



It All Began on a June Morning in 1690

There are dates that pass unnoticed by political, military, or economic history, yet end up profoundly transforming the soul of a people.

June 17, 1690, was one of those dates.

That morning, while most of Seville was still asleep and the first rays of daylight were only beginning to appear above the rooftops, a group of faithful members of the Brotherhood of Our Lady of Joy undertook an initiative that no one could have imagined would become one of the most important religious phenomena in modern Spanish history.

They carried no weapons.

They were not leading a revolt.

They were not demanding privileges.

They carried lanterns, religious banners, and a deep devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary.

As they walked through the streets, they prayed and sang praises to Our Lady.

The first public Rosary in Spain had been born.

And with it began a true spiritual revolution.

A Faith That Refused to Remain Behind Closed Doors

Late seventeenth-century Seville was a deeply religious city.

Churches shaped the rhythm of daily life, confraternities held great influence, and public expressions of faith were common.

Yet what happened that morning introduced something new.

Until then, the Rosary had been primarily a domestic, conventual, or parish devotion.

It was prayed in churches.

It was prayed in homes.



It was prayed within religious communities.

But this group of brothers decided to do something different.

They brought the Rosary into the streets.

Not to turn it into a spectacle.

Not to attract attention.

But to remind people that God does not belong solely to the private realm of human conscience.

The Catholic faith has always possessed a public dimension.

Christ did not tell His disciples to hide the light they had received.

On the contrary, He declared:

“You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden” (Matthew 5:14).

Those first rosary devotees understood this Gospel teaching perfectly.

Their prayer was not a protest.

It was a proclamation.

It was a way of announcing that Christ remains King and that Mary continues to lead souls to Him.

The Birth of the Rosaries of the Dawn

That initiative born around the Brotherhood of Our Lady of Joy did not take long to spread.

What began as a local act of piety quickly became a practice that captivated all of Seville.

The processions began before sunrise.



The darkness was pierced by the light of lanterns.

Silent streets filled with sacred hymns.

Hail Marys and Our Fathers echoed through squares and narrow alleyways.

The city awoke praying.

As the years passed, these Rosaries of the Dawn multiplied dramatically.

Parishes.

Monasteries.

Brotherhoods.

Associations of the faithful.

Virtually everyone wanted to organize their own.

During the eighteenth century, the phenomenon reached a scale that is difficult for the modern mind to imagine.

The city became literally filled with public Rosaries.

There were not only men's groups.

There were women's groups as well, and even children's Rosaries.

The Rosary had ceased to be merely a devotion and had become a genuine social and religious phenomenon.

A Seville Transformed by Mary

The spread of public Rosaries brought about a profound change in the spiritual life of Seville.

Many chroniclers of the period describe how thousands of people regularly participated in these expressions of piety.

The experience was especially striking because the prayers were not recited hastily.



They were sung.

Each group developed its own melodies.

The Hail Marys took on a solemn tone.

The Our Fathers resounded with deliberate reverence.

Prayer became a true form of popular catechesis.

Even people distant from religious practice found themselves attracted to these processions.

The beauty of the singing, the serenity of the procession, and the constant invocation of Mary's name awakened curiosity and, often, conversion.

Here we find a great pastoral lesson.

Beauty evangelizes.

Liturgy evangelizes.

Public prayer evangelizes.

When faith is lived authentically, it possesses an extraordinary power of attraction.

When the Rosary Overshadowed Everything Else

This may surprise modern readers, but there were moments during the eighteenth century when the Rosaries of the Dawn achieved a popularity greater than many penitential devotions.

The entire city seemed organized around them.

The Rosaries became gathering places.

Spaces of fellowship.

Centers of spiritual formation.

On many occasions they drew hundreds and even thousands of participants.



It was a true popular religious movement.

Baroque Seville had discovered something that we need to rediscover today: communal prayer possesses immense power to build Christian identity.

Not Everything Was Perfect

As with every human reality, difficulties also arose.

The enormous proliferation of Rosaries meant that different groups occasionally found themselves on the same streets at the same time.

Rivalries between organizations sometimes led to tensions and even conflicts.

From these incidents would eventually emerge the famous Spanish expression, “to end like a Rosary of the Dawn.”

The irony of history is evident.

A phrase now used to describe arguments or disputes originated from one of the most beautiful devotional practices of Catholic Spain.

Yet these episodes should not overshadow the main reality.

For decades, the public Rosary was one of the most powerful instruments of evangelization in the city.

The Theological Meaning of the Public Rosary

Why was it so successful?

Why did it transform an entire society?

The answer is profoundly theological.

The Rosary is not simply the repetition of formulas.

It is the contemplation of Christ together with Mary.

Each mystery leads the soul into the great events of Redemption.



The Incarnation.

The Passion.

The Resurrection.

The eternal Glory of Heaven.

While the lips pronounce Hail Marys, the mind contemplates God's saving work.

This is why Saint John Paul II called the Rosary a "compendium of the Gospel."

When an entire city prays the Rosary, an entire city is being evangelized.

Not through complicated speeches.

Not through academic treatises.

But through the simple contemplation of the mysteries of Christ.

A Lesson for the Twenty-First Century

We live in a world very different from Baroque Seville.

Yet the fundamental challenge remains the same.

Modern society seeks to confine religion to the private sphere.

Many believe faith should remain enclosed within church walls.

But the first rosary devotees of Seville remind us of something essential.

The Catholic faith is called to transform the streets as well.

Public spaces.

Culture.

Families.

Neighborhoods.



Cities.

Not through imposition.

Not through confrontation.

But through the peaceful witness of believers.

In a society overwhelmed by noise, the Rosary offers silence.

In a society marked by anxiety, it offers peace.

In a society fractured by division, it offers communion.

In a society that has forgotten God, it recalls His presence.

The Enduring Relevance of That Morning

Perhaps the brothers of Our Lady of Joy never imagined the magnitude of what they were beginning.

They were probably thinking simply of honoring the Blessed Virgin Mary.

Of praying.

Of giving glory to God.

Yet that humble early-morning procession would go on to shape Spanish spirituality for generations.

More than three centuries later, their example continues to challenge us.

Because the need remains the same.

Spain still needs prayer.

Families still need Mary.

Cities still need to hear the name of Christ.

And the Rosary remains one of the most powerful spiritual weapons ever entrusted to the



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Church.

It all began on a June morning in 1690.

A handful of faithful walked through the streets of Seville carrying light in their hands and prayer on their lips.

The city awoke.

And with it awoke a devotion that would forever change the religious history of Spain.