

Editor's Notes for *Letanía sencilla a dos coros ó 2 y 3 voces con órgano (Nº 4)*

The Litany of Loreto is used to honor Mary, the Mother of God, invoking various titles for her, reminding us of the role she plays in the Christian (especially Catholic) faith. Most likely the Litany was composed in or around Paris between the years 1150 and 1200. It gets its name from the Italian shrine (Loreto) where it was adopted in 1558. Pope Sixtus V approved its use in public worship in 1587. The Litany is used especially during May services, the month traditionally dedicated to the Blessed Virgin Mary. It is also used at Benediction and some congregations use it in the Divine Office. The Litany is approved for public use and carries a partial indulgence. We believe that Hilarión Eslava may have written as many as eight different settings for the Litany of Loreto, and I have previously transcribed four of these.

The Litany incorporates praises addressed to Mary found extensively in the writings of the early Church Fathers of the first six centuries. Over time, a number of titles for our Lady were removed or added to the Litany. Originally the Litany had fifteen additional titles, such as Our Lady of Humility, Mother of Mercy, Temple of the Spirit, Gate of Redemption, and Queen of Disciples. Recent history has seen the addition of five titles. The titles referring to Mary as “Mater Ecclesiae (Mother of the Church)”, “Consolatrix afflictorum (Comforter of the afflicted)”, and “Regina sine labe concepta (Queen conceived without sin)” are missing from this piece. This may indicate that this setting was originally composed sometime prior to 1854, when that latter title was approved. Another peculiarity in this litany setting is that two of the titles (“Mater Divinae gratiae” and “Mater purissima”) are repeated – something I have not seen in any of Eslava’s other litanies. I wonder if perhaps an error occurred where a couple of the missing titles were omitted, and by the time it was caught, the easiest remedy was to repeat those titles rather than try to adjust the remaining lyrics to get all the titles in the proper order. At any rate, I transcribed it as written.

The source score for the “Letanía Sencilla”, printed in Madrid by Bonifacio Eslava, proudly indicates that this piece was “sung on Saturdays at (the basilica of) Nuestra Señora de Atocha (in Madrid) in the presence of H.M. the Queen.” It is scored for two choirs or 2 or 3 voices with organ accompaniment. A footnote adds that “should no more than 2 voices be available, the middle voice can be eliminated.” These notes are identical to the notes included for “Salve Sencilla”, a separate piece that I recently transcribed (see this page or go to <https://musescore.com/user/29381772/scores/7640366>). These two pieces are written in the same key, with similar titles and levels of complexity, and I therefore suspect that these may have been intended as companion pieces.

“Sencilla” literally means “simple” in Spanish. As implied by the title, both the choral parts and the organ accompaniment are very basic and unembellished, and the choral parts are sometimes sung in unison. Despite the musical minimalism, this is still quite beautiful, and has the advantages of requiring very little rehearsal time and no need for particularly skilled performers.

Lyrics and English translation follow:

Kyrie, eleison	Lord, have mercy.
Christe, eleison.	Christ, have mercy.
Christe, audi nos.	Christ, hear us.
Christe, exaudi nos.	Christ, graciously hear us.
Pater de caelis, Deus, miserere nobis.	God the Father of heaven, have mercy on us.
Fili, Redemptor mundi, Deus, miserere nobis.	God the Son, Redeemer of the world, have mercy on us.
Spiritus Sancte Deus, miserere nobis.	God the Holy Spirit, have mercy on us.
Sancta Trinitas, unus Deus, miserere nobis.	Holy Trinity, one God, have mercy on us.

<p>Sancta Maria, Ora pro nobis. <i>(repeats after each of the following phrases)</i> Sancta Dei Genetrix, Sancta Virgo virginum, Mater Christi, Mater Divinæ gratiæ, (repeated) Mater purissima, (repeated) Mater castissima, Mater inviolata, Mater intemerata, Mater immaculata, Mater amabilis, Mater admirabilis, Mater Creatoris, Mater Salvatoris, Virgo prudentissima, Virgo veneranda, Virgo prædicanda, Virgo potens, Virgo clemens, Virgo fidelis, Speculum justitiæ, Sedes sapientiæ, Causa nostræ lætitiæ, Vas spirituale, Vas honorabile, Vas insigne devotionis, Rosa mystica, Turris Davidica, Turris eburnea, Domus aurea, Foederis arca, Ianua cæli, Stella matutina, Salus infirmorum, Refugium peccatorum, Auxilium Christianorum, Regina Angelorum, Regina Patriarcharum, Regina Prophetarum, Regina Apostolorum, Regina Martyrum, Regina Confessorum, Regina Virginum, Regina Sanctorum omnium.</p> <p>Agnus Dei qui tollis peccata mundi, Parce nobis, Domine</p>	<p>Holy Mary, Pray for us. <i>(repeats after each of the following phrases)</i> Holy Mother of God, Holy Virgin of virgins, Mother of Christ, Mother of divine grace, Mother most pure, Mother most chaste, Mother inviolate, Mother undefiled, Mother most amiable, Mother most lovable, Mother most admirable, Mother of our Creator, Mother of our Savior, Virgin most prudent, Virgin most venerable, Virgin most renowned, Virgin most powerful, Virgin most merciful, Virgin most faithful, Mirror of justice, Seat of wisdom, Cause of our joy, Spiritual vessel, Vessel of honor, Singular vessel of devotion, Mystical rose, Tower of David, Tower of ivory, House of gold, Ark of the covenant, Gate of heaven, Morning star, Health of the sick, Refuge of sinners, Help of Christians, Queen of Angels, Queen of Patriarchs, Queen of Prophets, Queen of Apostles, Queen of Martyrs, Queen of Confessors, Queen of Virgins, Queen of all Saints.</p> <p>Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world, spare us, O Lord.</p>
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Agnus Dei qui tollis peccata mundi,
Exaudi nos, Domine
Agnus Dei qui tollis peccata mundi,
miserere nobis

Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world,
graciously hear us, O Lord.
Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world,
have mercy on us.