The Anglican Rosary

In some form, the rosary also been part of the tradition of Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, Catholic, and Orthodox faithful for centuries. Jesus himself incorporated prayer as an essential and cultural expression of knowing and communicating with God. He and Paul, as Jews, would have been familiar with the Jewish prayer tradition of counting prayers. Jesus made it very personal in the sense that he called God "Abba," which translates as "Father." From its Jewish roots, the early Christian Church understood prayer as a connection of earth and heaven: it was the authoritative way of building a personal relationship with God. Believing that the repetition of prayers is a natural tendency for religious practitioners, religious individuals have used strung beads, knotted rope, and bags of pebbles to count their prayers. In today's time of intellectual inquiry and rational thinking, prayer is often difficult to grasp and express. However, many spiritual and religious leaders believe that inherent in human beings are a hunger for the sacred and a need for that which is spiritual and eternal. While the focus of prayer is spiritual and sometimes mental, as humans we find that something tangible helps.

Anglicans and other Protestants also use prayer beads to assist their meditations on and with God. The Anglican rosary, also known as Anglican/Episcopalian prayer beads, has elements of the Orthodox and Catholic traditions. It has thirty-three beads, which represent Jesus' thirty-three years on Earth. There are four sets of seven "weeks," recalling the Jewish and Christian belief in the perfection of the number seven; there are also the seven days of Creation, the seven days of the week, the seven seasons of the church year, and the seven sacraments of the church. Four slightly larger or different colored beads called "cruciforms" separate these four weeks; equally spaced in the circle of the rosary, they form a cross and remind us of four seasons and four directions of the compass. Attached to the last cruciform is an "invitatory," from which hangs a cross. As prayer starts at the cross, the invitatory "invites" us to pray along the remaining 32 beads. Moving to the right, three times round the rosary brings us to ninety-nine, the complete number of the Divine Names in Middle Eastern traditions; adding the cross at the beginning or end brings us to one hundred, which is the total of the Orthodox rosary, in addition to representing the fullness of creation.

There is no set prayer for the Anglican rosary; there are several traditional and contemporary prayers available, or you can assemble a set of prayers on your own. For example, try finding a Bible verse, psalm, or prayer that you like. Likewise, you can purchase a set of beads or create your own, following the layout of beads described above.

GUIDELINES FOR USING PRAYER BEADS

- Plan and practice. Become familiar with each bead in the circle. Decide which thoughts or prayers to assign to the cross and to each bead. Try to memorize these words and thoughts. Since the beads are an aid for meditation or contemplation, you will want to be able to work through the beads intuitively, focusing on your state of mind.
- Find the right time and place. Allow enough time to work through the beads in an unhurried pace. Find a place that is quiet, where you can be undisturbed.
- Start and end with a moment of silence. Get centered. Leave worldly concerns behind, so to speak. Prepare to focus on your meditation. Then start with the thoughts or prayers you have assigned to the cross.
- End with silence to allow time for reflection.

STEPS FOR USING PRAYER BEADS

Step 1. Hold the Cross and say the prayer you have assigned to it.
Step 2. Move to the Invitatory bead and say the prayer you have assigned to it.
Step 3. Enter the circle of the prayer with the first Cruciform Bead. Moving to the right, go through the first seven beads to the next Cruciform bead, continuing around the circle, saying the prayers for each bead. Many sources suggest you pray around the circle of the beads three times to signify the Holy Trinity. Add the cross at the beginning or end.

CLOSING YOUR PRAYERS

After three circuits around the prayer beads, you may finish as follows:
Invitatory Bead - The Lord's Prayer
The Cross - I bless the Lord.
SYMBOLISM

Prayer beads are imbued with symbolism. Anglican prayer beads have 33 beads divided into four weeks of seven, four cruciform beads representing the cross, and an invitatory bead.

There are four seasons in the solar year: spring, summer, fall, and winter. Many religious holy days, like Christmas and Easter fall around the equinox or change points of these seasons.

There are seven seasons of the Christian year: Advent, Christmas, Epiphany, Lent, Holy Week, Easter, and Pentecost. The seven beads, the weeks, are also associated with completion or spiritual perfection.

Jesus’ life on Earth was 33 years.

Praying through the beads three times, to signify the trinity, involves 99 beads, a number significant in Middle Eastern religion as the 99 names of God. Ending with the cross brings the number to 100, the number of beads in an Orthodox rosary, which represents the fullness of creation.

The prayer beads form a circle. Praying through the beads symbolizes one’s journey on the wheel of time.

JULIAN OF NORWICH PRAYER (Example)

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.