

PARISHES OF
ST PIUS X, ALDERLEY EDGE, ST BENEDICT'S, HANDFORTH
AND
SACRED HEART & ST TERESA'S WILMSLOW
WEEKLY REFLECTION

Sunday 4th May 2025: Third Sunday of Easter
Marian Prayers: 2 Hail Holy Queen (Salve Regina)

There is doubt as to the authorship of the Salve Regina. From early manuscripts, their language and style, the hymn can be dated with confidence to the 11th century. Some attribute it to Adhemar, Bishop of Puy (1055-1098), an important figure in the First Crusade and some to Bishop Peter of Compostela (c952-1002). However, the probability is that the prayer and its plainsong hymn were written by Hermanus Contractus of Reichenau, Lake Constance (1013-1054) who was severely disabled from birth – hence the nickname ‘Contractus’. He became a monk and learned scholar in the fields of theology, mathematics, astronomy, music, Latin, Greek and Arabic. Apart from his presumed authorship of the Salve Regina, he also probably wrote the Antiphon ‘Alma Redemptoris Mater’. The latter is one of the four antiphons in honour of Our Lady which is sung between the first Sunday in Advent and the 2nd of February, Candlemas Day, while the Salve Regina is sung between the Saturday before Trinity Sunday until the Friday before the First Sunday in Advent.

Others have suggested that St Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153) wrote the Salve Regina, but his role appears to have been as a key figure in promoting the anthem at the monastery at Cluny, where the first trace of its use dates from about 1135. St Bernard had a strong devotion to Our Lady. There are also two legends which state that it was St Bernard who added the triple invocation: “*O clement, O loving, O sweet Virgin Mary*”. The first is that, on Christmas Eve 1146 in his post as Apostolic legate in Germany, Bernard was visiting the Cathedral of Speyer which is on the left bank of the Rhine near to Heidelberg. On entering the Cathedral he sang the words for the first time, genuflecting three times as he did so. The second account is that, while he was praying at the Cathedral, he entered into ecstasy and Our Lady appeared to him in a vision, whereupon he exclaimed: “*O clemens, O pia O dulcis Virgo Maria*”. Neither legend is likely to be true since the story first arose some four centuries later and the music of the anthem strongly suggests a single authorship. Whether or not either legend is accurate, the words can be found engraved on a circle on the pavement of the church at the same spot where Bernard is said to have spoken

them. As recorded in Ratisbonne's "Life and Times of St Bernard (1855): *"Plates of brass were laid down in the pavement of the church, to mark the footsteps of the man of [God](#) to posterity, and the places where he so touchingly implored the clemency, the mercy, and the sweetness of the Blessed Virgin Mary"*.

Sometime after the time of St Bernard were added, probably by the Holy See, what are now the final words, namely: *"Pray for us O Holy Mother of God, that we may be made worthy of the promises of Christ"*. The promises of Christ are those made by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount: *"Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God"* – a promise that those who die in a state of grace will go to Heaven. As a footnote it is interesting that Scholars give examples of the regular singing of the Salve Regina by the sailors of Christopher Columbus, and in particular on his ship the *Santa Maria* on the eve of his first discovery of the Americas.

Stephen S.