

MEDITATION ON THE SALVE REGINA

Pseudo-Bernard

The following work, which exists in the manuscript tradition in both this and in a highly-abridged version, has been ascribed variously to St. Anselm, Hugh of St Victor, and not infrequently to Our Holy Father Bernard. In critical editions and compilations of the latter's works, it is often include as pseudepigrapha. St. Bernard famously added the triple invocation at the end of the antiphon extemporaneously in a moment of fervor upon his having heard it sung by the Canons of the church of Speyer in Germany. The date of this incident has been determined with some certainty to have been 29 December, 1146. The inclusion of the invocations in this meditation rules out a possible authorship by either Anselm (+1109) or Victor (+1141). I leave it to the reader to judge whether the style matches that of St. Bernard, in this first (to my knowledge) translation into English.

GO GREET the blessed Virgin, you must first consider her greatness; for she could not be elevated any higher in relation to her Son than to be called the Mother of the Lord. Therefore, rejoicing and marveling at the magnificence of our Mother, approach her devoutly, reverently, and confidently, saying: *Salve*. With these words, recoil into your own insignificance from the magnificence of the Mother of God. And say: Have patience with me, O Lady, for I, the lowliest of men, dare to stand in the presence of such a Lady and presume to greet you, the Queen of heaven, the Lady of angels, the Mother of my God. But through your kindness, O Lady, I trust in humility that you will bear with me, though I am unworthy. And though you are the Ark of God, incomparably more noble than the Ark of the Old Testament, and I much more ignoble; yet when I touch you in my heart and greet you with my lips, I do not believe I will be struck, but rather inflamed by your love, and be heard in all things through your abundant mercy. Therefore, *Salve, Regina*, under your rule, O Lady, I desire to serve from now on; I completely entrust myself to your dominion, that you may fully reign and govern me. Do not allow me to govern myself, for I am too aware of my own failings. Whatever you may have forgiven me, know that it must be ut-

terly destroyed. But since I am full of misery, and from the sole of my foot to the crown of my head, I am fetid and generate putridity and horror, how will you, such a noble creature deign to govern me? Surely, because you are the *Regina misericordiae*.

And who are subject to mercy, if not the wretched? Thus, you are the Queen of mercy, and I am the most wretched, the greatest sinner among all your subjects. So how, O Lady, will you not manifest the effect of your mercy in me? Truly, O Lady, you are the Queen of mercy, for there is no one in this life so desperate, so miserable, for whom you cannot obtain saving mercy, if they turn to your rule. Indeed, O Lady, when I behold you, I see nothing but mercy. For you have become the Mother of the wretched; you have given birth to mercy for the wretched. On all sides, O Lady, you are surrounded by mercy; you seem to desire nothing but to show mercy. You are greatly concerned about the wretched; you have adopted them as your own children; you desired to rule over them, O Lady, and that is why you are rightfully called the Queen of Mercy. So what do we fear from now on, O Lady? What do we dread? Why do we not approach you with swift steps? And who, when they seek from you, will not receive? Certainly, I do not know anyone, except for those who do not recognize their own misery. For there is

no one among us subject to your rule, except the wretched or those who recognize themselves as wretched and trust in your mercy. Therefore, let only those who consider themselves to be just and those who are proud and presumptuous be afraid, for they do not submit to your rule, and also those wretched who do not seek your mercy. As for us, the wretched, let us console ourselves with you from now on, let us dwell with you, O Lady; let us embrace you with the depths of our hearts, for you are *vita*.

Truly, you are life, which conquered the death of pride through humility, which obtained for us the life of grace, which gave birth to the life of glory, and there is no doubt that you have delivered many from the perils of natural life. In all things, you set life against death when it seems fitting. O marvelous life, which endeavors to give life to the dead! Through you, O Lady, there is a return from privation to abundance. O life that fears not death, expels death, and renders mortals immortal! O truly lovable life, desirable life, delightful life! O life that does not grow old, but rather rejuvenates the aged! O life that reduces carnal lives to nothingness! O life truly contrary to the life of the world! For whoever desires to possess you must afflict themselves, reject pleasures, and despise delicate things; and the more one is mortified, the more one will possess you. O life, divine in strengthening power, exhaling divine wisdom through supplication, and nourishing with divine goodness. If you are my life, why do you not always sustain my life? Who will grant me to rejoice always in the favor of this life? *Dulcedo*. Truly, sweetness, by obtaining the expulsion of the bitterness of sins, you acquire for us the sweetness of grace, you lead us to contemplate the sweetness of the heavenly homeland, and finally you bring us to possess it. O sweet Lady, whose memory alone sweetens the affections, whose meditation on greatness elevates the mind, whose beauty gladdens the inner eye, whose immensity of pleasantness intoxicates the meditating heart! O Lady, who ravishes hearts with your sweetness, and now, O Lady, you have ravished my heart; and where,

I ask, have you placed it, that I may find it? Have you perhaps placed it in your bosom, that I may find myself there? Have you pressed it to your chest? Perhaps you have placed it there, so that what was cold may be inflamed and warmed by your love, and that it may never be separated from you. O ravisher of hearts! When will you restore my heart to me? Why do you snatch the hearts of the simple in this way? Why do you show violence, indeed, kindness to your friends? Do you perhaps desire to keep it for yourself? When I ask for it, you smile at me; and immediately, lulled to sleep by your sweetness, I rest, and when I return to myself, I ask for it again, and you embrace me, O sweetest one, and immediately I am intoxicated with your love. Now I cannot distinguish my heart from yours. Nor do I know how to ask for anything from you except for what is yours. But since my heart is so inebriated with your love, so lulled to sleep by your love, govern it with your own, preserve it in the blood of the Lamb, and place it in the side of your Son, so that it may feel only what you feel, and love only what you love, and may be with you not on earth but in heaven. O blessed is the heart to which it is given to meditate on the Lady always, or nearly always; to which it is given to glory always in the delights of the Lord, and also to share in the sufferings of the Son. O wonderful and lovable sweetness of the heart, to which all other things, even father, mother, children, or whatever pertains to them, seem most foul and bitter. O sweetest Lady, possessing the sweetest fruit, drawing the sweetest hearts, bestowing the sweetest goods, promising the sweetest things, you make hearts sweet. O how sweet you are, my Lady! O truly how sweet and most sweet in delights, having the sweetest bosom of compassion, and supremely blessed! Then I will attain what I intend, then I will possess what I hope for, because you are *spes nostra*.

Are you not the Lady of the kingdom? Are you not the Mother of the reward, namely Christ, who is the reward of the good and the blessed? Are you not the one who desires our exaltation above all else? Do you not love us incomparably more

and seek our good more than a carnal mother? If, therefore, you desire to make us glorious, indeed, because you desire it, who can prevent it? For what else do you have to do but to present the Son? In Him is our merit and our reward, and our glory. *Let them trust in thee who know thy name: for thou hast not forsaken them that seek thee*, O Lady (Psalm 9:11). Surely, *they that hope in you shall renew their strength, they shall take wings as eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint*. (Isaias 40:31) Who will not hope in you, who aid the despairing? And who will not hope in you, for whom the prayers of the fathers were heard, the prophecies of the prophets, and their fulfilled promises? And what could the patriarchs and prophets desire, O Lady, that they did not obtain through you? If the ancients had all these things through you, how much more shall we, who are children of yours, redeemed by the blood of the Only Begotten, have what we desire when we ask? I have no doubt that if we come to you, we shall have what we desire. Therefore, let him who despairs hope in you; let him who falters run confidently to you; let him who wishes to obtain something come to you, saying: *Salve*. Who from then on can prevent us from your greeting, since you are such a Mother and Lady, *vita, dulcedo, et spes nostra*? Who, therefore, since you are a Queen, can hinder us from showing you reverence? Not only men, but all creatures also should salute you as the Mother of God. O Lady, through you, all things are restored, and through you, all things regain their Creator, so that they may be subject to Him in proper order. Surely, it seems amazing that the whole world does not cease from greeting you, but rather praises and greets you at all times. But what is it to greet you twice, except to revere you as the Lady of angels and men? And what is it to repeat the greeting, except to offer you endless reverence? What is it to greet you and greet you again, except to seek from you, O Lady, health and progress in salvation? Why do we greet and greet again, except that we may be healthily guarded through you, both inwardly and outwardly? What does it mean to say *salve*, and again, *salve*, except that I

expose both men to your reverence? Why, then, did I greet you at first, and greet you again, except that through you I might possess God and man, except that through you I might possess your Son? Why did I greet you, except to bring myself closer to my desires, and greet you again, except that you might hasten to fulfill them? Or certainly, at first we wished to greet you, that we might commend ourselves to you; secondly, that after this misery we might rejoice in the glory of your Son. First, O Lady, you are to be greeted, that through you we may obtain grace; secondly, that through you we may come to glory.

Ad te, to you indeed, because you, O Lady, have given birth to God and man; you alone, O Lady, have destroyed heretical depravity; you alone are the Lady of the kingdom; you alone are the guide to the reward. *Ad te*, our mother, to you, our nourisher, to you, our helper, to you, indeed, who washes us from the filth of sins, who comforts us even in our wandering infancy, who nurses hungry little ones; the weak and failing are sustained by your arms; you truly heal the wounded, bring the sick to salvation, and you are not only a mother and a nourisher, but also a physician to the suffering, who does not forsake those who are forsaken, who receives those who flee, who are the Queen, Empress, and Lady of the angels; who allures us with your tenderness, delights us with your favors, and nurtures us. *Ad te clamamus*. How could we not cry out, O Lady, as we endure wounds, feel the blows, and are surrounded and shaken by enemies from all sides! We cry out, distressed and oppressed by endless miseries. We cry out with the anxiety of the heart, the emptiness of the stomach, the bitterness of pain, or perhaps with the immensity of love towards you. We cry out. Let no drowsiness toward us come over you, who guards us day and night. Why do you sleep, O Lady? Arise, help us. We cry out, also to reveal our necessity, for necessity compels us to cry out. Moreover, we cry out to invoke your compassion, O Lady. For because of this crying out, my throat has become hoarse. Why then do you allow us to be further afflicted? If you delay too long, I

will lose my voice from crying out, and I will be unable to shout louder to you. Woe is me, what shall I do then when you cannot hear me or listen to me? What shall I do, O Lady, when I am utterly deprived of you? What shall I do when you cannot offer me your bosom? Quickly, O Lady, come to the aid of the one crying out, lest I fall into the hands of the enemy. Run, hasten, O Lady, help your most wicked and faithless servant who cries out to you in mercy, and snatch me from the hands of the enemy and from the perils of your foe. If nothing else, O Lady, the fact that your enemy dares to deceitfully attack us, your humble servants, should prompt you to hasten as quickly as possible. Run, and free us, O Lady, for the sake of suppressing their arrogance. Run, lest the enemy boast about ruling over your servants. Run, lest they say: "Where is their Lady, in whose clemency they trusted?" Do not be surprised, O Lady, if we cry out, for we are greatly separated from you. In a distant region we have scattered our portion. If we were closer, we could speak more clearly, and therefore, mindful of your bosom, we cry out to you. *Exsules* from our homeland, exiles from divine vision; indeed, exiles from grace, exiles from maternal consolation! O my soul, why are you not rather separated from the body than exiled from your Lady? If you are exiled from the mother, you are exiled from the head of Christ. And how can a wretched one walk without a head? Would it not be a monstrosity to walk without a head? Woe is me, why am I relegated to such a long exile? When will I see my God, my Savior? Or when will I be able to gaze upon my Lady at least? I do not doubt, O Lady, that if we cry out to you from the depths of our exile, we would fully possess you and your Son. Why do we desire to rest here as if citizens? Why do we not yearn for our homeland? Why do we not strive to embrace the most sweet Mother? Why do we not desire to dwell with her and with her Son? O Lady, while we are exiles here, establish us so that we may not cease to seek you and your Son here, as if confident in our homeland. But establish us in the body in such a way that we may always be citizens with you in our minds.

Filii Evæ. Truly children of Eve, because we are proud, presumptuous, ambitious, greedy at least for books and knowledge, and I hope not in other matters! Gluttonous, carnal, disobedient, and in short, following Eve herself in all things, we are inclined toward evil but reluctant toward good. And if it happens that we produce a son of good works, we give birth with a certain sorrow and sadness, but we commit evil with joy. Our own evils are not enough for us, but just as Eve tempted Adam, so do we incline others toward evil. And just as she excused herself, so do we excuse ourselves in our faults, or at least, if we can, we deflect blame onto others. We are weary of feeding on the tree of life, Christ the Lord, namely contemplating Him on the cross, and we extend our hands to the forbidden tree. We do not seek consolation through contemplation of the delights of paradise, but rather we want to dwell in the filth of sins and engage in the most futile things, indeed, to speak truly, to chew on the most putrid dung. Alas, what great insanity, vanity, and unheard-of blindness! For it pleases us more, in excessive labor and sweat, to acquire the cheap and mortal than to not only acquire life but also, in a certain way, possess eternal life and taste the glory of the Lord with all sweetness and delight. And if you, Lady, had not helped us, perhaps we would have come to the deepest depths of hell. It is not, Lady, that we can excuse ourselves, because we imitate not you, but Eve in all things, indeed, rather we rush headlong into evil. And therefore, recognizing this with the aid of your mercy, hoping to be relieved of such great misery through you, Lady, for this reason *ad te suspiramus*, Lady, desiring to come to you. To thee do we sigh, Lady, desiring to see your Son. To thee do we sigh, as infants gasping for the breast, as children, unworthy, stretching toward your maternal embrace. To thee do we sigh with longing. To thee do we sigh with internal love, too intoxicated with your love. For nothing except your love, with which we are intoxicated, Lady, compels us to sigh to you with longing. For who does not love you and sigh for you with longing, for you, the remedy for all, the path of love, brighter than the sun,

sweeter than honey, treasure of goodness, mirror of virtue, example of all holiness? Beloved by all, affable, delightful to all. You are the seat of wisdom, the river of mercy, the ray of divinity; there is no one who can hide from your warmth. Thus, with longing and love in the depths of our being, to thee do we sigh. *Suspiramus*, and with intense sorrow; for we are pressed on all sides by distress. So how then can there be no one to you who can resist your will, the solace of the wretched, the refuge of the outcast, the liberation of the captive, the spouse of the aged, the Queen of the stars, the Lady of all, even of enemies? And therefore, afflicted and miserable, we sigh to you, such a sweet and gentle helper in all things, the tree of life, the root of consolation, to you, O lady, such as you are, I say, *suspiramus*.

Gementes et flentes in hac lacrimarum valle. Do you not see, Lady, that we are completely filled with bitterness? Within, we groan; outwardly, we weep; lying in this tearful place. Laden with sins, we groan; burdened with troubles, we weep; abounding in miseries, we weep; in the valley of tears, deprived of help, we groan, unable to see the Sun of Justice. We weep, serving our enemies in the valley of tears, seeking your help. This is indeed the valley of tears, into which all tearful things flow, streaming with lamentation, toward which mournful things rush. Into this valley the demons of hell have poured, here is the punishment for the first humans, the miseries of old. What more can I say? I am neither sufficient nor capable of describing the abominations of this valley. *Eia argo, Advocata nostra!* O praiseworthy mercy of the Savior, excessively lovable, who deigned to grant such noble assistance to the afflicted! O truly wondrous goodness of our God, who has bestowed upon His guilty ones you, Lady, as their Advocate, so that with His Son as Judge between us and God the Father, you may be able to obtain for us what you desire. It is certain that He will not so openly condemn those whom the advocacy of your tenderness preserves! O admirable mercy of our God toward us, who, so that we would not flee from His clemency, not only shared

in our judgment as God and man, that is, Christ, from whom the sentence should be pronounced, but also willed to make His Mother, the Lady of glory, the Mother of mercy, our Advocate, so that we might find not judgment but assistance, not punishment but eternal reward. Therefore, there is no need to fear that you will not have mercy on the miserable and incline your judgment to the side you defend, and obtain grace for us which you pray for on our behalf. I know well that after the sentence there is no appeal to a higher authority, for although the Judge is a man, of whom you are the Mother, He is also God, the Son of God the Father. For I do not see, Lady, how anything can be denied to you, and through you, we may have our heavenly homeland. And this is also that wondrous tenderness; this is certainly what our God desires; this is what He longs for; this is why He has appointed you as our Advocate. Therefore, Lady, all that remains is that *illos tuos misericordes oculos ad nos convertas*. I do not doubt, Lady, that if you behold our miseries, your mercy will not delay its effect. The rays of your eyes are marvelous and lovely, by which you draw us to love and lead us to complete salvation, so that we may not fear the venomous gaze of the basilisk. O venomous eyes of Eve, why do you not offer yourselves to the eyes of the Virgin if you wish to receive perfect healing? For the radiance and clarity of her eyes dispel darkness, put to flight the hosts of demons, cleanse the vices of the mind, ignite frozen hearts, and ultimately draw us to heavenly things. O blessed are those, Lady, who behold your eyes! Therefore, gracious Lady, turn these eyes toward us.

Et Jesum, benedictum fructum ventris tui, nobis post hoc exilium ostende. O wondrous womb that could receive the Creator! O praiseworthy womb that deserved to conceive redemption! O desirable womb from which the longing of hearts emanated, a river of grace, a reward of glory! O womb, not just a womb, but a celestial heaven! In this womb was the price of the lost, the happiness of the blessed, the Lord of angels. O blessed bosom! O my Lady! O fountain of piety, lake of holiness, river of goodness, your womb, Lady! O

blessed womb that gave birth to the Sun, restored the entire world, regained the heavenly homeland, and bestowed even more! O how precious is the womb that brought forth healing to the sick, life to the dead, and paradise to the righteous! O ivory womb, seat of wisdom! O beautifully-wrought womb, height of glory! O lovable womb, sweetness of the soul! O elevation of minds, intoxication of hearts, and sweetness of sinners! Your fruit, O Lady, is certainly a blessed fruit, born from its very beginning. This is Jesus, the Son of the living God. This is our Savior, Christ the Lord. In the sweetness of this fruit, the understanding is uplifted, the emotions are expanded, and the desires of both are calmed. Reason becomes clear, affection becomes sweet, and intention is purified. The whole heart melts savoring the sweetness of your fruit. Show us this Jesus, the blessed fruit of your womb, after this exile. So that by seeing Him we may possess Him, by seeing Him we may be filled with beatitude, by seeing Him we may be enraptured in Him, by seeing Him we may be poured out into Him, by seeing Him we may be transformed

into Him completely. *O clemens! O pia! O dulcis Maria!* O loving to the needy, clement to the supplicants, sweet to the lovers! O clement to the repentant, loving to the progressing, sweet to the contemplatives! O clement in delivering, loving in bestowing, sweet in giving yourself! O clement in consoling, loving in counseling, sweet in soothing! O clement in sight, loving in action, sweet in affection! clement in conception, loving in appearance, sweet in embrace; you are clement to the afflicted, loving to the forsaken, sweet in love to the just. You are clement to the subjected, loving to the corrected, sweet to the beloved. You are clement to the seekers, loving to those who seek you, sweet to those who knock at your door; you are clement to the admirers, loving to the rejoicers, sweet to those who taste you. You are clement to the poor, loving to the despised, sweet to the devout. You are clement to the elevated, loving to the transformed, sweet to the dissolved. *O clemens! O pia! O dulcis virgo Maria! Ave, Maria, gratia plena, Dominus tecum.*