica "because she comprises in herself all the excellent and valued properties of the rose; and especially because, amongst all grades of flowers, to the rose is awarded the highest grade, and it is even regarded as the queen of flowers. In a similar manner, Mary is superior in dignity to all the angels and saints, excels them all in glory, and is most justly entitled to be called and venerated as queen of heaven and earth."

Also, as the rose is the most beautiful flowers, emitting the sweetest perfume even in the midst of thorns, Mary's virtues are an odor of sanctity amidst the thorns of this life.

We find the most beautiful meditation on Our Lady as Rosa Mystica in the writings of Saint Brigid. "The rose," Mary told Saint Brigid, "gives a fragrant odor; it is beautiful to the sight, and tender to the touch, and yet it grows among thorns, inimical to the beauty and tenderness. So may also those who are mild, patient, beautiful in virtue, be put to a test among adversaries. And as the thorn, on the other hand, guards, so do wicked surroundings protect the just against sin by demonstrating to them the destructiveness of sin." Saint Brigid then added: "The Virgin may suitably be called a blooming rose. Just as the gentle rose is placed among thorns, so this gentle Virgin was surrounded by sorrow."

St. Ambrose relates how the rose came to have thorns. Before it became one of the flowers of the earth, the rose grew in Paradise without thorns. Only after the fall of man did the rose take on its thorns to remind man of the sins he had committed and his fall from grace; whereas its fragrance and beauty continued to remind him of the splendor of Paradise. It is probably in reference to this that the Virgin Mary is called a 'rose without thorns,' because she was exempt from Original Sin.

As early as the 4th century, St. Gregory of Naziansus spoke of "weaving a chaplet for the Virgin Mary." Chaplet here means the same thing as crown or wreath. Further, according to 13th-century German and Spanish legends, a monk saw the "aves" (hail Marys) he offered to Mary turn into a chain of roses. These Hail -Marys-seen-as-roses would be rendered into English as the Rosary.

Pope Leo XIII will go on to say, "For as often as we greet Mary with the angelic salutation, 'full of grace,' we present to the Blessed Virgin, in the repetition of our words of praise, roses which emit the most delightful perfume." Each prayer offered through Mary takes on the sense of a rose being lovingly arranged. As Pope Pius XII would say, among the many things the rose represents, we should interpret them as manifestations of "the fullness of her perfections and the delicacy of her goodness."

Holy Rosary

As you already imagine, the Holy Rosary, of course, takes its name from the Rose. The word Rosary means "Crown of Roses." Roses are a symbol of the Rosary and its mysteries. Rosebuds are a figure of Jesus as Infant; half-blown blossoms represent the Passion of Christ. The full flower shows forth Christ's victory over death and triumph. Similarly, the different colors and parts of the rose bush should remind us of the Joyful, Sorrowful, and Glorious mysteries. And, since Mary is herself called Mystical Rose, she obtains for us the blessing attached to the blessed roses.

In addition, Saint Louis de Montfort, in his book, *The Secret of the Rosary*, speaks symbolically of the White Rose of purity, simplicity, devotion; the Red Rose of the Precious Blood of Our Lord. He also speaks of the Rose Tree, symbolizing the Mystical Roses of Jesus and Mary. He compares the rosebud to a rosary bead, and urges children to regard the prayers of the rosary as "your little wreath of roses for Jesus and Mary."

In short, "a rose delights us because of its beauty----so we have Jesus and Mary in the Joyous Mysteries. Its thorns are sharp, and pricks, which makes us think of them in the Sorrowful Mysteries, and last of all its perfume is so sweet that everyone loves it, and this fragrance symbolizes their Glorious Mysteries."

St. Bernard wrote, "Eve was a thorn, wounding, bringing death to all. In Mary we see a rose, soothing everybody's hurts, giving the destiny of salvation back to all." A rose's thorns could also stand for her sacrifice in accepting the role of Mother of God.

It is for this reason we should attach ourselves to Mary by praying the Holy Rosary. In fact, we should not only pray the rosary, but become a living rosary which is basically Jesus and Mama Mary's own lives lived in and through us. As we pray the rosary, let us acquire the virtues of Jesus and Mary in the cloister of our hearts.

Encouraging us to pray the rosary daily, St. Louis de Montfort has this to say: "So please do not scorn this beautiful and heavenly tree, but plant it with your own hands in the garden of your soul, making the resolution to say your Rosary every day. By saying it daily and by doing good works you will be tending your tree, watering it, hoeing the earth around it." "Eventually you will see that this little seed which I have given you, and which seems so very small now, will grow into a tree so great that the birds of Heaven, i.e., predestinate and contemplative souls, will dwell in it and make their nests there. Its shade will shelter them from the scorching heat of the sun and its great height will keep them safe from the wild beasts on the ground. And best of all, they will feed upon the tree's fruit----which is none other than our adorable Jesus, to Whom be honor and glory forever and ever." Amen. So be it. (God Alone, St. Louis de Montfort)

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