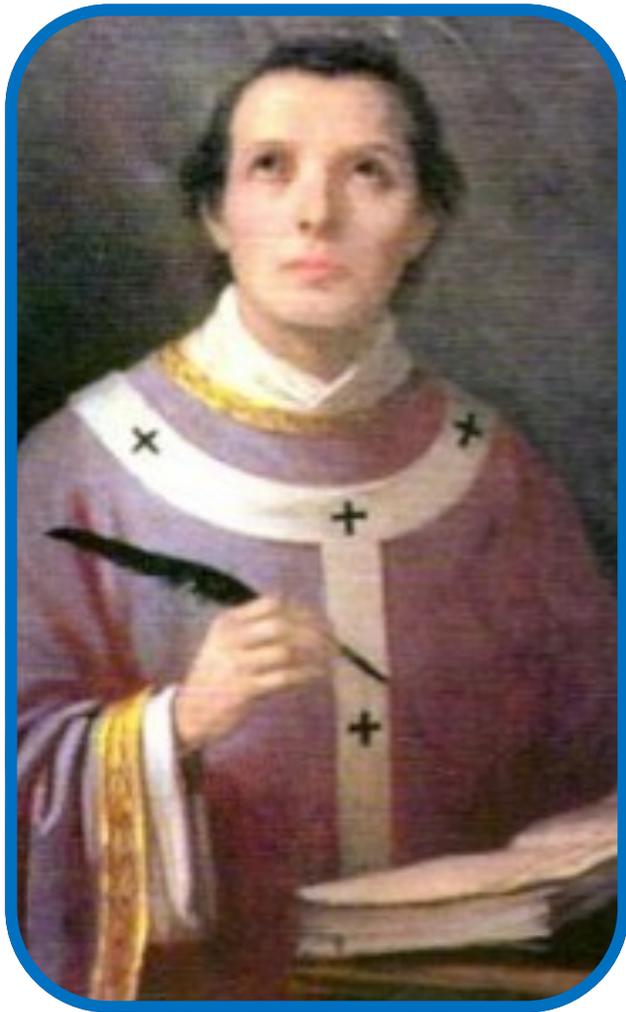




J.M.J.

## THE THIRD GREAT PRAYER TO MARY

—Saint Anselm of Canterbury



*It reflects Mary's place in redemption. She is the mother of all the redeemed. The central piece deals with the relation of God and Mary in creation and recreation: God gave His own Son ... that all nature in you might be in Him. Mercy and justice are one in Mary's womb. The four elements, the whole of creation, have been given life again. Anselm develops a cosmic vision of redemption with Christ as the central figure, and Mary the one who shows Him us and us Him. As mentioned, the central idea is to "ask for her and Christ's love."*

Mary, great Mary, most blessed of all Marys, greatest among all women, great Lady, great beyond measure, I long to love you with all my heart, I want to praise you with my lips, I desire to venerate you in my understanding, I love to pray to you from my deepest being, I commit myself wholly to your protection.

Heart of my soul, stir yourself up as much as ever you can (if you can do anything at all), and let all that is within me praise the good Mary has done, love the blessing she has received, wonder at her loftiness, and beseech her kindness; for I need her defense daily, and in my need I desire, implore, and beseech it, and if it is not according to my desire, at least let it be above, or rather contrary to, what I deserve.

Queen of angels, Lady of the world, Mother of Him who cleanses the world, I confess that my heart is unclean, and I am rightly ashamed to turn towards

such cleanness, but I turn towards it to be made clean in order to come to it. Mother of Him who is the light of my heart, nurse of Him who is the strength of my soul, I pray to you with my whole heart to the extent of my powers. Hear me, Lady, answer me, most mighty helper; let this filth be washed from my mind, let my darkness be illuminated, my lukewarmness blaze up, my listlessness be stirred. For in your blessed holiness you are exalted above all, after the highest of all, your Son, through your omnipotent Son, with your glorious Son, by your blessed Son. So as being above all after the Lord, who is my God and my all, your Son, in my heart I know and worship you, love you and ask for your affection, not because of my imperfect desires, but because it belongs to your Son to make and to save, to redeem and bring back to life.

Mother of the life of my soul, nurse of the redeemer of my flesh, who gave suck to the Saviour of my whole being—but what am I saying? My tongue fails me, for my love is not sufficient. Lady, Lady, I am very anxious to thank you for so much, but I cannot think of anything worthy to say to you, and I am ashamed to offer you anything unworthy. How can I speak worthily of the mother of the Creator and Saviour, by whose sanctity my sins are purged, by whose integrity incorruptibility is given me, by whose virginity my soul falls in love with its Lord and is married to its God? What

can I worthily tell of the mother of my Lord and God by whose fruitfulness I am redeemed from captivity, by whose child-bearing I am brought forth from eternal death, by whose offspring I who was lost am restored, and led back from my unhappy exile to my blessed homeland?

‘Blessed among all women,’ all these things were given to me by ‘the blessed fruit of your womb’ through his baptism of regeneration, some in fact, others in hope; yet by sinning I put it all away from me so that now I have nothing and scarcely any hope. What then? If they vanished because of my guilt surely I will not be ungrateful to her by whom so many good things came to me? Stop, lest I add iniquity upon iniquity! I give great thanks for what I have had, I weep for what I have not, I pray so that I may have them again. For I am sure that since through the Son I could receive grace, I can receive it again through the merits of the mother. Therefore, Lady, gateway of life, door of salvation, way of reconciliation, approach to recovery, I beg you by the salvation born of your fruitfulness, see to it that my sins be pardoned and the grace to live well be granted me, and even to the end keep this your servant under your protection. Palace of universal propitiation, cause of general reconciliation, vase and temple of life and universal salvation: I have made too little of your praises, and in a little man like me it is especially vile to

belittle your merits. For the world rejoices in your love and so proclaims what you have done for it. O Lady, to be wondered at for your unparalleled virginity; to be venerated for a holiness beyond all reckoning—you showed to the world its Lord and its God whom it had not known. You showed to the sight of all the world its Creator whom it had not seen. You gave birth to the restorer of the world for whom the lost world longed. You brought forth the world’s reconciliation, which, in its guilt, it did not have before. Through your fruitfulness, Lady, the sinner is cleansed and justified, the condemned is saved and the exile is restored. Your offspring, Lady, redeemed the world from captivity, made whole the sick, gave life to the dead. The world was wrapped in darkness, surrounded and oppressed by demons under which it lay, but from you alone light was born into it, which broke its bonds and trampled underfoot their power.

Heaven, stars, earth, waters, day and night, and whatever was in the power or use of men was guilty; they rejoice now, Lady, that they lost that glory, for a new and ineffable grace has been given them through you. They are brought back to life and give thanks. For all things were as if dead, since they had lost that inborn dignity by virtue of which they were ruled and used to the praise of God for which they were made. They were buried by oppression, and tainted by being used in the service of idols for which they

were not made. But see now, how they are raised to life, and praise the Lord, for they are ruled by the power of those who confess God, and are honoured by the use they put them to. And now they bound with joy, in a new and inestimable grace, for they know the very God, the Creator, not only ruling invisibly over them all but visibly among them, sanctifying them by use. So much good has come into the world through the blessed fruit of Mary’s womb.

But, Lady, why do I only speak of the benefits with which you fill the earth? They go down to hell, they go up to heaven. For through the fullness of your grace those in hell rejoice that they are delivered, and those in heaven are glad at that restoration. By the glorious Son of your virginity, all just men who died before his birth exult that their captivity is broken down, and the angels wish each other joy in the rebuilding of their half-ruined city.

O woman, uniquely to be wondered at, and to be wondered at for your uniqueness, by you the elements are renewed, hell is redeemed, demons are trampled down and men are saved, even the fallen angels are restored to their place. O woman full and overflowing with grace, plenty flows from you to make all creatures green again. O virgin blessed and ever blessed, whose blessing is upon all nature, not only is the creature blessed by the Creator, but the Creator is blessed by the creature too.

O highly exalted, when the love of my heart tries to follow you, whither do you escape the keenness of my sight? O beautiful to gaze upon, lovely to contemplate, delightful to love, whither do you go to evade the breadth of my heart? Lady, wait for the weakness of him who follows you; do not hide yourself, seeing the littleness of the soul that seeks you! Have mercy, Lady, upon the soul that pants after you with longing.

A thing to be wondered at-- at what a height do I behold the place of Mary! Nothing equals Mary, nothing but God is greater than Mary. God gave his own Son, who alone from his heart was born equal to him, loved as he loves himself, to Mary, and of Mary was then born a Son not another but the same one, that naturally one might be the Son of God and of Mary. All nature is created by God and God is born of Mary. God created all things, and Mary gave birth to God. God who made all things made himself of Mary, and thus he refashioned everything he had made.

He who was able to make all things out of nothing refused to remake it by force, but first became the Son of Mary. So God is the Father of all created things, and Mary is the mother of all re-created things. God is the Father of all that is established, and Mary is the mother of all that is re-established. For God gave birth to Him by whom all things were made and Mary brought forth Him by whom all are saved. God brought forth Him without whom

nothing is, Mary bore Him without whom nothing is good. O truly, 'the Lord is with you,' to whom the Lord gave himself, that all nature in you might be in him.

Mary, I beg you, by that grace through which the Lord is with you and you willed to be with him, let your mercy be with me. Let love for you always be with me, and the care of me be always with you. Let the cry of my need, as long as it persists, be with you, and the care of your goodness, as long as I need it, be with me. Let joy in your blessedness be always with me, and compassion for my wretchedness, where I need it, be with you.

O most blessed, all that turns away from you, and that you oppose, must needs be lost, and equally it is not possible that whatever turns to you and you regard with favour, should perish. For just as, Lady, God begat Him in whom all things live, so, O flower of virginity, you bore Him by whom the dead are raised up. And as God through his Son keeps the blessed angels from sin, so, O glory of purity, through your Son you save unhappy men who have sinned. For just as in some way the Son of God is the bliss of the just, so in some way, O rich in saving grace, your Son is the reconciliation of sinners. For there is no reconciliation except that which you conceived in chastity, there is no salvation except what you brought forth as a virgin. Therefore, Lady, you are mother of justifier and the justified,

bearer of reconciliation and the reconciled, parent of salvation and of the saved.

Blessed assurance, safe refuge, the mother of God is our mother. The mother of Him in whom alone we have hope, whom alone we fear, is our mother. The mother of Him who alone saves and condemns is our mother.

You are blessed and exalted not for yourself alone but for us too. What great and loving thing is this that I see coming to us through you? Seeing it I rejoice, and hardly dare to speak of it. For if you, Lady, are His mother, surely then your sons are His brothers? But who are the brothers and of whom? Shall I speak out of the rejoicing of my heart, or shall I be silent in case it is too high for me to mention? But if I believe and love why should I not confess it with praise? So let me speak not out of pride but with thanksgiving.

For He was born of a mother to take our nature, and to make us, by restoring our life, sons of His mother. He invites us to confess ourselves His brethren. So our judge is our brother, the Saviour of the world is our Brother, and finally our God through Mary is our Brother. With what confidence then ought we to hope, and thus consoled how can we fear, when our salvation or damnation hangs on the will of a good Brother and a devoted mother? With what affection should we love this Brother and this mother, with what familiarity should

we commit ourselves to them, with what security may we flee to them! For our good Brother forgives us when we sin, and turns away from us what our errors deserve, he gives us what in penitence we ask.

The good mother prays and beseeches for us, she asks and pleads that he may hear us favourably. She pleads with the son on behalf of the sons, the only-begotten for the adopted, the lord for the servants.

The good Son hears the mother on behalf of His brothers, the only-begotten for those He has adopted, the lord for those He has set free.

Mary, how much we owe you, Mother and Lady, by whom we have such a Brother! What thanks and praise can we return to you? Great Lord, our elder Brother, great Lady, our best of mothers, teach my heart a sweet reverence in thinking of you. You are good, and so are you; you are gentle, and so are you. Speak and give my soul the gift of remembering you with love, delighting in you, rejoicing in you, so that I may come to you. Let me rise up to your love. Desiring to be always with you, my heart is sick of love, my soul melts in me, my flesh fails. If only my inmost being might be on fire with the sweet fervour of your love, so that my outer being of flesh might wither away. If only the spirit within me might come close to the sweetness of your love, so that the marrow of my body might be dried up. Lord, son of my lady, Lady, mother of my lord, if I

am not worthy of the bliss of your love, certainly you are not unworthy of being so greatly loved. So, most kind, do not refuse what I ask, for though I confess I am not worthy of it, you cannot worthily refuse it. Give me not according to my deserts when I pray, but something that will be worth your loving. Give me, unworthy as I am, something that I can worthily give back to you. If you are not willing to give according to my desire, at least do not refuse to give what I ought to give back to you.

Perhaps I am presumptuous to speak, but the goodness of you both makes me bold. So I speak thus to my lord and my lady, I, 'who am dust and ashes.' Lord and Lady, surely it is much better for you to give grace to those who do not deserve it than for you to exact what is owing to you in justice? The first is praise-worthy, the other is wicked injustice. Give us then your grace, so that you may receive what is owing to you. Show me your mercy, for I need it and it is right for you to give it, lest I act towards you unjustly, which no one needs and is no good to anyone. Be merciful to me because I ask it, lest I be unjust towards you by whom I am cursed. Kind Lord and Lady, do not make it difficult to pray to you, but give my soul your love, which not unjustly it asks and you justly expect it to ask, lest I be ungrateful for your good gifts because of that which in justice it shudders at and you not unjustly punish.

Surely Jesus, Son of God, and Mary his mother, you both want, and it is only right, that whatever you love, we should love too. So, good Son, I ask you through the love you have for your mother, that as she truly loves you and you her you will grant that I may truly love her. Good mother, I ask you by the love you have for your Son, that, as he truly loves you and you him, you will grant that I may love him truly. For see, I am asking what it is indeed your will to do, for why does He not act as my sins deserve when it is in his power? Lover and ruler of mankind, you could love those who accused you even to death, and can you refuse, when you are asked, those who love you and your mother? Mother of our lover who carried him in her womb and was willing to give him milk at her breast -- are you not able or are you unwilling to grant your love to those who ask it? So I venerate you both, as far as my mind is worthy to do so; I love you both, as far as my heart is equal to it; I prefer you both, as much as my soul can; and I serve you both, as far as my flesh may. And in this let my life be consummated that for all eternity all my being may sing 'Blessed be the Lord 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>