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J.M.J.

THE FIRST PRAYER TO MARY

—Saint Anselm of Canterbury



Anselm presents Mary as the Theotokos, her one claim to veneration away from all orders of creation. She is the most holy after God which explains her power of mercy. Human beings see themselves in her as in a mirror. They recognize their sin and are ashamed. The main sin of the sinner is dullness, which must be broken through. That's where he needs Mary's intercession.

Mary, holy Mary, among the holy ones the most holy after God, Mother with virginity to be wondered at, Virgin with fertility to be cherished, you bore the Son of the most High, and brought forth the Saviour of the lost human race. Lady, shining before all others with such sanctity, pre-eminent with such dignity, it is very sure that you are not least in power and in honour.

Life-bearer, mother of salvation, shrine of goodness and mercy, I long to come before you in my misery, sick with the

sickness of vice, in pain from the wounds of crimes, putrid with the ulcers of sin. However near I am to death, I reach out to you, and I long to ask that by your powerful merits and your loving prayers, you will deign to heal me.

Good Lady, a huge dullness is between you and me, so that I am scarcely aware of the extent of my sickness. I am so filthy and stinking that I am afraid you will turn your merciful face from me. So I look to you to convert me, but I am held back by despair, and even my lips are shut against prayer.

My sins, my wicked deeds, since you have destroyed my soul with your poison, why do you make it a horror with your filth, so that no one can look on my misery? If your weight is so great that I have no hope of being heard, why by your shame do you block the voice of my prayer? If you have made me mad with love for you, why have you made my

senses unfeeling with your torpor? Alas, what a shameful thing is the filth of sin before the brightness of holiness. Alas, what confusion there is for an impure conscience in the presence of shining purity.

You are blessed above all women, in purity surpassing the angels, in goodness overpassing the saints. Already dying I long to be seen by such kindness, but I blush before the gaze of such purity. What I want to ask you, Lady, is that by a glance from your mercy you will cure the sickness and ulcers of my sins, but before you I am confounded by the smell and foulness of them.

I shudder, Lady, to show you all my foul state, lest it makes you shudder at the sight of me, but, alas for me, I cannot be seen any other way. How disturbed and confused is the state of sin! How my sins tear my heart in pieces and divide it, gnaw at it and torment it! Because of these

sins of mine, Lady, I desire to come to you and be cured, but I flee from you for fear of being cursed.

My sins cannot be cured unless they are confessed, but to acknowledge them throws me into confusion. If they are concealed they cannot be healed, if they are seen they are detestable. They chafe me with sorrow, they terrify me with fear, they bury me with their weight, they press upon me heavily, and confound me with shame.

Mary, powerful in goodness, and good in power, from whom was born the fount of mercy, I pray you, do not withhold such true mercy where you know there is such true misery. The brightness of your holiness confounds the darkness of my sins, but surely you will not blush to feel kindness towards such a wretch? If I acknowledge my iniquity, surely you will not refuse to show kindness? If my misery is

too great to be heard favourably, surely your mercy will be less than it ought to be? Lady, before God and before you my sins appear vile; and therefore so much the more do they need His healing and your help.

Most gentle Lady, heal my weakness, and you will be taking away the filth that offends you. Most kind Lady, take away my sickness, and you will not experience the dirt you shudder at.

Most dear Lady, do not let what grieves you be, and there will be nothing to defile your holiness. Hear me, Lady, and make whole the soul of a sinner who is your servant, by virtue of the blessed fruit of your womb, who sits at the right hand of his almighty Father and is praised and glorified above all for ever. Amen.

Source: *Johann Roten S.M.*, "Anselm of Canterbury: The Marian Spirituality of Saint Anselm" <https://udayton.edu/imri/mary/a/anselm-of-canterbury.php>