

"Three Prayers" **Written For Frank Kacmarcik**

Thomas Merton

Editorial Note: A revised version of these three poems was included in Volume two of *The Merton Annual* (pages 115-117) with the heading "Three Prayers on Sacred Art." The manuscript at The St. John's University Alcuin Library is entitled "THREE PRAYERS." Each poem is clearly a distinct unit. The poems are not separately headed with Roman Numerals as in the later version. These prayers were written for Frank Kacmarcik as artist and are, therefore, for the artist, not about sacred art.

THREE PRAYERS

First Prayer: For Vocations in the Realm of Sacred Art

Almighty God, Father of all light, Maker of the World
Who has made man in Your image, a seer and a maker,¹
Look down into the abysmal darkness of our hearts
And see the unutterable destitution into which our spirit
 and our art have fallen, since we have grown blind to
 the splendor of Your truth.
O Lord, Who once heard the cry of Israel, Your son,
 enslaved in Egypt
Who delivered him, with great power,
And led him, with Your prophet Moses into the desert:
Send us now men of vision who will open our eyes
 once again
To see Your incorruptible light.
O Lord, Who showed to Moses on the flaming mountain
The plan of a perfect Tabernacle, in which a fitting worship
 could be offered to Your Majesty,
Send us chosen messengers and teachers,
Men of worship and men of art,

Who will restore with chaste and noble works
 the beauty of Your House!
 May they teach us to see, with pure hearts,
 The Splendor of Your Son, Jesus Christ,
 And to express what we have seen in images
 worthy of so great a vision:
 Through the same Jesus Christ, Your Son,
 Your Logos, Your Art and Your Splendor
 In Whom all things subsist
 And through Whom, by the power of the Holy Spirit,
 All are called to be united with You forever.²

Second Prayer: In Selecting an Artist for a Sacred Work

Lord, God, Father Almighty, Whose art and Whose wisdom
 delight at all times to play, before You, in the great
 mystery of the works³ You have created:

Look down upon us and bless our ardent desire to create, in
 our turn, a sacred "world," a mystical Eden of spiritual
 symbol and form,

In which we may converse familiarly with You as
 Adam our Father once did in Paradise.

Send us, therefore, a wise maker of sacred buildings⁴ to
 construct⁵ a visible house for Your invisible glory.

Enlighten us, and let us choose the one who has received
 wisdom, from You, to do this work with all humility,
 and reverence, and perfection.

Teach us to choose him, not in the way the world chooses its
 servants,⁶ not by his empty fame, not by the price of
 his service, not by his conformity to ephemeral
 fashions: but show us how to find, by the inspiration of
 Your Holy Spirit, the one whom that same Holy Spirit
 will guide and strengthen for his Task: for without
 Your Holy Spirit, Lord, no man can serve you
 worthily or make anything that will give you honor.

But with His guidance and inspiration, all
 will be done in praise of your everlasting glory, through
 Christ our Lord. Amen.

Third Prayer: For the Artist⁷ and for the Work in Progress

Lord Jesus Christ, Who by Your Holy Passion and Death and
by Your glorious Resurrection, restored the mined⁸
world to its pristine perfection and ushered in a
New Creation,

Be mindful, we beg You of your servant _____,⁹ and
stand by him in the work he has undertaken for Your
Glory.

Strengthen his soul in his struggle to create a new and living
form: Sustain him in his wrestling with the inertia of
wood and stone, defend him against the lure of cow-
ardly solutions, falsity, insincerity and
servility to worldly standards.

Grant him patience, humility and understanding.

Endow his heart with incorruptible wisdom, his mind with
subtlety and wisdom¹⁰, his hands with dexterous skill.

May he be sanctified in his work, may his work itself be
holy, and may it raise all our hearts to You in prayer:

Thus may we all, priests and people, artists and workers be
united in one great act of praise and thanksgiving on
the day when, by Your grace, we shall happily dedicate
this¹² work in all its¹³ splendor, to the glory of Your
Heavenly Father. Amen.

Notes

1. This line is expanded in the revised version to "Who have given
to Man the power to conceive sacred forms and to create/Works of art
in Your honor,/"

2. "Amen." added in revised version.

3. "world" in revised version.

4. "ikons" substituted in revised version with "[or buildings]" fol-
lowing.

5. "adorn" substituted in revised version with "[construct]" follow-
ing.

6. [·] added, not comma in revised version.

7. , (comma) added after "Artist" in revised version.

8. "mined" replaced with "ruined" in revised version.

9. "[Name], the architect [or sculptor, painter, etc.]" added in re-
vised version.

10. "discipline" substituted for "wisdom" in revised version.
12. "new" added in revised version.
13. "sacred" added in revised version.