

***Franciscan University Presents***  
***“Champions of the Rosary”***  
***With guest, Fr. Donald Calloway, MIC***

***The Rosary: The Spiritual Sword of Mary***  
**Fr. Donald Calloway, MIC**

**The rosary was forged in an age of chivalry.** It is a spiritual weapon, a heavenly sword, fashioned by the hands of a Divine Craftsman. All swords take time and skill to make, but this heavenly sword required the greatest of efforts — centuries — to produce. It is a weapon unlike any other. It has the power to slay dragons (demons), converts sinners, and conquer hearts. The blade of this sword was forged in the living Word of God, shaped by the hammer of divine inspiration, and entrusted to the Queen of Heaven and her chosen servants.

When the weapon was finally battle-ready and the time set for the Divine Craftsman to unsheathe its power, the Queen of Heaven revealed it to the world and chose a zealous preacher to be its founder. She knighted him with the divine weapon and commissioned him to preach it far and wide.

From this holy man an Order of Preachers would be formed to champion the weapon with its mysteries and hand on the sword to all who desire to wield it. These chosen souls are known throughout history as champions of the rosary.

***St. Dominic: The First Champion of the Rosary***

At the beginning of the 13<sup>th</sup> century, the Church was experiencing violent opposition from a group known as the Albigensians, a heretical sect named after the town of Albi in southern France where it originated. During the spread of this heresy, a Spaniard named Dominic Guzman established himself as a dynamic orator against their errors. In preparing for his efforts to correct the errors of the Albigensians, St. Dominic had reasoned that since he was gifted with great oratorical ability and theological acumen, he would be able to win souls back to Christ rather easily. However, after having spent several years ardently preaching in town after town, he realized that his methods were not as effective as he had hoped and came to the conclusion that he needed something more. He knew he was up against a formidable spiritual power and needed something strong enough to overcome the enemy.

According to tradition, St. Dominic retreated into the silence of the Prouille forest near the town of Toulouse, France, to pray, begging heaven to come to his aid and give him what he needed to overcome the Albigensians. After three days of intense prayer, the Queen of Heaven came to his assistance. She informed him that his efforts in preaching had been noble, but it was the *Ave Maria* that would give his preaching power. The Queen of Heaven said to him: “Wonder not that until now you [St. Dominic] have obtained so little fruit by your labors; you have spent them on a barren soil, not yet watered with the dew of divine grace. When God willed to renew the face of the earth, he began by sending down on it the fertilizing rain of the Angelic Salutation. Therefore, preach my Psalter.”<sup>[1]</sup> This was the founding moment of the holy rosary of Mary. It was the moment the sword was unsheathed.

### ***Championing the Rosary in Battle***

The first rosary victory was won at the Battle of Muret on September 12, 1213. A small town in southern France near the city of Toulouse, Muret was a stronghold for the Albigensians. Due to the efforts of St. Dominic and his rosary, the heretical sect was defeated and the first chapel ever dedicated to the rosary was established at the Church of St. Jacques where St. Dominic had been praying his rosary during the battle.

After this first rosary victory, history has witnessed numerous battles where the rosary was used as a spiritual weapon to conquer the enemy. Some of these battles are responsible for saving entire nations, the heart of Christianity (the Vatican), and even Western Civilization as a whole. One has only to call to mind the Battle of Kotor (1539), the Great Siege of Malta (1565), the Battle of Lepanto (1571), the Siege of La Rochelle (1627), the Battle for the Philippine Islands (1646), the Battle of Vienna (1683), and the Battles of Temesvar and Corfu (1716), to discover the power that the rosary has over the forces of darkness. Throughout its history the rosary has also been responsible for saving countries and peoples from the scourge of war and oppressive political ideologies, such as happened in Austria in 1955, Brazil in 1964, the Philippines in 1986, and Colombia in 2008.

### ***Papal Champions of the Rosary***

For the last 800 years, those who have held the office of the Vicar of Christ have relentlessly promoted the rosary to the faithful. If one were to catalogue all the statements made by popes on the rosary the content would fill a library. The first pontiff to promote the rosary lived in the same century as St. Dominic. His name was Pope Urban IV (pope from 1261-1264).<sup>[2]</sup> After him, every century has witnessed numerous popes champion the rosary and grant indulgences to those belonging to the Confraternity of the Rosary. Many of these popes were Rosarians themselves — members of the Confraternity of the Rosary. Some of the more prominent papal champions of the rosary have been: Pope John XXII (14<sup>th</sup> century); Pope Alexander VI (15<sup>th</sup> century); St. Pope Pius V (16<sup>th</sup> century); Blessed Pope Innocent XI (17<sup>th</sup> century); Pope Clement XI (18<sup>th</sup> century); Pope Leo XIII (19<sup>th</sup> century); and St. Pope John Paul II (20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries). Even in our own day, Pope Benedict XVI greatly promoted the rosary during his pontificate, and Pope Francis is following his predecessors by also championing the rosary.

### ***Miracles of the Rosary***

The miracles associated with the rosary over the centuries are so numerous that they could never be numbered. The rosary has prevented and stopped wars, brought about great conversions, healed marriages, and helped a countless number of souls draw closer to Jesus, his Church, and the Sacraments. Many of these miracles are recorded in the greatest book ever written on the rosary, *The Secret of the Rosary* by St. Louis de Montfort. His book was written in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century. Since that time, many other miracles have come to light that not even St. Louis de Montfort was aware of. For example, in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, in what is now known as western Texas and New Mexico, a tribe of Jumano Indians bore testimony that they had received numerous visits from a lady dressed in blue who taught them the Catholic faith. This lady also gave them rosaries and taught them how to pray it. Years later, when Catholic missionaries arrived in that area, they were completely baffled when they discovered a tribe of Indians who already knew the Catholic faith and were in possession of rosaries! At first, when the Indians described their experiences with the lady in blue, the missionaries thought the tribe had been

blessed with apparitions of Our Lady. However, upon further investigation, they discovered that the famous Spanish mystic Venerable Mary of Agreda had been bi-locating to the tribe, teaching them the faith, and bringing rosaries with her from her convent in Spain.

In 1754, an image that came to be known as Our Lady of Las Lajas (Our Lady of the Rocks) miraculously appeared on a rock cliff in Colombia. This image depicted the Virgin Mary giving a friar's cord to St. Francis and a rosary to St. Dominic. Mystified by its appearance, the people of Colombia earnestly tried to ascertain who had painted the image, but were unsuccessful in finding the artist. Years later, as geologists were investigating the image they came to the scientific conclusion that the image is not a painting at all. They discovered that the colors on the rock are not made from paint but that the image *is* the rock itself. They discovered this miracle when they bored 3 feet into the rock and determined that the image appearing on the surface of the rock goes to a depth of at least 3 feet into the rock itself! This famous image now has a shrine built around it and has been declared a minor basilica.

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the rosary even helped an Italian man who was an ordained satanic priest experience a radical reversion to Catholicism and quickly become one of the greatest promoters of the rosary in the history of the Church. This man's name was Blessed Bartolo Longo. After his conversion through the rosary, he became a Third Order Dominican and built the world's most famous basilica dedicated to the rosary, the Basilica of Our Lady of the Rosary of Pompeii, Italy. Saint John Paul II, Pope Benedict XVI, and Pope Francis have all visited there.

### ***Apparitions of the Rosary***

In the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, there occurred more reported Marian apparitions than any other era in the history of the Church. Many of these apparitions have been approved, either by the local bishop or the Vatican. When studying these apparitions, there can be no doubt that one of the most prominent themes in these apparitions is the rosary. Starting with Lourdes, France, in 1858, when Our Lady appeared to St. Bernadette Soubirous holding a rosary in her hand – and even praying part of the rosary with St. Bernadette – the Queen of Heaven began to appear all over the world in a plethora of rosary-themed apparitions; Fatima, Portugal (1917); Beauraing, Belgium (1932-1933); Banneux, Belgium (1933); Akita, Japan (1973); Cuapa, Nicaragua (1980); Kibeho, Rwanda (1981-1989); and San Nicolas, Argentina (1983-1990). In December 2014, Jesus himself appeared to Bishop Oliver Doeme in Nigeria and handed him a sword that miraculously transformed into a rosary! To his bishop, Jesus emphatically stated that the rosary-sword was to be used to defeat radical Islam. Heaven is trying to tell us something!

### ***Champions of the Rosary***

The Servant of God Frank Duff — founder of the Legion of Mary — once wondered if there has been a single saint since the 13<sup>th</sup> century who has not prayed the rosary. Without a doubt, the rosary has been *the* most frequently mentioned form of Marian devotion by the saints since the 13<sup>th</sup> century. It would be impossible to list all of these saints. Saint John Paul II once noted the following in this regard: “It would be impossible to name all the many saints who discovered in the rosary a genuine path to growth in holiness.”<sup>[3]</sup> Many people are familiar with the more well-known champions such as St. Dominic, St. Louis de Montfort, and St. Pio of Pietrelcina, but there are so many more! For example, Blessed Alan de le Roche is responsible for reviving the rosary after the Black Death killed 1/3 of the population of Europe; in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Our Lady called St. Anthony Mary Claret a “new St. Dominic”; Pope Leo XIII wrote

11 encyclicals on the rosary; the Servant of God Joseph Kentenich referred to the rosary as a spiritual machine gun and a grace-filled atomic bomb; St. Maximilian Kolbe specifically called the rosary a sword; the Servant of God Patrick Peyton gathered millions of people together to pray the rosary; and Venerable Fulton J. Sheen created a special kind of rosary known as the World Mission Rosary. And this is only a sampling of those saints and popes who championed the spiritual sword of Mary!

Wouldn't you like to find out about all the battles, popes, miracles, saints, and champions associated with the rosary throughout history? Well, I've made it easy for you. I have just published an encyclopedic book on the rosary that presents everything there is to know about the spiritual sword of Mary. The book is titled *[Champions of the Rosary: The History and Heroes of a Spiritual Weapon](#)*. It is 445 pages long, contains a complete history of the rosary, 26 of its greatest champions, an extensive color art section, and all the indulgences offered by the Church for those who pray the rosary. The book has endorsements from 30 bishops (10 of whom are Dominican bishops), 4 cardinals, the Master General of the Dominicans, and many Dominican provincials and theologians. Archbishop Augustine Di Noia, OP, the assistant secretary at the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, has stated that *Champions of the Rosary* is probably the most comprehensive book ever written on the rosary!

*Champions of the Rosary: The History and Heroes of a Spiritual Weapon* is available through the website: [www.fathercalloway.com](http://www.fathercalloway.com)

### **References**

[1] "Our Lady's words to St. Dominic," as quoted in Augusta Theodosia Drane, OP, *The History of St. Dominic: Founder of the Friars Preachers* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1891), 122.

[2] The fact that a 13<sup>th</sup> century pope promoted the rosary was affirmed by Pope Sixtus V in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. He wrote: "Remembering, then, how great a help to our religion has been the institution of the most holy Psalter, called the Rosary of the glorious and ever Virgin Mary the Holy Mother of God, which was devised by the Founder of the Order of Friars-Preachers, Blessed Dominic, by the inspiration, as it is believed, of the Holy Ghost; remembering, too, what great benefit has thence accrued, and daily accrues, to the world, and mindful that in consequence, confraternities of the Faithful of both sexes have been canonically erected under the invocation of the Rosary of the same Blessed Virgin Mary in divers churches, chapels, and altars of the world, and that their Brethren and Sisters deservedly obtained not only conformation and growth of these Confraternities, but also Indulgences and privileges, and especially of happy memory from Urban IV and John XXII." Pope Sixtus V, as quoted in Wilfrid Lescher, OP, *St. Dominic and the Rosary* (London: R. & T. Washbourne, 1902), 10.

[3] St. John Paul II, *Rosarium Virginis Mariae*, Apostolic Letter (October 16, 2002), 8.

**Titles Mentioned on *Franciscan University Presents*  
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- \**No Turning Back: A Witness to Mercy* by Father Don Calloway, MIC. Marian Press.**
  - \**Champions of the Rosary: The History and Heroes of a Spiritual Weapon* by Father Don Calloway, MIC. Marian Press.**
  - \* *The Secret of the Rosary* by St. Louis de Monfort. Catholic Way Publishing.**
  - \* *Dives in Misericordia* by Pope John Paul II. Vatican.**
  - \* *Rosarium Virginis Mariae* by Pope John Paul II. Vatican.**
  - \* *Evangelizing Catholics: A Mission Manual for the New Evangelization* by Dr. Scott Hahn. Our Sunday Visitor.**
  - \* *The Creed: Professing Our Faith Through the Ages* by Dr. Scott Hahn. Emmaus Road Publishing.**
  - \* *The Beggar’s Banquet: A Personal Retreat on Christ, His Mother, the Spiritual Life, and the Saints* by Dr. Regis Martin. Emmaus Road Publishing.**
  - \* *Witness to Wonder: The World of Catholic Sacrament* by Dr. Regis Martin. Emmaus Road Publishing.**
- \*Available through the Franciscan University Bookstore, 1235 University Blvd., Steubenville, OH 43952. 1-888-333-0381, [www.franciscan.edu/bookstore](http://www.franciscan.edu/bookstore).

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