

The Marian Prayer of St. Thomas Aquinas

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Our brother Thomas, one of the greatest lights of the Dominican Order, was profoundly devoted to the Blessed Virgin Mary. His little known Marian thought has been gathered in a volume entitled *Meditations* by the Dominican, Fr. Mezard, O. P.¹ These selections, "taken verbatim from Aquinas," Fr. Mezard tells us, were culled from the *Summa*, as well as from his Commentaries on the Hail Mary and the Gospel of St. John. They are arranged in the form of short readings to accompany the feasts and seasons of the liturgical year.

In the Marian prayer of St. Thomas, which is always God-centered and in relation to Christ, we find an emphasis on petition, as well as emphases on contemplation, and even mysticism. This brief paper will reflect these emphases in the light of Mary, *mediatrix* of grace, a title and function of Our Lady of current interest in the Church. It is a title and function which St. Thomas made his own and integrated into his life of prayer and study. St. Thomas taught that the Blessed Virgin Mary "must be shown every honor, preached and praised, and invoked by us in our every need."²

According to our Angelic Doctor, the Blessed Virgin Mary "was so full of grace that it overflows on to all mankind" and suffices for the salvation of the world.³ "It is necessary," he says, "that whosoever desires to obtain favors with God, should approach this mediatrix, approach her with a most devout heart because, since she is the Queen of Mercy, possessing everything in the kingdom of God's justice, she cannot refuse your petition."⁴ Making the thought of St. Bernard his own, St. Thomas reflects that no refusal can exist in the presence of the exceeding charity of her pierced and immaculate heart together with the pierced side and wounds of her Son. For St. Thomas, Mary is the throne of grace of whom "the Apostle speaking to the Hebrews said, 'let us go with confidence to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace in seasonable aid'." (Heb 4: 16)⁵

In the mystery of the Incarnation the Lord himself entered " into the womb of the Blessed Virgin, for she was the wonderful temple of God. ...[and now] every creature, yes even every malefactor who runs to it with his whole heart, will be saved and every prayer poured forth in it will be heard."⁶ Whatever our difficulty, Thomas counsels us to pray to Mary, "for in every danger you can obtain salvation from this glorious Virgin [and] in every work of virtue you can have Mary as your helper [for] she truly says of herself, 'I am the Mother of fair love, and of fear , and of knowledge, and of holy hope, in me is all grace of the way; in me is all hope of life and of virtue.'" (Ecclus 24:24)⁷

St. Thomas, like the Fathers of the Church, saw numerous typologies of Mary in the Old Testament. Contemplating the text, "There shall come forth a rod out of the root of Jesse, and a flower shall rise up out of this root," (Is 11: 1) St. Thomas saw Mary as the root wielding the true rod of saving grace. In another text, "Lift up the rod, and stretch forth thy hands over the sea, and divide it, so that thy children may go through the midst of the sea on dry ground," (Ez 14:16), St. Thomas says that it is Mary who has divided the sea for us, that is the world, so that we might pass safely through it." She "has brought to us the water of grace from the rock, Christ, so that we may drink freely of this life-saving water."⁸

The figure of Judith was for St. Thomas a type of Mary who in bringing forth Christ restored God's people "to their original innocence" and that what was said of Judith, "Thou art the glory of Jerusalem, thou art the honor of our people," really refers to Mary.⁹

Esther is another Marian typology. "The truth corresponding to [the] figure of Esther" is the story of Mary's role in our redemption. "Through Queen Esther, that is, through the Blessed Virgin the sentence of damnation passed against us was revoked; namely through her intercession, through the extension of the King's golden sceptre to Mary and

through her kiss on the top of that sceptre we are saved from hell and damnation. ...Queen Esther, that is the Blessed Virgin, pleased the eyes of the King in helping to redeem the human race and she found favor in his presence, not only for herself, but for all mankind."¹⁰

In the contemplation of St. Thomas the virginal body of Mary, as well as her soul, overflowed with grace. "The soul of the Blessed Virgin was so full of grace that it overflowed into her flesh, thus fitting it for the conception of God's Son."¹¹ Her immaculate heart, her feelings, mind and will were all involved in the conception and care of her Son, just as it is in helping each of us conceive and bring forth Christ in our soul.

Mary not only brings Christ to us, she also brings us to Christ. St. Thomas, in interpreting the mystical meaning of the wedding of Cana, considers that Mary is present in the mystical marriage of the soul with God and that it is she who "arranges the marriage, because through her intercession, the soul is joined to Christ through grace."¹² St. Thomas points out that it was the fiat of Mary which allowed the spiritual marriage between the Son of God and human nature to take place. In the plan of God, Mary's "yes" stood for the "yes" of all God's people thereby making it possible for every person to pronounce his or her own *fiat* and attain intimate union with the divine nature.¹³ St. Thomas calls Mary *mediatrix* and *consolatrix*¹⁴ and in his prayer he entrusts his entire person to the intimacy of her pure, grace-filled and loving heart.

According to St. Thomas, the prayer of petition is an affair of the practical reason. The Saints, above all, are conscious of their spiritual poverty and need of help on their *reditus* back to God. St. Thomas wrote a prayer to the most Blessed Virgin Mary, expressing his own need for help and dependence upon her as his *mediatrix*. From this prayer, several pages in length, I quote a few brief excerpts:

O most blessed and sweet Virgin Mary,

Mother of God, filled with all tenderness,
Daughter of the most high King,
Lady of the Angels,
Mother of all the faithful,

On this day and all the days of my life,

I entrust to your merciful heart my body and my soul,
all my acts, thoughts, choices,
desires, words, deeds,
my entire life and death,

So that, with your assistance,

all may be ordered to the good
according to the will of your beloved Son, our Lord Jesus Christ....

From your beloved Son...

request for me the grace to resist firmly
the temptations of the world, the flesh and the devil....

My most holy Lady,

I also beseech you to obtain for me
true obedience and true humility of heart

So that I may recognize myself truly

as a sinner--wretched and weak--
and powerless,
without the grace and help of my Creator
and without your holy prayers....

Obtain for me as well,

O most sweet Lady,
true charity with which from the depths of my heart
I may love your most holy Son, our Lord Jesus Christ,
and, after Him,
love you above all other things....

Grant, O Queen of Heaven,

that ever in my heart
I may have fear and love alike
for your most sweet Son....

I pray also that, at the end of my life,

you,

Mother without compare,
Gate of Heaven and Advocate of sinners....
will protect me with your great piety and mercy....

and obtain for me, through the blessed and glorious Passion of your Son

and through your own intercession,
received in hope, the forgiveness of all my sins.

When I die in your love and His love,

may you direct me
into the way of salvation and blessedness.

Amen. ¹⁵

ENDNOTES

1. Saint Thomas Aquinas, *Meditations*, selected by P. D. Mezard, O.P., adapted and trans. by E. C. Mc Enery, O.P., new and revised ed. (Columbus, Ohio: College Book Co., 1941). These meditations "taken verbatim from Aquinas" are culled mostly from the Summa as well as from his *Commentary on the Angelic Salutation, Namely: The Hail Mary!*, and his Commentaries on Sacred Scripture (see Preface).

2. St. Thomas Aquinas, *Meditations*, p. 416.

3. St. Thomas Aquinas, *The Three Greatest Prayers: Commentaries on the Our Father, the Hail Mary, and the Apostles' Creed*, trans. Laurence Shapcote, O.P. with intro. by Thomas Gilby, O.P. (Westminster, Maryland: The Newman Press, 1956), *Commentary on the Angelic Salutation, Namely, the Hail Mary!*, 32. See also St. Thomas Aquinas, *Meditations*, 102.

4. St. Thomas Aquinas, *Meditations*, 411.

5. *Ibid.*, 416.

6. *Ibid.*, 94.

7. *Ibid.*, 103. See also St. Thomas Aquinas, *The Three Greatest Prayers: Commentary on the Angelic Salutation, Namely the Hail Mary!*, 33.

8. *Ibid.* ; see also Book of Num 20:8.

9. Aquinas, *Prayers*.

10. Ibid., 24.

11. Ibid., 32.

12. St. Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on John*, ed. James A. Weisheipl, O.P. (Albany, N. Y.: Magi Books, Inc., 1980), 1,10, n.201, 98; and 2,1, n.336, 338, and 343, 151-152

13. St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 3a, 30, 1.

14. St. Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on John*, 2,1,n.344, 152. See also St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, vol. 51, *Our Lady*, Appendix 1, ed. and trans. with Appendices by T. R. Heath, O.P (N.Y.: Blackfriars-McGraw Hill, 1969) 94.

15. St. Thomas Aquinas, *Devoutly I Adore Thee*, trans. and ed. by Robert Anderson and Johann Moser (Manchester, New Hampshire: Sophia Institute Press, 1933), "Prayer of St. Thomas Aquinas to the Blessed Virgin," 21-31.

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