

# OUR PRAYERS: Salve Regina

Deep in every human heart is a desire for the living God that expresses itself in prayer. In the Catholic tradition, some prayers have become classic expressions of what the human heart seeks. *Words of Faith: Our Prayers* explores prayers that for centuries have revealed a faith that fosters a deep, personal, growing, and loving relationship with Jesus Christ. These prayers teach us much about who we are and about the God to whom we belong.

—Keith J. Egan, Series Editor

## We Pray

Hail, holy Queen, Mother of mercy,  
hail, our life, our sweetness, and our hope.

To you we cry, the children of Eve;  
to you we send up our sighs,  
mourning and weeping in this land of exile.

Turn, then, most gracious advocate,  
your eyes of mercy toward us;  
lead us home at last  
and show us the blessed fruit of your womb, Jesus:

O clement, O loving, O sweet Virgin Mary.

## We Practice

The anthem (a poem or hymn of praise, loyalty, and fidelity) *Salve Regina*, though known and sung in Latin around the Catholic world for centuries, is probably more familiar to English-speaking people as the prayer “Hail, Holy Queen.” Though it is not drawn directly from scripture, the text may have been influenced by early Christian commentaries on the Song of Songs. Whatever its precise roots, this anthem reflects fundamental Catholic teachings about the Mother of God.

The *Salve Regina* is a seasonal song used in the Liturgy of the Hours, at the end of the day. Specifically, it is recited or sung after Night Prayer from Trinity Sunday (Sunday after Pentecost) until the Saturday before the First Sunday of Advent (last day of the liturgical year). Religious communities of brothers and sisters, priests, and many others pray all or part of the Hours every day. Many parishes celebrate Morning and Evening Prayer (two of the major Hours that make up the Liturgy of the Hours) especially during the Advent, Christmas, Lent, and Easter seasons. The *Salve Regina* is often prayed after praying the rosary.

This anthem was composed in the eleventh century and was originally used during church processions in honor of Mary. The chant melody dates from about the same time. Eventually, it was adopted by those living in monasteries and sung after their final prayers of the day as they returned to their rooms to retire for the night. For many centuries, the *Salve Regina* has been a means for people of faith to turn to the Mother of God and ask for her intercession as the final act of their day. It has inspired several songs in honor of Mary that remain favorites of many Catholics today.

## DID YOU KNOW?

There are four anthems in honor of Mary used during the Church year:

- *Alma Redemptoris Mater*, “Loving Mother of the Redeemer,” from the First Sunday of Advent until the Feast of the Presentation on February 2.
- *Ave Regina Caelorum*, “Hail, Queen of Heaven,” from the Feast of the Presentation until Wednesday in Holy Week.
- *Regina Caeli*, “Queen of Heaven,” from Easter Sunday until Trinity Sunday.
- *Salve Regina*, “Hail, Holy Queen,” from Trinity Sunday until the Saturday before Advent.

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## We Believe

This prayer can be divided into four parts, each one providing us with insight into Mary's role in salvation history and her place in our lives. In the first two lines, we greet Mary as Queen of Heaven and Mother of Mercy. Her assumption into heaven situates her as first among all creatures who rejoice in God's presence. While her role as heavenly queen might leave us feeling at a distance from her, the title "Mother of Mercy" reflects an intimacy that inspires our trust. We can approach her as one who loves, understands, and intercedes for us. She is a reflection and mediator of God's own mercy.

The next section expresses the reality of the human condition. We are children of Eve, the mother of all humanity. We share in human weakness and sinfulness, standing ever in need of grace and the support of those who pray for us. We have Mary and the entire communion of saints at peace with God to pray on our behalf. Because our true home is with God in heaven, we live now in a land of exile, longing to be one with God in whose image and likeness we were created. Because Mary dwells in that true home, we look to her and call to her that she might help us.

The four lines following express the heart of this Marian anthem, the core of our petition. The title advocate is ancient, reflecting Mary's generosity in sharing the graces she has received and in her intercession on our behalf. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* recognizes this as one of Mary's principal titles (CCC #969). Her intercession is the beacon that will guide us to heaven and into the very presence of the Lord Jesus. Such is Mary's graciousness. Mary is in heaven, but she has not forgotten us; she can and will assist us. We approach her with confidence because she reflects everything that God has promised to us. She facilitates for us the fulfillment of God's promises. Such is her advocacy.

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### The Blessed Virgin is invoked in the Church under the titles of Advocate, Helper, Benefactress, and Mediatrix.

—CCC, #969

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The prayer crescendos in the form of an invocation that summarizes the qualities of Mary celebrated in this anthem. We call out to her as merciful (clement), loving, and sweet or gracious, always ready to share her gifts.

## A BIT OF HISTORY

The Salve Regina was likely written by an eleventh century German monk, Hermann Contractus. He was severely disabled from birth and could not move without the help of others. An accomplished scholar in many fields, including music, this anthem captures well Hermann's and our need for Mary's intercession, help, and support.

The Salve Regina was a favorite blessing for those preparing to go to war during the Crusades in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. In Europe, it was often sung for processions on Marian feasts during the Renaissance. The anthem also became popular among sailors because it was easy to remember and sing, helping pass the time on long voyages. It was used for the blessings of ships as they set out, and for evening prayer services on board. In his journals, Christopher Columbus recounts such blessings and services during which the Salve Regina was used on the ships he commanded.



## We Live

The Salve Regina, whether recited or sung, is a prayer of love, expectation, and anticipation—a prayer of trust and confidence in Mary's closeness and care for us. Praying it teaches us who we are before God and what we need to do as children of God. It helps us confide in Mary because she remains at our side, guiding us toward God.

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### [Mary] is a mother to us in the order of grace.

—CCC #968

- Be a Marian blessing to someone by doing a favor or offering a gift that will enhance that person's quality of life. Advocate for this person's well-being by your simple act of kindness.
- Choose one day this week or this month to be a Marian presence by visiting a lonely neighbor or acquaintance. Listen to the person and offer whatever assistance is needed, which may be as simple as your companionship over a cup of coffee.
- During this month, take a minute or two each morning or at lunchtime to jot down one way in which Mary is a special blessing in your life for that day. Honor her by sharing that blessing with at least one other person.
- Pray the Salve Regina each night before bed, perhaps as part of a simple Night Prayer. You can find simple formats online or visit a local Catholic book store.

### With Children

- Help your child(ren) compose a prayer to Mary, using a familiar and favorite title. Include the special ways your family seeks Mary's help and how you will follow her example as followers of Christ.
- Draw and color a picture of Mary as Jesus' mother and Queen of Heaven. Display the picture so others can enjoy it and call to mind Mary's presence in their own lives. Perhaps use it as a backdrop to a simple home shrine or prayer corner.



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