

From the Chaplaincy



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THE BEAD OF PRAYER

By Fr. Francis Ongkingco

“Hail Mary, full of grace...,” my voice trembled as I led the Rosary.

“Holy Mary, Mother of God...,” my wife and three other children responded as we intensely prayed for our daughter, Francine, who was suffering from a very rare virus.

Believe it or not, this was my first time ever to lead the Holy Rosary in my life. My wife Sarah was

emotionally unable to lead, especially after the doctors privately informed us that there was nothing more they could do.

Only a miracle could save our daughter!

As I felt each round bead pass between my moist and trembling fingers, a very familiar scene from my childhood came back to my mind.

I recall how hard we also prayed for my grandmother's recovery. I could still see her lying serenely upon her bed. Although her eyes were closed, her lips were moving as she silently prayed the Rosary with us. Her hands held the Rosary, made out of precious "wild pearls," given to her as a wedding gift by her great-grand aunt.

As a child then, I had no patience for such a "monotonous" chain of Hail Marys and Holy Marys. My knees immediately gave way to tiredness and I began wandering around looking for something *more* interesting to do.

Children are never fond of solemnities and rites, even in such existential moments as death, they continue to eagerly explore and enjoy life. The sudden and well-placed pinch of my mother was the only thing that brought me back praying sorely on my knees. Worse, I couldn't focus on praying now that I was trying to rub off a new throbbing pain on my pinched left arm. But I immediately forgot this discomfort when I noticed something that the others - I thought - did not observe.



It was strange how grandmother held her Rosary. She didn't pass the beads through her fingers, but seemed to be "playing" with only one single bead. Suddenly, a gentle spark appeared between her frail and wrinkled fingers where the bead was. The spark lasted for a second or so, and the bead completely vanished!

"Mommy! Mommy! Did you...?" I cried out as I moved closer to examine grandma's Rosary, but Mom only nudged me back to my kneeling position and pinned me with another pinch. "Ouch!"

I was too excited about the "magic" bead that I didn't even realize that grandma had just passed away that very same moment.

It was only a few years later, as an older boy whose parents would now take more seriously, that I told Mom about the disappearing bead. I was surprised she didn't say anything, but simply nodded in agreement.

"Do you believe what I'm saying, Mom?"

"Of course, Ralph," she replied. "In fact, I never got around to telling you that grandma's Rosary and her prayers had saved a number of lives." I was amazed with what I heard. Mom then shared how during the great war, grandma would bribe the invaders with some of the precious beads in exchange for the freedom of her friends and relatives who were about to be unjustly executed.

“Since then,” my mom continued, “grandma offered a bead to Our Lady for a very special or urgent need.”

“You mean you’ve seen the beads disappearing like magic?” I asked.

Mom only smiled back, and said, “Not always, but it isn’t magic, Ralph, but faith and prayers. Especially because grandma would only ask favors for others and never for herself.”

Many years later, before mom passed away, I received grandma’s Rosary as an heirloom.

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As grandma’s Rosary beads and medals jingled in the air between my hands, I noticed that the bead between my fingertips was one of the few remaining pearl beads. The other beads were replaced by some hard wood or stone.

I closed my eyes and prayed intensely begging Our Lady for a miracle. I continued to lead the prayers, but I didn’t move my fingers from that pearl bead.

Suddenly, I couldn’t tell exactly what happened. I seemed to be in some sort of trance. A woman’s gentle soft voice said, “Ralph, I’ve heard your prayers. I would like to choose: that I take the bead of your prayer and in exchange give back your daughter’s health; or to allow me to take the precious bead your daughter is with me to Heaven.”



I started to cry. Sarah and the children were surprised to see me crying, and realized something different was happening. Then I prayed the most profound and difficult prayer in my life: “My Mother...I...would like to instead leave the choice to You: Take what is for You the most precious bead and keep it always close to Your heart in Heaven!”

After saying this prayer, I then felt great peace permeating my soul. My wife and children huddled around to embrace me. One by one, we all knelt around our baby Francine. Our sorrow was turned into a profound joy of being assured that she was now with our Lady in Heaven.

“... pray for us sinners, now, and at the hour of our death. Thy Will be done. Amen.”