

The Anglican Rosary

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*"Pray without
Ceasing"*



*“Rejoice always,
pray without ceasing,
give thanks in all circumstances;
for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.”*

– I THESSALONIANS 5

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History

The use of beads or other counting device as a companion to prayer has an ancient history. Those early Christian monastics known as the Desert Mothers and Fathers were reported to have gathered up small pebbles and put them in their pockets. While walking, they would pray and toss a pebble into the sand each time they completed a prayer. When their pockets were empty, they would stop, gather more pebbles, and begin again. Beads or knots on a rope or string became a lot more convenient than having to gather pebbles all the time.

Every major religious tradition has used these aids to prayer. The earliest recorded examples are the *Mala* beads of the Hindu and Buddhist faiths. The Eastern Orthodox have a prayer rope with intricate cross-knots, and the Roman Catholics have the rosary with which most of us are probably familiar. There are also the Islamic prayer beads called the *Misbaha* or the *Tasbeih*.



Traditional
Mala Beads

The use of the rosary as a focus for contemplative prayer and meditation experienced a revival in the Episcopal Church in the 1980's. A specific Anglican Rosary was developed during this period. By design, it both reflects our

emphasis on incarnational theology¹ and is more flexible for personalized prayers.

Why?

Many people seek to deepen their prayer life. This search has taken many forms within the Episcopal Church in the past thirty years such as centering prayer², walking the labyrinth³, and other varieties of meditation.

Praying the rosary is seen as a tactile aid to focus on prayer. My mind naturally tends to wander, and it helps to have something I can hold onto physically – for me, it is pleasant to carry my prayers in my hand. I always have the rosary in my pocket, and although I do not pull it out in the grocery store or while pumping gas, just its touch can remind me of the peace of prayer and put me in a prayerful frame of mind, whatever my activity.



Sometimes people express concerns about the rosary because of Jesus' injunction found in Matthew 6:7 – *When you are praying, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do; for they think that they will be heard because of their many words.* In my experience, any prayer can become *empty phrases*. I was raised in a religious tradition that allowed only unplanned, extemporaneous prayer, and I now serve as a priest in the Episcopal Church where liturgical prayer is more commonly heard. Any kind of prayer can become *empty phrases*. I have heard extemporaneous prayer that was beautiful, genuine, and uplifting and also liturgical prayer that came from the heart and brought me closer to God's presence. Unfortunately, I have also listened to extemporaneous prayers where the person constantly used clichés and catchphrases and was clearly not even paying attention to what she or he was saying. I also admit I have gritted my teeth as a bored lector droned through the prayers in the Book of Common Prayer. I think the difference lies in your heart, your focus, and your intent, more than in the form of the prayer. The rosary is only one of a number of types of prayer in which I engage.

How?

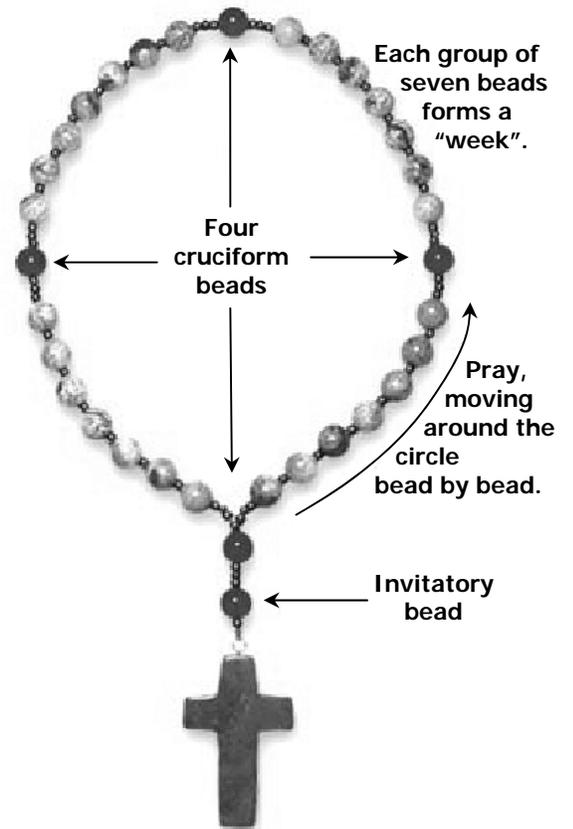
There is a great deal of symbolism woven into the design of the Anglican rosary. There are thirty-three beads representing the thirty-three years of Jesus' life. The *Cruciform* beads form the cross and can also represent the four compass points of the earth. The seven beads of the *Weeks* can represent the seven days of creation, the day of the Sabbath, and the number seven is often used in the Bible as symbolic of perfection. To enter into prayer there is an *Invitatory* bead (pronounced *in-vī'tə-tōr'ē*), much like we say a collect at the beginning of our services to invite us into worship.

The rosary can be prayed alone or with a group. It is recommended a person pray around the circle three times – a symbolic number for the Trinity. Doing so also invites you to go deeper as distractions fall away.

In general, the rosary is used in three basic ways:

1. Repetition of the same prayer or devotion.
2. Repetition of several different prayers in some pattern, sometimes interspersed with or accompanied by meditations whether spoken, silent or with music or chanting.
3. Meditation on a series of spiritual themes.

When praying, the idea is to be unhurried and calm. The goal is not so much to finish, as to develop a rhythm in prayer. I tend not to think of it as repetition, but sinking deeper with each meditation into the presence of God.



Sample Prayers

Trisagion⁴ and Jesus Prayer

The Cross

In the Name of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

The Invitatory

*O God make speed to save me (us),
O Lord make haste to help me (us),
Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit:
As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.*

The Cruciforms

*Holy God, Holy and Mighty,
Holy Immortal One, Have mercy upon me (us).*

The Weeks

*Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God,
Have mercy on me, a sinner.*

CONTINUED...

The Invitatory (Last time through)
The Lord's Prayer

The Cross
*Let us (or "I") bless the Lord
 Thanks be to God.*

Julian of Norwich Prayer

The Cross
In the Name of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

The Invitatory
*O God make speed to save me (us),
 O Lord make haste to help me (us),
 Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit:
 As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever.
 Amen.*

The Cruciforms
*God of your goodness, give me yourself,
 For you are enough to me.
 And I can ask for nothing less that is to your glory.
 And if I ask for anything less, I shall still be in want, for only in you have I
 all.*

The Weeks
*All shall be well, and all shall be well,
 And all manner of things shall be well.
 - or -
 In His love He has done His works, and in His love He has made all things
 beneficial to us.*

The Invitatory (Last time through)
The Lord's Prayer

The Cross
*Let us (or "I") bless the Lord
 Thanks be to God.*

– WRITTEN BY SISTER BRIGIT-CAROL, S.D., SOLITARIES OF DEKOVEN

A Celtic Prayer

The Cross

In the Name of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

The Invitatory

*O God make speed to save me (us),
O Lord make haste to help me (us),
Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy*

Spirit:

*As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever.
Amen.*

The Cruciforms

*Be the eye of God dwelling with me,
The foot of Christ in guidance with me,
The shower of the Spirit pouring on me,
Richly and generously.*

The Weeks

(PRAY EACH PHRASE ON A SEPARATE BEAD.)

*I bow before the Father who made me,
I bow before the Son who saved me,
I bow before the Spirit who guides me,
In love and adoration.
I praise the Name of the one on high.
I bow before thee Sacred Three,
The ever One, the Trinity.*

The Invitatory (Last time through)

The Lord's Prayer

The Cross

*Let us (or "I") bless the Lord
Thanks be to God.*



– WRITTEN BY SISTER BRIGIT-CAROL, S.D., SOLITARIES OF DEKOVEN

An Evening Prayer

The Cross

*Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit. As it was in the
beginning, is now, and will be for ever. Amen.*

The Invitatory

*Open my lips, O Lord,
and my mouth shall proclaim Your praise. CONTINUED...*

The Cruciforms
*Guide us waking, O Lord,
 and guard us sleeping;
 that awake we may watch
 with Christ, and asleep
 we may rest in peace.*



The Weeks

*Jesus, Lamb of God, have mercy on us.
 Jesus, bearer of our sins, have mercy on us.
 Jesus, redeemer of the world, give us your peace.*

The Invitatory (Last time through)

The Lord's Prayer

The Cross

*Let us (or "I") bless the Lord
 Thanks be to God.*

— KING OF PEACE EPISCOPAL CHURCH, KINGSLAND, GEORGIA

Bless the Lord

The Cross

In the Name of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

The Invitatory

*O God make speed to save me (us),
 O Lord make haste to help me (us),
 Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit: As it was in the
 beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.*

The Cruciforms

*Behold now, bless the Lord, all you servants of the Lord. You that stand in
 the house of the Lord, lift up your hands in the holy place and bless the
 Lord.*

The Weeks

*I lift up my eyes to the hills;
 From where is my help to come?
 My help comes from the Lord,
 The maker of heaven and earth.*

The Invitatory (Last time through)

The Lord's Prayer

CONTINUED...

The Cross

*Let us (or "I") bless the Lord
Thanks be to God.*

Including Specific Personal Prayers

When I have wanted to include my own specific prayers within a rosary prayer, I have tried three ways – they all work well:

Pausing – After a specific bead (usually the first Cruciform) I simply offer my personal thanksgivings, intercessions, and petitions, and then continue on with the regular rosary. If I think of other prayers as I go, I simply pause after the next Cruciform.

Include Specific Prayers in the Weeks – Certain kinds of prayer, such as intercessions for the sick, work right into some of the rosary prayers by just changing a word to the person's name, e.g., in the "Jesus Prayer", instead of saying, "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner," when you pray the Weeks, you could change it to, "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on Fred."



"Dropping In" Specific Prayers – While praying and using the words of the rosary I have chosen, I just spend awhile visualizing the loved one I wish to be healed, or I dwell on a particular blessing, or I allow myself to let go of a specific fear. I do not plan to insert these thoughts at any particular point in the rosary, I just let them surface however they wish as I immerse myself in the rhythm of the prayers. I have always referred to this as "dropping in" prayers because it feels to me like letting a single drop slide into a still pool causing ripples outward.

Creating Your Own Rosary Prayers



When learning the rosary, people often start with one prayer, and then learn another and another to give variety, for the change of the seasons, the time of day, or because of their particular needs. Once you are comfortable using the rosary as a companion in prayer, you might consider writing your own.

This can be as simple as substituting one or two prayers from the Book of Common Prayer or a different scripture you love within a rosary prayer you already know. It could also take the form of writing your own words and designing an entire set of prayers that are uniquely your own. Here are some steps you might consider:

1. Decide on the overall theme or need you wish to express in your prayer.
Perhaps you wish to focus on healing, peace, faith, etc.
2. Gather prayer, poems, hymns, quotes, etc. that go with your theme or write your own.
3. Write your prayers for the Cross, the Invitatory bead, the four Cruciforms, and the Weeks. You might like to use the same prayer for each type of bead or use a different prayer on each type of bead (1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th Cruciform for example).
 - a. The Cross might be an acclamation, a meditation, or a statement of faith.
 - b. The Invitatory might be some kind of thought that invites you deeper into prayer and quiets your heart.
 - c. The Cruciforms might reflect the overall theme you have chosen in a general way.
 - d. The Weeks might very specifically reflect the theme you have chosen.

Internet Resources

<http://gigibeads.net/index.html> -- A site where you may purchase rosaries with a link to different prayers written by many people under the link, "How to Use the Prayer Beads". Link includes a number of prayers specifically tailored to the saints' days in the Episcopal Church.



<http://www.fullcirclebeads.com/prayers.html> -- Purchase of beads available with general guidelines and some standard prayers.

<http://www.kingofpeace.org/prayerbeads.htm> -- A site sponsored by the King of Peace Episcopal Church in Georgia. Good basic history of the Anglican Rosary with directions to make your own beads, sample prayers, links to places where you can purchase rosaries, and even an online rosary you can pray.

<http://www.franciscan.org.au/anglican-rosary/> -- The Society of St. Francis in Australia. Excellent history and thought behind the Anglican Rosary. Especially good advice on how to personalize prayers for your own rosary. An online store, but they apparently sell only one style of rosary made from wooden beads from the Holy Land.

<http://www.solitariesofdekoven.org/store.html> -- The Solitaries of De Koven are a group of Episcopal solitaries devoted to the practice of contemplative prayer. They support their work and lives through the sale of Anglican Rosaries.

<http://www.whitestreetbeadcompany.com> – A selection of different rosaries you may order, some of them quite fancy, but none over \$40.00.

Many other sites can be found on Google, and you can often find Anglican Rosaries on E-bay, although you might have to look closely to be sure they are not from other religious traditions.

Books

The Anglican Rosary by Lynn C. Bauman; Praxis Publishing, TX, 2003

A Circle of Prayer: The Anglican Rosary for All of God's People – 2nd Ed.; The Convent of the Transfiguration; Contact information available at www.ctsisters.org



End Notes

¹ *Incarnational Theology* is basically the understanding that our physical lives truly do matter to God. This is shown in scripture by Jesus' concern for the poor, the sick and suffering, and is attested to by Jesus becoming human in the first place. God speaks to us through human means by our own individual human experiences and through the human community, especially the church. *Incarnational Theology* has been the major impetus behind the focus in the Episcopal Church on caring for the disadvantaged in our society and issues of justice. *Incarnational Theology* played a significant role in Anglican identity, thinking, and history, and was written about and explored deeply by William Temple, Archbishop of Canterbury from 1942 to 1944.



² *Centering Prayer*: A method of quiet meditation in which a single symbolic word is used as a sign of one's willingness to wait on God and be available to God's presence. This word is used as a point of focus. The discipline involves setting aside twenty minutes or so for quiet prayer. This apophatic method has been widely taught and practiced in the Episcopal Church since the early 1980s. Thomas Keating's *Finding Grace at the Center* (1978) encouraged the practice of centering prayer – *An Episcopal Dictionary of the Church, A User Friendly Reference for Episcopalians*, Don S. Armentrout and Robert Boak Slocum, editors.

³ "The labyrinth is an ancient pattern found in many cultures around the world. Labyrinth designs were found on pottery, tablets and tiles date as far back as 4000 years. Many patterns are based on spirals from nature... One feature they all share is that they have one path which winds in a circuitous way to the center... Labyrinths are currently being used world-wide as a way to quiet the mind, find balance, and encourage meditation, insight and celebration."
– Grace Cathedral Website, http://www.gracecathedral.org/labyrinth/labyrinths_new.shtml

⁴ Trisagion Means "Thrice Holy"