

FLEUR DE LYS SERIES

*THE PASTORAL
PRAYER*

of Saint Aelred of Rievaulx

Translated by
A Religious of C.S.M.V.



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PUBLISHER'S FOREWORD

There are those works from the 2,000-year-old treasure of Christian literature that so burn with the presence of the Holy Spirit that little more can, or should, be said. While it is certainly no weakness of a work that some kind of commentary may be necessary for a proper appreciation of its insights—for this certainly applies to Holy Scripture, the *Rule of Saint Benedict*, and many more works, as well—we nonetheless ought give those gems which speak for themselves a special reverence within the broad devotional landscape.

The Pastoral Prayer of Saint Aelred is one such gem. Each line, often most every phrase, is so filled with honest self-examination and complete oblation toward God, that I am rendered speechless, thrown into prayer. But let me not say much more, else my words trod upon the inward savoring of the gloriously delicate insights of this venerated English Cistercian and abbot, a possibility terribly frightening.

I will say that I first came upon this work as part of personal study of the English School of Catholic spirituality, of which this saint is a key voice, that coincided coincided with my chaplaincy internship at a Chicago-area hospital as a Candidate for Holy Orders. Asked to lead a devotion for one of the weekly group seminars, I shared Saint Aelred's "Prayer for the Good of All." That it spoke profoundly to these Christians—two Roman Catholics, a Lutheran, Presbyterian, and Seventh Day Adventist, along with myself, an Anglican—demonstrates that the *Oratio Pastoralis* can resound with any disciple of Jesus Christ who seeks, by the grace of God, to be spent on behalf of others.

Matthew Dallman, Solemnity of Saint Anselm, 2016

TRANSLATOR'S INTRODUCTION

Aelred was born in Yorkshire in 1110, and spent his youth mostly at the Scottish court. In 1133 he took the Cistercian habit at Rievaulx, which had been founded from Clairvaux two years before. In 1141 he was made Novice Master at Rievaulx; in 1143 he was sent to be abbot of Revesby in Lincolnshire, a daughter-house of Rievaulx; and in 1147 he was recalled to the mother-house to be its third abbot, which office he held until his death in 1167. He knew Saint Bernard, and himself is sometimes called "the Bernard of the North." His feast day is 3rd March.

The *Oratio Pastoralis* exists today in a single manuscript, a compilation written at Rievaulx in the thirteenth century and now preserved at Jesus College, Cambridge. It seems never to have been published, as were Aelred's other words—e.g., the *Speculum Caritatis*, and the *De Amicitia Spirituali*, on account of which he ranks as one of the greatest Cistercian authors—but rather to have been kept in his own monastery as a family treasure. The text is printed, however, in the late Dom Andre Wilmart's *Auteurs spirituels et textes devors du moyen-age latin*, Parish, 1932, pp. 291-296, and this translation has been made from that.

As Dom Wilmart observes, there are passages in the *Pastoral Prayer* which recall Saint Augustine's *Confessions*, and Walter Daniel, Aelred's biographer, tells us that that classic was his favorite reading.

He was probably familiar also with Saint Anselm's prayers; but, apart from its form and of course its Scriptural basis, the *Pastoral Prayer* is wholly Aelred's own. It is interesting,

therefore, as a window, an intimate light, on to the holy soul of a great Cistercian abbot eight centuries ago; and it is valuable now because, as the manuscript heading says, it is *propria praelatorum*, apt for the use of all who are set over others in any sort of way. So I hope that this translation may be of use to many besides Religious superiors and even besides the clergy; for most of us have some responsibility for others, even if it be only as their intercessors.

WANTAGE, AUGUST 1954

Here begins
THE PASTORAL PRAYER
of Venerable Aelred, the Abbot of Rievaulx,
a Prayer composed and regularly used by him,
and apt for those who are set over others,
Abbots especially.

I
ADDRESS

O Good Shepherd Jesus,
good, gentle, tender Shepherd,
behold a shepherd, poor and pitiful,
a shepherd of the sheep indeed,
but weak and clumsy and of little use,
cries out to Thee.
To thee, I say, Good Shepherd,
this shepherd, who is not good, makes his prayer.
He cries to thee,
troubled upon his own account, and troubled for the sheep.

II
ACT OF CONTRITION

For when in bitterness of soul
I view my former life,
it scares and frightens me that I should be called shepherd,
for I am surely crazy if I do not know myself

unworthy of the name.

Thy holy mercy is upon me,
to snatch my wretched soul out of the nether hell.

Thou showest mercy as Thou wilt;
Thy pity succours him whom Thou art pleased to pity;
and such is Thy forgiveness of my sin,
that Thou dost not avenge Thyself by damning me,
nor dost Thou even overwhelm me with reproaches;
and, even when Thou dost accuse, Thou lovest me no less.

Nevertheless, I am disturbed and troubled,
for I am mindful of Thy goodness, yes—
but I am not unmindful of my own ingratitude.

See, then,

before Thee is my heart's confession of the countless sins,
from which Thy mercy has been pleased to free my hapless soul.

My whole heart renders thanks and praise to Thee
with all its might for all these benefits.

But I am no less in Thy debt
for all the evil things I have not done.

For, most assuredly, whatever evil thing
I have not done, it was Thy guiding hand
that made me thus abstain from doing it;
since either Thou didst take away the means thereto,
or else Thou didst correct my inclination,
or gavest me the power to resist.

But what am I to do, O Lord my God,
about the ills whereby, in Thy just judgement,
Thou sufferest Thy servant, the son of Thy handmaiden,
still to be wearied and be overcome?

The things concerning which my sinful soul
is troubled in Thy sight, O Lord, cannot be counted;
yet, for all that,
neither my sorrow for them, nor my care
to shun their repetition is as great
as they demand, and as my will desires.

III HIS OFFICE FACED

To Thee, my Jesus, I confess, therefore;
to Thee, my Savior and my Hope,
to Thee, my Comfort and my God, I humbly own
that I am not as contrite and as fearful as I ought to be
for my past sins;
nor do I feel enough concern about my present ones.
And Thou, sweet Lord,
hast set a man like this over Thy family!
Me, who take all too little trouble with myself,
Thou bidst to be concerned on their behalf;
and me,
who never pray enough about my own sins,
Thou wouldst have pray for them.
I, who have taught myself so little too,
have also to teach them.
Wretch that I am, what have I done?
What have I undertaken?
What was I thinking of?
Or rather, sweetest Lord, what wast *Thou* thinking of

regarding this poor wretch?

Sweet Lord, I pray Thee, is not this Thy family,
Thine own peculiar people, that has been led by Thee
out of the second Egypt, and by Thee has been
created and redeemed?

And lastly, Thou hast gathered them together
out of all parts, and made them live together
in a house where all men follow a common way of life.

Why then, O Fount of mercy, hast Thou willed
to put such people, souls so dear to Thee,
into the charge of such an outcast from Thy Face?

Was it to satisfy my appetites, to give free rein to my desires,
in order that Thou mightiest have the more against me,
and sentence me with more severity,
and punish me for others' sins, as well as for my own?

O God most holy, if this were the case,
was it then fair to let so many souls, souls of such quality,
suffer such risk, solely that there might be
more obvious reason for one man's severer punishment?

For to what greater peril can subjects be exposed,
than to a stupid and sinful superior?

Or—and this is more seemly to expect,
more pleasant to experience from kindness such as Thine—
didst Thou set such a person over Thy household, Lord,
in order that, if it should please Thy goodness,
to rule it well though him,
Thy mercy might be shown, Thy wisdom known,
the excellence of Thy power declared thereby
as Thine alone, not man's;

and so the wise, the righteous, and the strong
should never glory in their wisdom, righteousness, and strength
as though they were their own;
for, when such persons rule Thy people well,
it is not they, but Thou, that rulest them.
Give not the glory unto us, O Lord, if this be so,
but unto Thine own Name.

IV INTRODUCTION TO THE PRAYERS THAT FOLLOW

Yet, Lord, whatever be the reason why
Thou hast put my unworthy, sinful self
into this office, or hast suffered others
to appoint me to it,
the fact remains that Thou commandest me
—so long as Thou allowest me to hold the same—
to be concerned for those set under me,
and to pray for them most particularly.

Wherefore, O Lord,
I lay my prayers before Thee, trusting not
in my own righteousness, but in Thy great mercy;
and where no merit of my own can lift its voice,
duty is eloquent.

Let Thine eyes, therefore, be upon me, Lord,
and let Thine ears be open to my prayers.

But since, according to the law divine,
a priest is bound to offer sacrifice

first for himself, thereafter for his people,
I make oblation to Thy majesty
first of the sacrifice of prayer for my own sins.

V

PRAYER FOR HIS OWN NEEDS

Look, look at my soul's wounds!
Thy living and effective eye sees everything.
It pierces like a sword, even to part asunder soul and spirit.

Assuredly, my Lord, Thou seest in my soul
the traces of my former sins,
my present perils,
and also motives and occasions for others yet to be,
Thou seest these things, Lord,
and I would have Thee see them.

Thou knowest well, O Searcher of my heart,
that there is nothing in my soul that I would hide from Thee,
even had I the power to escape Thine eyes.

Woe to the souls that want to hide themselves from Thee!
They cannot make themselves not to be seen by Thee,
but only miss Thy healing and incur Thy punishment.

So see me, sweet Lord, see me!

My hope, Most merciful, is Thy lovingkindness;
for Thou wilt see me, either as a good physician sees,
intent upon my healing,
or else as a kind of master, anxious to correct,
or a forbearing father, longing to forgive.

This, then, is what I ask, O Fount of Pity,

trusting in Thy mighty mercy and Thy merciful might:

I ask Thee, by the power of Thy sweetest Name,
and by Thy most holy Manhood's mystery,
to put away my sins and heal the languors of my soul
mindful only of Thy goodness, not
of my ingratitude.

Further, against the vices and the evil passions
which still assault my soul,
(whether they come from past bad habit, or
from my immeasurable daily negligence,
whether their source is in the weakness
of my corrupt and vitiated nature,
or in the secret tempting of malignant spirits)
against these vices, Lord, may Thy sweet grace
afford me strength and courage;
that I may not consent thereto, nor let them reign
in this my mortal body,
nor yield my members to be instruments of wickedness.

And, as I thus resist,
do Thou the while heal all my weakness perfectly,
cure all my wounds, and put back into shape
all my deformities.
Lord, may Thy good, sweet Spirit
descend into my heart,
and fashion there a dwelling for Himself,
cleansing it from all defilement both of flesh and spirit,
impouring into it the increment of faith, and hope, and love,
disposing it to penitence, and love, and gentleness.

May He quench with the dew of His blessing

the heat of my desires,
and with His power put to death
my carnal impulses and fleshly lusts.
In labours, and in watchings, and in fastings,
may He afford my fervor and discretion,
to love and praise Thee, to pray and think of Thee;
and may He give me power and devotion
to order every act and thought according to Thy will,
and also perseverance in these virtues
unto my life's end.

VI SPECIAL PRAYER FOR WISDOM

These things, my Hope,
I need for my own sake.

But there are others that I need
not only for myself, but for the sake of those
to whom Thou bidst me be a power for good,
rather than merely a superior.

There was a wise king once, who asked
that wisdom might be given him to rule Thy people.

His prayer found favour in Thine eyes,
Thou hearkenedst thereto;

and at that time Thou hadst not met the cross,
nor shown Thy people that amazing love.

But now, sweet Lord, behold before Thy Face
Thy own peculiar people, whose eyes are ever on Thy cross,
and who themselves are signed with it.

Thou hast entrusted to Thy sinful servant
the task of ruling them.
My God, Thou knowest what a fool I am,
my weakness is not hidden from Thy sight.
Therefore, sweet Lord, I ask Thee not for gold,
I ask Thee not for silver, nor for jewels,
buy only that Thou wouldest give me wisdom,
that I may know to rule Thy people well.
O Fount of Wisdom, send her from Thy throne of might,
to be with me, to work with me,
to act in me, to speak in me,
to order all my thoughts, and words, and deeds, and plans
according to Thy will,
and to the glory of Thy Name,
to further their advance and my salvation.

VII PRAYER FOR THE GOOD OF ALL

Thou knowest my heart, Lord;
Thou knowest my will
is that whatever Thou hast given Thy servant
should be devoted wholly to their service,
and spent for them in its entirety;
and I myself, moreover, would be freely spent for them.
So may it be, O Lord, so may it be.
My powers of perception, and of speech,
my work time and my leisure,
my doing and my thinking,

the times when things go well with me,
the times when they go ill,
my life, my death,
my good health and my weakness,
each single thing that makes me what I am,
the fact that I exist, and think, and judge,
let all be used, let all be spent for those
for whom Thou deignedst to be spent Thyself.

Teach my Thy servant, therefore, Lord,
teach me, I pray Thee, by Thy Holy Spirit,
how to devote myself to them, and how
to spend myself on their behalf.

Give me, by Thine unutterable grace, the power
to bear with their shortcomings patiently,
to share their griefs in loving sympathy,
and to afford them help according to their needs.

Taught by Thy Spirit, may I learn
to comfort the sorrowful, confirm the weak, and raise the fallen;
to be myself one with them in their weakness,
one with them when they burn at causes of offence,
one in all things with them, all things to all of them,
that I may gain them all.

Give me the power to speak the truth straightforwardly,
and yet acceptably;
so that they all may be built up in faith, and hope, and love,
in charity and lowliness, in patience and obedience,
in spiritual fervor and submissiveness of mind.
And, since Thou hast appointed this blind guide to lead them,
this untaught man to teach, this ignorant one to rule them,

for their sakes, Lord, if not for mine,
teach him whom Thou hast made to be their teacher,
lead him whom Thou hast bidden to lead them,
rule him who is their ruler.

Teach me, therefore, sweet Lord,
how to restrain the restless, comfort the discouraged,
and support the weak.

Teach me to suit myself to everyone
according to his nature, character, and disposition,
according to his power of understanding, or his lack of it,
as time and place require, in each case,
as Thou wouldst have me do.

And, since the weakness of my flesh
—or it may be my lack of courage and my
heart's corruption—
prevent my edifying them by labours of watching and fasting,
I beg Thy bounteous mercy that they may be edified
by my humility and charity, my patience and my pity.
May my words and teaching build them up,
and may they always be assisted by my prayers.

VIII PRAYER FOR SUBORDINATES

Hear me yet further, God most merciful,
for those for whom I am compelled and drawn to pray to Thee
both by my duty and by my heart's love.

Remembering Thy kindness, I am bold;
for Thou, sweet Lord, knowest how much I love them,

how I yearn over them, and how my heart goes out to them.

Thou knowest, Lord,

I do not want to rule them harshly or self-assertively,
but to help them in charity, rather than command,
and to be subject to them in humility,
while being always one of them in sympathy.

Hear me, therefore, here me, O Lord my God,
and let Thine eyes be open on them day and night.

Spread Thou Thy wings, most loving Lord, and shield them;
stretch forth Thy holy right hand, Lord, and bless them;
and pour into their hearts Thy Holy Spirit,
that He may keep them in unity of spirit and the bond of peace,
chaste in their bodies, lowly in their minds.

May He be there to help them when they pray,
and fill them with the unction and the riches of Thy love.

May He renew their minds with sweet compunction,
enlighten their hearts with the light of Thy grace,
cheer them with hope, and humble them with fear,
and kind them with love.

May it be He Who prompts them to such prayers
as Thou wilt gladly hear.

May He, Thy same sweet Spirit, be in them,
when they make meditation;
so that, by Him enlightened, they may know Thee,
and ever cherish in their hearts the thought of Him;
so that in trouble they will call on Him,
and turn to Him in all perplexity.

May the same loving Comforter, when they are being tempted,
come swiftly to their aid;

and may He help their weakness in all the
straits and troubles of this life.

By the same Spirit make them, Lord, to be
alike within themselves, with one another, and towards myself,
peaceable and equable and kind,
obedient, serviceable, helpful to each other.

May they be fervent in spirit, rejoicing in hope,
enduring steadfastly
through poverty and fasting, toils and vigils, silence and repose.

Drive far from them, O Lord, the spirit
of pride and of vain glory,
of envy and of gloom,
of accidie and slander,
of distrust and despair,
of fornication and uncleanness,
of discord and presumption.

Be in their midst, according to Thy faithful promise;
and, since Thou knowest what each of them needs,
I pray Thee, strengthen what is weak in them,
spurn not their frailty, heal that which is diseased,
give joy for sorry, kindle what is lukewarm,
establish what is insecure in them, that each of them may know
he does not lack Thy grace in any of his trials and temptations.

IX PRAYER FOR THE SUPPLY OF TEMPORAL NEEDS

Lord, as Thou shalt see fit,
provide Thy servants also with those temporal goods,

whereby the weakness of this wretched body
is in this life sustained.

This one thing only do I crave, my Lord,
from Thy sweet pity:
namely, that whether it be much or little that Thou givest,
Thou wouldst make me, Thy servant, a good
and faithful steward
in respect of all,
a wise and fair distributor,
a sensible provider.

Inspire them, too, my God, to bear it patiently
when Thou withholdest things;
and, when Thou dost bestow, to use Thy gifts
with temperance and restraint.

Inspire them, O Lord, also to have of me,
who am Thy servant, and their servant for Thy sake,
such an opinion as may profit them,
such love and fear of me
as Thou, Lord, seest to be good for them.

X CONCLUSION

I, for my part, commit them
into Thy holy hands and loving providence.
May no-one snatch them from Thy hand,
not from Thy servant's, unto whom Thou hast committed them.
May they persevere with gladness in their holy purpose,

unto the attainment of everlasting life
with Thee, our most sweet Lord, their Helper always,
Who livest and reignest to ages of ages.
Amen.