

**“Let me sing for my beloved my love song concerning his vineyard.”**

***Is 5:1***

Have you ever noticed how often gardens or vineyards get mentioned in the Bible? Life began in the Garden of Eden, Christ underwent His Agony in the Garden of Gethsemane and was buried in a tomb in a garden near to where He was crucified. (Remember St Mary Magdalene supposed the risen Lord was the gardener?) And the heavenly Jerusalem in the Book of the Apocalypse at the end of the Bible is planted with many garden features such as fountains and trees and all manner of fruitful plants. And all the way through Sacred Scripture, gardens and vineyards are referred to again and again. But have you ever stopped and thought, Why?

It was in the Garden of Eden that the human race was first given life, and it is in the gardens of the heavenly Jerusalem that our life is crowned with all the good things of heaven. Along the way, vineyards become symbols of fruitfulness and abundance or, as in the case of today's First Reading, of the fruit/lessness of infidelity. In today's Psalm the vineyard is the symbol of a nation – of God's chosen people – and, later, becomes the symbol of His Church, stretching out its branches to the farthest shore and offering shelter to all who would come. And in the Gospel today, the vineyard becomes the symbol of God's Kingdom betrayed, and foreshadows the Garden of Gethsemane. Our Saviour even dies on a tree. Yet even when the vineyard or garden is associated with betrayal, the life and fruitfulness, the richness and abundance of the garden is nonetheless a symbol, throughout the Scriptures, of God's goodness and blessings, of favours bestowed and new life planted and nurtured, and of growth.

St Paul, in today's Second Reading, sums up this goodness when he writes about 'whatever is true, whatever is honourable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable... [and whatever is excellent and] worthy of praise.' These are the fruits of God's garden that are worth pondering on in our hearts.

In this month of October, we ponder on these mysteries in a very particular fashion because October is the month of Our Lady of the Rosary. The word rosary, of course, comes from the Latin *rosarium*, meaning 'rose garden.' It seems fitting – does it not? – given that Our Lady, in the Song of Songs, is called the Rose of Sharon (Song 2:1).

Whenever we pray the rosary, it is as if Our Lady is taking us for a walk through her own rose garden and showing to us all the wonderful and fragrant flowers that she has pondered on in her heart for so long (Lk 2:19, 51), and now invites us to ponder on also.

She walks us through the rose beds of different colours. The white roses whose sweet fragrance fills our minds with the mysteries of the Incarnation: the Angel Gabriel's annunciation of the birth of the Messiah, the Nativity of our Saviour in Bethlehem, and the joy of finding her twelve-year-old Son after he was three days lost.

The red roses seem to have a heavier fragrance, pungent with the solemn odour of Christ's suffering, the shedding of His Precious Blood in the Garden of Gethsemane as He prayed in Agony, as He was scourged at the pillar, as He was crowned with thorns and then made to walk through the streets to Calvary, and as His hands and feet and side were pierced.

And finally, the almost honey-filled sweetness of the golden roses of glory that show forth Our Lord's resurrection and ascension into heaven, the outpouring of new life at Pentecost and the birth of a new creation, and the hope that is held out to us all as we contemplate the glorious assumption and coronation of the Blessed Virgin herself.

Our Lady gave the rosary to St Dominic so that he, all who came after him, might be invited into her rose garden to walk with her among the fragrant mysteries of her

Son's life, death, and resurrection. And it is precisely because each flower in that garden is redolent with the mysteries of our redemption that the rosary itself is one of the most powerful prayers outside of the Mass itself. Praying the rosary unites us to her Son's Incarnation, His suffering, His rising to new glory. Praying the rosary consoles, comforts, and strengthens us, and through the rosary we place our needs at the feet of our Mother so that she may pass those needs on to her Divine Son. Praying the rosary wards off harm and temptation. Praying the rosary takes us deep into the Garden of Paradise, in the centre of which stands the Tree of Life that has triumphed over the destruction brought about by the devil. Praying the rosary – precisely because it is so steeped in all the goodness, truth, and beauty that has been revealed by God – draws us ever closer to the Wounded Heart of Christ, and therefore draws us closer to the life of the Blessed Trinity Itself.

If you are in the habit of praying the rosary already, then use this month to deepen your devotion to it, perhaps, for example, by reading quotations from the Scriptures for each mystery. If you only say the rosary rarely, or are not in the habit of saying it at all, then allow Our Blessed Lady herself to take you for a walk through her rose garden and open up to you more fully the fragrant mysteries of our redemption.

Our Lady of the Rosary, pray for us.