

Homily for October 6, 2018
“Our Lady of the Rosary”

The year was 1571 and there was a crisis in Europe. Muslim expansion had been so successful, that their ships ruled the Mediterranean Sea from the Strait of Bosphorus to the Strait of Gibraltar and constantly preyed on Christian vessels. Pope Pius V, in the last year of his papacy in 1571, tried to rally the nations of Europe to join in a Holy League to stop and roll back the Muslim enemy which threatened the entire continent. Spain, whose King, Philip II, was also King of Austria, responded favorably. The Muslims were then engaged in the conquest of Cyprus, an island belonging to the Republic of Venice. As the summer of 1571 turned into autumn of that year Don Juan, the 25 year old son of Emperor Charles V was entrusted with the admiralty of the Holy League Navy. Soon before his departure, King Phillip of Spain presented Don Juan with a picture of Our Lady of Guadalupe which she had caused to be miraculously imprinted on the cloak of the Indian peasant Juan Diego in Mexico 40 years before. Don Juan placed the picture in the chapel of the admiral-vessel.

On September 16, the Christian fleet put to sea. Don Juan anchored off of Corfu where he learned that the Muslims had leveled entire towns and villages and then retreated to the coast of Lepanto in the Gulf of Corinth.

At dawn on October 7, at the entrance to the Gulf of Patras, part of Greece, the Christian and Muslim fleets finally came face to face for the battle of Lepanto.

The wind and all military factors favored the Muslims, but Don Juan was confident. He boarded a fast ship for a final review of his fleet. He shouted encouraging words to the men and they shouted back. After Don Juan returned to his own position, the wind mysteriously changed to the advantage of the Christian fleet. First-hand witnesses wrote about this moment as a most dramatic turn-of-events resulting from an "unknown factor".

At that very moment, at dawn on October 7, 1571-- as Vatican Archives later revealed--Pope Pius V, accompanied by many faithful, were praying the Rosary in the Basilica of Santa Maria Maggiore. From dawn to dusk the prayers continued in Rome as the Christians and the Muslims battled at Lepanto. When it was all over the Muslims had been defeated. Of some 270 Moslem ships, at least 200 were destroyed. The Turks also lost 30,000 men while Christian casualties numbered between 4,000 and 5,000.

Following the great Christian victory at Lepanto, Pope St. Pius V declared that henceforth a commemoration of the Rosary would be a part of the Vatican's Mass on every October 7. His successor, Pope Gregory XIII, went further. In 1573 he established the Feast of the Most Holy Rosary--to be celebrated at all Churches which had specific altars dedicated to the Rosary.

This story brings into focus a theme at the heart of today's Gospel. We are continually engaged in a battle for the souls of people and the souls of nations. The seventy disciples on returning from their mission declared:

“Lord, in your name even the demons submit to us!”¹⁸ He said to them, “I watched Satan fall from heaven like a flash of lightning.”¹⁹¹

Our unified voice of prayer, joined with the prayer of our Blessed Mother is to work so that demonic strongholds are weakened and ultimately defeated.

In our day there are such powerful forces, be it radical secularism , the New Atheism, sexual redefinitions, gender confusion and deception, sexual abuse in the Church, the blatant disregard for the sanctity of life as abortion and Dr. Assisted Suicide and Euthanasia, so clearly illustrate.

All of this can be disconcerting. Evil spirits are being given ever greater permission to rule the souls of so many. At a time like this, never tire of praying the Rosary. At a time like this join your prayers with those of our blessed Mother so that we would be a people united in love, witness and courage as we face contemporary challenges. May we be inspired and informed by our courageous Christians forbears.

I invite you to come together tomorrow at 2 PM as we join with Catholics across Canada to pray the Rosary.

Pope St. Pius V pray for us. Holy Mary Mother of God pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death, Amen.

¹ [*The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition*](#). (1993). (Lk 10:17–19). Washington, DC: National Council of Churches of Christ.