

FROM SIN *to*  
SANCTITY



# FROM SIN *to* SANCTITY



*The Prayers and Meditations  
of St. Anselm*

SAINT ANSELM  
*of* CANTERBURY

TAN Books  
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## I.

# Prayers to the Divine Persons

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## Prayer to God

*This opening prayer, considered the most important in Anselm's collection, is a simple plea for a sinner to be forgiven, to grow in self-awareness, and then to be open to the graces for serious spiritual battle, aiming toward the theological virtues ("belief, hope, love"). Amidst the Anselmian tendency to beg for humility and mortification is the crucial awareness that love is all that matters and the only life for which all will be judged: "All I really want is to love You." As a faithful churchman, Anselm sees the inextricable link between such charity and the teachings of Christ, commands which must not only be lived out but lived freely and joyfully. In other words, from the start, the love Anselm seeks has "rules" and practical guidelines and concrete criteria.*

Almighty God, tender Father and good Lord, have mercy on me, a sinner (see Lk 18:13). Forgive my sins. Grant me to be cautious and even conquer all the traps, temptations, and toxic treats in my life. In both my thoughts and in my actions, may I perfectly avoid what You forbid and do what You command. May I believe, hope, love, and live in accord with Your mind and will. Grant me a contrite piety, a humility, and the ability to live abstemiously and to mortify my flesh (cf. Rom 8:13).

All I really want is to love You, to pray to You, to praise You, and to meditate upon You. In all things, may I act according to Your will with purity of heart, solemnity of mind, devotion, and with a mind made true and useful.

Allow me to know Your teachings and to love them, delight in them, and to follow them easily and fruitfully. Always, Lord, let me never grow slothful but advance humbly in life toward higher and higher things. Never let me rely, Lord, on my human ignorance, my own weakness, nor on my own merits, never allow me to trust anything other than Your own dutiful disposition towards me. Treat me mercifully and use all my thoughts and deeds in

accord with Your loving will (cf. Mt 6:10) so that Your plan may always be accomplished in me and by me. Free me from every evil and lead me to eternal life through the Lord (cf. Mt 6:13).

### *Questions for Prayerful Reflection*

- ✠ Do you tend to pray to God in general or more specifically to the Father, Son, or Holy Spirit?
- ✠ When you pray with Anselm's words here, are you able to understand your sins in the context of God's love, or do you tend to condemn yourself and find yourself unable to approach Him? That is, when speaking to God, do you tend to stay away from those images and memories of your life you find embarrassing or uncomfortable?
- ✠ When you approach God in prayer, what do you "rely" on—your supposed virtues, your successes, your talents and gifts, or do you come to God more honestly, relying only on His grace and goodness?



## Prayer to Christ When the Mind Longs to Burn with His Love

*After the opening prayer to the Godhead in general, the next three prayers of Anselm are offered to the Second Person of the Divine Trinity in particular. These three prayers are to the God-made-flesh, Jesus Christ—to His Person (no. 2), more specifically to His Body and Blood (no. 3), and then to a representation of Christ's Cross (no. 4). In the following prayer, "When the Mind Longs to Burn with [Jesus's] Love," Anselm invites us to place ourselves before Jesus and see how great is His generosity, especially as compared to how little we truly desire to be totally His. As such, this is the first set of prayers where Anselm's theology of honor plays a crucial role. The Lord's love will forever outrun the degree to which we are indebted to Him: "I in no way have come to love You as much as I owe You." Yet in a spirit of courage and filial trust, Anselm perseveres in begging the Lord to decrease this disparity between His perfect care and the sinner's lukewarm indifference. Notice here how prayer for Anselm (and for any saint) is never a compartmentalized moment of an otherwise busy day. Notice how very "sensual" this prayer is: all of Anselm's being is taken up praising a Christ he sees, feels, listens to, and whose banquet he cannot wait to taste. Does Jesus pervade your world in such glory, surround your experiences with such richness?*

Lord Jesus Christ, my Redemption, my Mercy, my Salvation: I praise You and I give You thanks. Yet how wholly unequal is my piety compared to Your generosity and how much more is expected of true devotion. How absolute is the meagerness of my desire, how lavish is the sweetness of Your charity. Regardless of the little sort of praise and thanks which I realize are in no way equal to what I owe You, but insofar as I am able, my soul will fulfill its debt to You.

Since You are the hope of my heart, the strength of my soul, the cure for my infirmity, may Your most powerful tenderness take care of what my most tepid stupidity tries to accomplish. You are my life and the goal of my desire, even though I in no way have come to love You as much as I owe You, let my desire to love You match how much I should actually love You. My Light, You see the inner recesses of my soul because, “My Lord, my deepest yearning is before You” (Ps 38:10), and You have graced my soul with any good it desires.<sup>6</sup> If You inspire all that

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<sup>6</sup> This is sometimes a difficult truth to realize but it is solid Christian teaching that any desire for the good in any fallen soul is a gift of God. God places holy desires in us, and in so doing, His gifts become our merits. In *Preface I* for the *Mass of the*

is good, Lord, or better, You inspire it because it is good,<sup>7</sup> I thus desire to love You.

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*Saints*, the priest prays, “For You are praised in the company of Your Saints and, in crowning their merits, You crown Your own gifts.” This Preface is very “Augustinian”: “God thus crowns you because he crowns his own gifts (*dona sua*) and not your merits (*merita tua*)” (*Expositions of the Psalms*, 102.7). The Augustinian tradition worked this teaching out against the heresy of Pelagianism, named after the monk Pelagius, who wrongly taught that there can be good in a soul apart from God’s direct act of grace and each person can increase that good through harder and harder work. The truth is that without God’s grace, we cannot only not do good, we “can do nothing” (Jn 15:5).

<sup>7</sup> Here Anselm echoes what has been called “The Euthyphro Problem,” which he certainly knew from his philosophy studies. It is so-called because the seemingly unsolvable problem in question was first posed in Plato’s dialogue on piety, *The Euthyphro*. Plato’s dilemma is the question whether (1) something is good because it is willed by God or (2) does God will something because it is good? If one sides with the first possibility, one falls into the problem of moral relativism in that God could will anything (e.g., the torture of the innocent) and we would be bound to call anything “good.” All commands and basic moral instincts would be emptied of any real meaning. But, if one sides with the second possibility, God is no longer the sovereign Good but must bow to an independent order of goodness, and we would be caught up in a sort of cosmic dualism. Here God wills something because it has a claim on Him, and not as the sovereign Creator Who brings all things into being (and thus into goodness, as we shall see). Clearly, neither horn of this dilemma is acceptable, and it would fall to St. Thomas Aquinas to clarify how goodness is synonymous with God’s very nature and is not something He

Complete in me what You have created me to desire, granting that I may come to love You as much as You ask.<sup>8</sup> I offer You praise and thanks for this desire which You have inspired within me; I offer praise and prayers, lest this gift which you have granted through your own goodness proves unfruitful. Perfect what You have started and bring to completion what You have created me to be, not because of my merits, but because of Your goodness which goes before all else.

Transform, Most Merciful One, my lukewarmness into an exceedingly fervent love for You. This, most clement God, is what my prayer seeks: that remembering these things and meditating on Your kindnesses, I might be illumined by Your love. Your

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simply wills apart from Himself. God is not just a “good,” He is Goodness, and, therefore, He is the Bestower, the Standard, and the supreme Exemplar of all good. Nothing outside God binds Him but all things are now bound to Him and, as such, all things are metaphysically good insofar as they exist.

<sup>8</sup> Anselm rightly prays to have an upright will, to desire what is truly desirable. The Christian problem is not one of the intellect; we sin not because we fail to know deep dogma or are unable to articulate the Creed like Oxford dons. The real problem lies in our wills, in not wanting to belong fully to Christ and, instead, wanting what is harmful for our eternal well-being. This is surely why God becomes a helpless Child, a gentle Teacher, a crucified God—to win our wills over through gentleness and to melt the chilly indifference of our hearts through weakness.

goodness created me, Lord, and Your mercy has cleansed what You had made from original sin. Your patience has carried me thus far—even after I floundered in my sordid sinfulness, having lost that baptismal cleansing. Yours is a patience that sustains me and has waited for me. That is, Good Lord, You await my reformed life while my soul waits for a sufficient repentance so that through the inbreathing (*inspirationem*) of Your grace, it might live well with You.<sup>9</sup>

My Lord, my Creator, my Patience, and my Nourisher, be also my Helper. For You, I thirst, hunger, and desire; for You, I sigh; for You, I long. I am like an orphan who has been stripped of the closeness of a most tender father, crying and bawling, unceasingly and wholeheartedly longing to embrace his loving face.<sup>10</sup> As much as I can—although this

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<sup>9</sup> This section of Anselm's prayer emphasizes our ongoing need for God's mercy and our own awareness that repentance never ceases before one's death. For even though the sacrament of Baptism cleanses the stain of original sin, our own freely chosen aversion to God thereafter stands in need of constant healing. Finally, the Latin here is our word for "inspire," a breathing into, and clearly Anselm's intentional reference to the Holy Spirit's indwelling, the teaching that the same Spirit Who indwelt Jesus now inhabits the soul of every baptized believer.

<sup>10</sup> While this may sound harsh and cold, know that in the

is not as much as I ought—I contemplate Your Passion and remember Your beatings, Your scourgings, Your Cross, and I remember Your wounds, and how You were put to death for me, and how Your body was anointed, buried, but at the same time I recall Your glorious resurrection and miraculous ascension. I hold all these things with an unwavering faith, bemoaning my state of exile (cf. Eph 2:19) and hoping in the one consolation, Your return, and so I burn to gloriously behold Your face.

Pitiful me because I was not able to see the Lord of angels lowered to converse with men, empowering men to converse with angels. A rejected God freely died so a sinner could live. Alas, I was too unworthy to be astonished in the actual presence of something so admirable, something so immeasurably loving. Oh my soul, why were you not present when the sword of intense sorrow ran through you (cf. Lk 2:35)? Why were you unable to be wounded

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*Prologue to the Benedictine Rule*, St. Benedict sought to inspire his monks toward holiness by telling them that “we must serve God always with the talents He has given us so that He will refuse to disinherit us, His children, like an angry father, nor infuriated by our sinfulness that He would give us over to eternal torments like a fearsome Lord.”

by the iron lance which pierced the side of your Savior (cf. Jn 19:34a)? Why were you found unworthy to see the nails puncture the hands and the feet of your Creator (cf. Jn 20:20)? Why did you turn away in horror from the blood pouring out from your Redeemer (Jn 19:34b)? Why were you not inebriated with seething tears when He was given bitter gall to drink (cf. Lam 3:15; Mt 27:34)? Why did you not compassionately accompany the most chaste Virgin, His most worthy Mother, and your most loving matron?

My most merciful Lady, how could I describe the fountains which sprung forth from your most chaste eyes when you beheld your only Son before you, innocent but bound, beaten, and butchered? What might I presume about the torrent of tears that poured down your most loving face when you looked up to see your own Son and God and Lord hanging on the cross, the flesh of your flesh cruelly torn apart by faithless men? How could I ever estimate what weeping plagued your most pure heart when you heard, "Woman, behold your Son" (Jn 19:26), and when the disciple heard, "Behold your mother" (Jn 19:27)? For in the place of your Son,

you received a disciple in place of the Master, a servant instead of the Lord.

If only I could have taken my Lord down from that cross along with blessed Joseph of Arimathea, prepared His body with spices, and laid Him in the tomb (see Jn 19:38–42)! Or even if I could have come afterwards so that such a burial would not have been without my grieving. If only I could have been among that blessed chorus of women, trembling at the sight of angels and hearing the announcement of my Lord's resurrection, the news of my own consolation, the news of that which has been so long awaited and so, so desired! If only I could have heard from the mouth of the angel, "Do not be afraid, Jesus who was crucified whom you seek is risen, he is not here" (Mt 28:5).

Kindest, Sweetest, Most Peaceful One, when will You make up for the fact that I did not witness the blessed incorruption of Your Body? How will I ever place a kiss on the wounded places where those nails pierced You? Will I ever be able to bedew with tears of joy those scars that prove You are truly flesh and bones (cf. Lk 24:39)? Admirable, Inestimable, and



Incomparable One, when will You console me and when will You lessen my pain?

For such pain cannot subside while I am still on pilgrimage and far from the Lord. Cursed is my soul, Lord, because You, my life's Consoler, have ascended but have not said goodbye. Ascending, You blessed those who were in your company, but I was not there. "With raised hands" (Lk 24:50) You were taken up into heaven by a cloud, but I did not see this. Angels promised You would one day return, but this I did not hear.

So, what shall I say? What shall I do? Where shall I go? Where should I look for Him? Where and when might I find Him? Whom shall I ask? Who can speak to me of my Beloved, "for I languish with love" (Sg 2:5; 5:8)? "Joy has been drained from my heart and my laughter has been changed into weeping" (Lam 5:15). "My flesh and my heart fail me, God is the rock of my heart, my portion forever" (Ps 73:26). Unless it comes from You, my Dearest One, "my soul refuses to be consoled" (Ps 77:3). "Whom else have I in the heavens? None beside You delights me on earth" (Ps 73:25). I want You, I hope in You, it is You I seek. "My heart spoke to You, saying, 'Seek

my face, Your face, Lord, I seek! Do not hide Your face from me” (Ps 27:8–9).

Kindliest Lover of all peoples, “To You the helpless entrust their cause, You are the defender of orphans” (Ps 10:14; Lam 5:3). My most reliable Advocate, have mercy on this abandoned orphan. For I have become a fatherless orphan, my soul has become like that of a widow.<sup>11</sup> Look at these, the tears of an orphan and a widow, which is all I can offer You until You return. Hurry, Lord, show Yourself, and then I shall be consoled. “Show me Your face and I shall be saved” (Ps 80:20). Make Your presence known and I shall obtain my heart’s desire. Reveal Your glory and my joy will be made perfect. “For You my body yearns; for You my soul thirsts” (Ps 63:2). “My soul thirsts for God, the living God. When can I enter and see the face of God?” (Ps 42:3) When will You come, my Consoler, Whom I await? Oh, when shall I see my joy for which I long? Oh, if only “I could be satisfied when Your glory appears” (Ps 17:15), for which I hunger. Oh, then shall I become intoxicated “feasting on the rich

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<sup>11</sup> Here Anselm is placing himself in the place of those for whom God has a special affection: “Father of the fatherless, defender of widows” (Ps 68:6).

food of Your house” (Ps 36:9a), for which I long; if only You would give me to drink “from Your delightful stream” (Ps 36:9b), for which I thirst.

Lord, let my “tears be my bread day and night” (Ps 42:4) until it is said to me: “Behold your God,” until I hear, “Awake, soul, here is your Bridegroom” (Mt 25:6). But in this meantime, feed me with sorrows and let me drink my tears, and let my sorrows be my comforts. Maybe then my Redeemer will come, since He is good; He will not delay because He is loving. To Him give the glory forever and ever. Amen.

### *Questions for Prayerful Reflection*

- ✠ Think of that which you hold most dear in your life—your family, your friends, your talents and passions, the highlights of your life’s story, and so on. Now imagine all those treasures as God’s direct gifts to you—not things of your own doing, not the results of your own intelligence and connections, but gifts pure and simple. How does that help you see things more truthfully?

- ✠ What would it mean for you to “fervently love” God, as Anselm pleads throughout?
- ✠ Imagine yourself at the foot of the Cross on that first Good Friday, AD 33. What would you say to Jesus; what would you feel? What do you hear; whom do you see? Now imagine yourself at the empty tomb three days later. What would you feel; what would you want Jesus to know about you?

### **Prayer for Receiving the Body and Blood of the Lord**

*Holy Communion is, of course, the way Jesus Christ—God made flesh—continues His promise to never leave us orphans (cf. Jn 14:18) and to be with us always, even until the end of time (cf. Mt 28:20). Anselm’s prayer before receiving the Sacred Host (number three in his collection) begins by placing the redemption of the world in the plan of the Father’s sending the Son in the power of the Holy Spirit. This collaborative work continues in the celebration of Holy Mass: the priest calls down the Holy Spirit as the Sacred Host is then offered to the Father, involving all believers in this heavenly elevation. As such, Anselm prays that this liturgy becomes his own, transforming how he feels, how he speaks, and how he lives.*

Lord, Jesus Christ, Who by the orchestration of the Father and the work of the Holy Spirit, through Your freely-willed death, You so mercifully redeemed this world from sin and eternal death. I adore You and I venerate You as much I seem able, despite how tepid my affection and lowly my devotion—giving You thanks for such a gift, Your Holy Body and Your Holy Blood which I desire to receive as a cleansing of my sins as well as a defense against them.

I confess, Lord, that I am not worthy to come near (cf. Lk 7:6) and even touch this Sacrament, but I place my trust in that same tenderness toward sinners with which You handed over Your soul so that they may be justified, and by which You offered Yourself as a holy sacrifice unto the Father. A sinner, I believe I may accept these gifts so I too may be justified by them. I beg and beseech You, Merciful Lover of Mankind: let what You have given for the wiping away of sins never prove to increase my sins but serve to absolve them and act as a protection against them.

Lord, make me discerning in mouth and in heart, that I might know by faith and by heartfelt affection, that through the power of these Sacraments, I am

empowered to be conformed to Your death and resurrection. [Through the power of these Sacraments], through the death of the “old man,” and through a renewal of my faith-life (cf. Rom 6:6), may I be made worthy to be incorporated into Your Body, “which is the Church” (Col 1:24). Then I am your member and You are my Head, and I will remain in You and You in me (cf. Jn 15:4). Then at Your resurrection, You will reform my “lowly body” and configure it to Your spiritual body (cf. Phil 3:21; 1 Cor 15:39–49), according to the promise of Your apostle, and then I shall forever rejoice in You unto Your glory, You Who live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, God forever and ever. Amen.

### *Questions for Prayerful Reflection*

- ✠ Pray this prayer before receiving Holy Communion next. What words or images most resonate with you?
- ✠ Do you understand how Communion is also a Sacrifice? In elevating the Host to the Father, the priest is showing you how Jesus the Lamb is perpetually lifting

you up to God and in so doing, forgiving your sins through His Blood and thus raising you into the life of heaven even here and now.

- ✠ Imagine yourself as a living member of Christ's own Sacred Body. You are His hands and eyes, His words and His heart while on earth. Holy Communion grafts and strengthens that union every time you receive the Host. Where does such intimacy call you toward greater holiness in your day-to-day life?

### **Prayer to the Holy Cross**

*The Cross is the sign of salvation, for here the Son's sacrifice absolves what sinful humanity has justly incurred, a sacrifice received and ratified come Easter Morning. This prayer of St. Anselm, number four, is essentially unique from other medieval prayers to the Cross, for it is offered not simply to the actual Cross of Calvary but to whatever crucifix is before him, as simple or as plain as it might be. Consequently, these words were written for his contemporaries (and for us) as a way to pray before the crucifix in one's own home or at*

*the local parish. In doing so, pay attention to what comes to mind, the people you remember and the feelings that surface as you actually speak to the cross before you, imagining Jesus dying out of love for you.<sup>12</sup> This prayer reminds us that we must all have a special place in our home where a crucifix is clearly visible and where we have our own prayer time.*

Oh holy cross, which brings that Cross upon which our Lord Jesus Christ perished so as to rescue us from the eternal death toward which we were all heading, and into the eternal life which we had lost because of our sinning: I adore you, I venerate you, and in you I glorify that one Cross which you symbolize for us, and on that Cross I adore, venerate, and glorify the Lord's compassion worked so mercifully there.

Oh, loveable cross on which is our salvation, our life and our resurrection! Oh, precious wood through which we have been saved, through which we have been freed. Oh, venerable sign through which we have been set apart for God! Oh, glorious cross in whom alone we should boast!

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<sup>12</sup> For clarity's sake, Cross has been capitalized when referring to the actual wood on which Jesus died and left in lowercase for the cross of one's own home or parish.



Foolish and unfaithful men needed you in order to inflict their cruelty upon the Gentlest of Man, but that is not why we celebrate you—rather, it is for the wisest love of Him Who freely embraced you. For these men were unable to accomplish anything unless He in His wisdom allowed it; nor could He undergo anything unless He in His mercy willed it. Those men chose you to carry out their most faithless crime, but He chose you to bring to completion the work of His faithfulness. Those men used you to betray a just man over to death, but because of you, He rescued sinners from death.

They used you to destroy life; He used you to annihilate death. They used you to condemn the Savior; He used you to save the condemned. They tried to bring the Living One to death; He used you to vivify the dead. They were foolish and cruel; He was wise and merciful. Therefore, oh admirable cross, we hold you in esteem not for the cruel stupidity for which these men wanted to exploit you but rather for the mercy and wisdom you brought about.

How, then, shall I praise you; in what way shall I exalt you? With what affection should I pray to you, and with what amount of joy shall I glorify in you?

Through you, hell was destroyed and damned up for all those who have been redeemed. Through you, the evil spirits tremble—they are held down, defeated, and stomped upon. Through you, the world is renewed and is now decorated in the truth that gleams and the justice that reigns. Through you, sinful human nature is now justified, the damned have been saved, any slave to sin and to the underworld is now freed, and the dead have been brought back to life. On account of you that blessed city in heaven has been restored and is made complete. Through you—for our sake, God—the Son of God was obedient to the Father, even to the point of death (cf. Phil 2:8), which is why He is now exalted and has received the name above every other name (cf. Phil 2:9). Because of you, He has prepared His throne and has begun His reign.

Oh cross, you who were chosen and set aside for such overwhelming benefits, neither the intellect nor the words of either angels or humans could ever sufficiently praise and exalt the work completed on you. Oh you, on whom and through whom is my salvation and my life; Oh you, on whom and through whom is my entire and only good, “may I

never boast except” in you (Gal 6:14). Why would I have been conceived, born, and lived, why would I enjoy all the goods of this life, if I am only to descend into hell afterwards? Would it not have been better for me if I had never been conceived (see Mt 26:24)? And this would certainly be the case if I had not been redeemed by you.

With what kind of feeling am I to glory in you, for without you there would be nothing to glory in, but for all eternity the sorrow and miseries of hell would have mastery over me? With what sweetness am I to rejoice in you, through whom that slavishness of hell which I have inherited, has been given over to the kingdom of heaven? With what joy am I to be grateful to you, without whom the future would horrify me—if even for only a moment—but through whom I now expect to rejoice forever? For even though I now serve God between hope and fear, I am certain that I shall come to all those good things of heaven through you if I only give thanks, love, and live glorifying in you.

Therefore, allow my glory to be through you and in you. Allow my true hope to be through you and in you. For through you, my sins are absolved, and

through you, my soul died to the old (cf. Eph 4:22) and was reborn to a new life of righteousness. I plead that through baptism, you wash me from all my sins in which I have been conceived and in which I have been born (cf. Ps 51:5) and cleanse me again from all the sins I have committed since I have been reborn so that through you, I may come to all those delights for which the human person has been created, through the same Jesus Christ our Lord Who is blessed forever. Amen.

### *Questions for Prayerful Reflection*

- ✠ Take some time to sit or kneel before your favorite crucifix or icon of Mount Calvary. Gain some quiet, and then ask Jesus on the Cross: “What have I done for You? What am I doing for You? What shall I do for You?” Simply sit with those questions, perhaps reviewing your past, looking at your current life, and anticipating your future. What feelings surface? What sins are still to be confessed? What new plan or resolve is Jesus asking of you?

- ✠ What are the crosses in your life right now? Can you name them and then pray to unite them to the Cross of Jesus, where He can transform any death, disappointment, or failing into something unexpectedly new and beautiful?
- ✠ What are the “delights” for which you have been created? Although we live in a fallen world, do you allow yourself to enjoy the things God gives you, and do you treat those pleasures as gifts of the Almighty? Be specific.