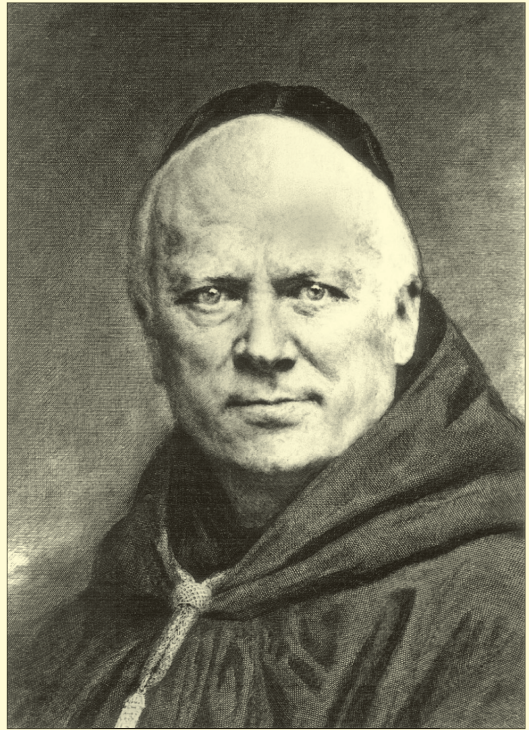


St Cecilia's
Abbey,
Ryde

Chronicle



Advent/Christmas 2024

No. 55

St Cecilia's Abbey, RYDE,
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Sung Mass & the full Divine Office every day.

Usual times of principal celebrations:

MASS : 10.00 a.m. Sundays & Solemnities

9.30 a.m. Weekdays

VESPERS: 5.00 p.m.

COMPLINE: 8.00 p.m.

CHRISTMAS 2024

Vigils: Christmas Eve 10.00 p.m. (please check)

Midnight Mass: Just after midnight.

Day Mass: 10.00 a.m.

HOLY WEEK 2025

17th April, Maundy Thursday: Missa Vespertina: 5.00 p.m.

18th April, Good Friday: Actio Liturgica: 3.00 p.m.

19th April, Holy Saturday: Paschal Vigil: 10.45 p.m.

20th April, Easter Sunday Mass 10.00 a.m.

2025 Ascension Day: Thursday 29th May, Mass 10.00 a.m.

Corpus Christi: Thursday 19th June, Mass 10.00 a.m.

Feast of the Sacred Heart: Friday 27th June, Mass 10.00 a.m.

Cover Illustration: Dom Prosper Guéranger O.S.B. by Claude-Ferdinand Gaillard (1874)

Illustrations: p.4: Ephrem the Syrian, anonymous ancient icon.

p.6 Open source.

p.8 Monastery copy of bust of Dom Guéranger.

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p.10 Mother Cécile Bruyère

From Mother Abbess

In one of his Hymns on the Nativity, St Ephrem the Syrian imagines Mary recalling the Annunciation thus:

The day when Gabriel entered my poor presence,
he made me immediately a free woman and a servant;
for I am servant of your divinity,
but I am also mother of your humanity, my Lord, and my son.¹

It is natural for any new mother to gaze at her child with wonder. She cannot stop looking at this miracle of flesh and blood who has come forth from her. The years go by, but a mother will usually read her child's face more profoundly than anyone else. A child may be trying to hide some mischief or trouble, but his mother will almost invariably spot it.

If this is true of ordinary mothers, who have their share of sins and failings, what must have been the quality of the gaze of Mary who knew no sin? To be sure, she knew pain, weariness, anxiety and sorrow but in her there was no bad temper or self-seeking or other sin or damage that could block her insight into the mystery of her Son. As she waited for the birth of her Son, and then as she followed his earthly course, she was to some degree already seeing the King in his beauty (Is 33:17), as her natural maternal insight was exercised by her Immaculate Heart. Indeed, any who carry a wound caused in part by our own mother's lack of insight can be reminded that, as disciples of Mary's Son, we can find in Mary a mother who looks on us with total understanding.

That particular work of Mary belongs to her post-Easter commission. Here I should like to reflect on her contemplation of her Son during his earthly life, and to do this using the insights of St Ephrem already cited. As a Syriac Christian (he came from Nisibis on the easternmost frontier of the Roman Empire, in what is now south-east Turkey), he shared the same Semitic world as Our Lady herself.

Beginning then, at Bethlehem we can watch Mary gazing at her Child with the awe that any new mother has, overwhelmed by a love that shows the right order of things. Ephrem imagines her saying to him:

However great was the ivory palace of the kings of our people,
greater and more beautiful is the little cave in which I bore you.²

It would be impossible to say how far Mary's mind could penetrate at that time into what had happened in the world when her Son was born, but at some point – perhaps after Easter, perhaps only in heaven – she would be able to say with Ephrem:

¹ *Hymns on the Nativity* 5.20, *Ephrem the Syrian: Hymns*, tr Kathleen E McVey (Classics of Western Spirituality), pp 108-109.

² *Hymns on the Nativity* 19.12, McVey p 168.

He whose cupped hands contain the sea is born in a cave;
his glory fills the heavens and the manger is filled with his splendour.³



The Ephrem scholar, Dr Sebastian Brock, remarks that Ephrem “finds himself constantly in a state of wonder as he ponders on creation and the Scriptures.”⁴ This was surely true also of Mary – and incidentally is what should be true of us. Dr Brock continues: “It was not that Ephrem is against intellectual enquiry; he simply insists that it should not be carried out in areas for which it is totally unsuited.” This was particularly the case when the true Divinity and Humanity of Our Lord were in question. One of Ephrem’s complaints about Arianism was that it sought to explain what should be simply revered as a mystery beyond us.

On the coming of the Magi, therefore, Ephrem writes:

The Magi ... sought him, and when they found him in the crib,
worship instead of investigation they offered him in silence.
Instead of empty controversies, they gave him offerings.
You, too, seek the First-born, and if you find him on high,
instead of confused searchings, open your treasures before him
and offer him your deeds.⁵

Moving on in time, we have the Presentation of the Lord in the Temple. Any mother spends time imagining the perils that might befall her precious child. Mary, moreover, had the insight of her faith, and the prophecy of Simeon to give her entrance into the mystery of what was happening that day and what it foretold. Ephrem describes it thus:

Mary carried him as a child,
the priest carried him as an offering,
the cross carried him as one slain,
heaven carried him as God.⁶

The same hymn has much to say about Our Lord’s earthly ministry, the progress of which Mary surely followed with all the attention of her maternal heart. For example:

He did not shrink from the unclean,
he did not turn away from sinners,
in the sincere he greatly delighted,

³*Homily on the Nativity*, ll 31-34, tr Sebastian Brock, *The Harp of the Spirit* (1975), p 64.

⁴Brock, *Harp*, p 14.

⁵*Hymns on the Nativity* 21.25, McVey p 178.

⁶*Hymns on the Resurrection*, 1.9 Brock, *Harp*, p 28.

at the simple he greatly rejoiced.⁷

I think we would all agree that to be misunderstood or even harshly judged is very painful, but when we love somebody and see him misunderstood or harshly judged, it is worse. Think then of Mary watching the following situation described by Ephrem:

By the greedy he was considered a glutton,
but by those who knew, the Provider of all.⁸

When we feel ourselves misunderstood or harshly judged, we can ask Mary to help us to focus with her on Jesus, victim of the greatest mis-judgment ever.

With regard to the Passion of Our Lord, Mary had John to tell her about the trial, and then she witnessed the Crucifixion for herself. I do not think it is fanciful to imagine that this woman of prayer *par excellence* could also see in the various events of the Passion some of the context of salvation history, as Ephrem describes it:

He gave up his hands to be pierced by nails
to make up for the hand which plucked the fruit;
he was struck on his cheek in the judgment room
to make up for the mouth that ate in Eden;
and while Adam's foot was free
his feet were pierced;
our Lord was stripped that we might be clothed;
with the gall and vinegar
he sweetened the poison of the serpent which had bitten man.⁹

We know from the Gospels that Our Lord's mental anguish and physical suffering were real, even though he laid down his life of his own free will. Mary had to witness his terrible sufferings, with all the pain of being his mother and yet unable to help; at the same time, in the darkness of faith, she consented to what was taking place. In her eyes, therefore, his face on the cross, disfigured by pain and by the blows he had received, had a comeliness all of its own. In this context we could mention St Ephrem's famous poem addressing a pearl as a symbol of the Lord. Because it was thought that a pearl came into being when lightning struck a mussel in the sea, it was an obvious symbol of Christ born of Mary through the action of the Holy Spirit. Moreover, if a pearl is to be placed on high, on a royal crown, it must be pierced. Hence Ephrem writes, addressing the pearl,

In your beauty is the Son's beauty depicted
– the Son who clothed himself in suffering, nails went through him.
Through you the awl passed, you too did they pierce,
as they did his hands.

⁷Brock, *Harp*, p 29.

⁸Ibid.

⁹ *Nisbene Hymns*, 36.1, Brock, *Harp*, pp 41-42.

But because he suffered he reigns
– just as your beauty is increased by your suffering.¹⁰



The risen Christ, then, in more words from Ephrem, is the Athlete, this time not to be beaten;¹¹ he is the Living Lamb whom Sheol had to vomit forth,¹² the Lamb who has trodden out a path out of the grave which we can all follow.¹³

He is the reconciling peace, sent to the peoples,
the gladdening flash, who came to the gloomy,
the powerful leaven, conquering all in silence,
the patient one, who has captured creation little by little.

To this list Ephrem adds

Blessed is he who makes your joys dwell in his heart
and forgets his griefs in you.¹⁴

Is not that a portrait of Mary, wholly absorbed in her Son? And Ephrem describes her elsewhere:

Herself most fair, to the Wonderful she gives birth;
she is the spring that provides the Fountain,
she is the ship that bears joy from the Father,
that carries good news in her pure womb;
she took on board and escorts the great Steersman of creation
through whom peace reigns on earth and in heaven.¹⁵

Let us ask Mary to teach us how to gaze on her Son, and to assist us with her prayers in this privileged endeavour.

~ Eustochium

¹⁰ *Hymns on Faith*, 82.12, Brock, *Harp*, pp 33.

¹¹ *Hymns on Paradise*, 12.6, tr Sebastian Brock, p 162.

¹² *Hymns on the Unleavened Bread*, 3.11, Brock, *Harp*, pp 38.

¹³ *Ibid.* p 39.

¹⁴ *Hymns on the Nativity* 21.9, McVey p 175.

¹⁵ *Hymns on Mary*, 7.1, Brock, *Harp*, pp 60. Dr Brock writes that the authenticity of this hymn is not certain but it is “of sufficient merit and beauty to rank alongside the other pieces in this selection.”

Dom Guéranger and Joy: Part 2

by Dom Jacques de Préville OSB, St-Pierre de Solesmes

Joy, for Dom Guéranger, is part of monastic life. After a delightful description of a day's work of the small fledgling community at the priory of Solesmes, in January 1833, the young prior wrote to his brother Édouard and his sister-in-law: "We are as cheerful as monks."¹ And later:

"To tell you, my good friends, that I am struggling like a dog, physically and morally, will not surprise you, but what will astonish you is that with all this I am so well that I have never been better. Singing does not tire me, the morning rising, the appointed hours, the thousand annoyances, the miseries and persecutions, all this does not deprive me of my cheer."²

It was in the midst of all the worries and hassles of every kind concerning the very recent foundation, that in January 1834 Dom Guéranger wrote to Euphrasie Cosnard, whose spiritual director he was and who was too fond of cats, an astonishing Latin epistle on cats,³ with rare and sophisticated words which must have given his correspondent a great deal of trouble to look up, in spite of the Latin lessons given to her by the young Abbé Guéranger when she was a student at the Visitation of Le Mans. Thus, Dom Guéranger knew how to preserve his freedom of mind in the midst of difficulties and trials. In the same month of January 1834, he wrote to Euphrasie: "I have had heavy crosses for six months and they are not getting lighter."⁴

He was "an enemy of all pretence, of all formality,"⁵ without approving boorishness, however. This simplicity and familiarity of Dom Guéranger may have slightly misled his monks in the beginning. It seems to have been one of the causes of the very painful crisis of the community in 1836, when the young prior was given notice by his monks to resign. According to the tradition reported by Dom Delatte, the essence of the grievances against Dom Guéranger was the absence of a religious spirit and manners incompatible with the office of superior. "In other words," comments Dom Oury, "he did not behave like the superiors of seminaries trained at Saint-Sulpice; he didn't have enough gravity in everyday life."⁶

Once the crisis was over, Dom Guéranger kept this simplicity and spontaneity.

¹ Letter to Édouard Guéranger, 9 January 1833, Arch. Abbey de Solesmes, *Lettres de dom Guéranger à sa famille*, p. 91

² Ibid. p. 162

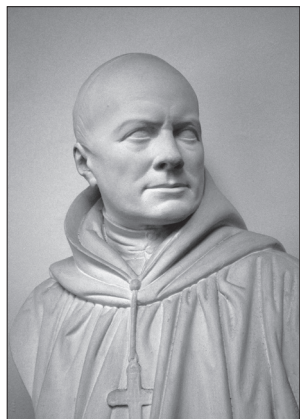
³ *Lettres de dom Guéranger à Euphrasie Cosnard*, Solesmes, 2004, p. 60-62.

⁴ Ibid. p. 60.

⁵ Dom Guépin, Arch. Abbey de Solesmes, *Lettres de dom Guéranger à ses moines*, Arch. dom Guéranger, IV/3, Solesmes, 2005, p. 11.

⁶ Oury, *Dom Guéranger, moine au cœur de l'Église*, Éd. de Solesmes, 2000, p. 138.

Luckily for us! They became better understood and accepted by his monks. In the well-known letter in which he gave Dom Maur Wolter the founder of Beuron, a whole series of advice on how to be a good superior, he said: “Always be approachable to everyone; avoid etiquette and ceremony; get as close as you can to the familiarity you saw practised at Solesmes.”⁷ In saying this, he unwittingly paints a portrait of himself.



He liked to tease his monks when he thought they were too serious. We know his remark to Dom Couturier at the election of the prioress of Sainte-Cécile in 1868. He presided over the vote, assisted by two monks. His prior, Dom Couturier, was there, grave as usual: “My good Father Prior,” whispered the abbot to him, “come along, you are not at a funeral. Don’t look so gloomy, Father Prior, it’s not you whom we are naming.”⁸

In his trials, Dom Guéranger maintained this admirable supply of joyful serenity. To do this, he relied on his total trust in God, but also on his balanced temperament which never allowed him to let himself be defeated. “I have received a special grace against gloominess. He has never come into my house and I’m everywhere chasing him away.” He had to drive him out in the terrible financial crisis of 1845 that almost put an end to Solesmes and the Congregation, “our awful misfortunes,” as Dom Guéranger himself said to Charles Le Sobre.⁹ He was not afraid to confide his anxieties to this man who was a great help to him: “My desolation is at its height.” “The anxieties of so many details oppress me, and all the more so because I have no one near me to whom I can open up, to pour out my worries.” He had to act very cautiously with his cellarer, Dom Fonteinne, on whom he could not fully rely. “In spite of that, I am worried to death about this right now... In truth, it is enough to make one lose one’s mind if one did not trust in God who can do all things, and whose ways are all loving and adorable.” “I’m fighting as best I can, and I’m really desperate... I am miserable.” “I’m withering.” “Truly, am I not the most unfortunate of men? For the last five years I have been drinking my bitter chalice, and always in separate draughts. It doesn’t end.” Indeed, this was the year 1850. These cries of distress in the correspondence of this period with Charles Le Sobre are really touching, truly poignant letters. It required a singular amount of energy on the part of Dom Guéranger not to succumb. “You know, my good friend, that it is not my person that worries me in all this; that sacrifice has been made for a long time, and I have not withdrawn it...”

⁷ Letter to Dom Maur Wolter, 5 May 1863.

⁸ Cited by Dom Guy-Marie Oury, *Lumière et force*, Ed. De Solesmes, 1997, p.130

⁹ All of the quotations in this paragraph are from letters to Charles Le Sobre.

He wanted to preserve the tranquillity and peace of his monks at all costs, and he succeeded in hiding his worst anxieties from them. And he continued to work, in spite of these material worries that could have paralysed his faculties or led him to depression.

Dom Guépin recounts in his Memoirs about a later period: “Loaded with preoccupations and overwhelming worries, he came among us [the novices], always with a smile on his lips and forgetting everything, to amuse and instruct us.”

Another monk gives a similar testimony: “Once he was in the midst of the brethren, he would start the conversation with his marvellous tact, sometimes about events, sometimes about the reading in the refectory; sparks flew from his lips; he sought to stimulate our spirits, to raise the level of the intellect, and his inexhaustible cheer, his charming verve, awakened everyone around him.”¹⁰

At Sainte-Cécile, the picture is even more endearing. Dom Guéranger felt quite at ease in the midst of these young nuns whom he was training for the monastic life. In her Souvenirs, written immediately after Dom Guéranger’s death, Mère Cécile writes:

“Father Abbot laughed. I have not seen a more communicative, fresher, fuller laugh in a 60-year-old man, who had suffered so much.” The mention of this laugh recurs often in these pages: “He began to laugh with his good laugh.” Or: “He laughed as he knew how to laugh.” “This remark made our good Father laugh to tears.” And the charming description of a conference narrated by a nun:



“After saying the *Veni Sancte*, he sits down in his chair and always begins with these words: ‘Well, my little children, what have you to ask me tonight?’ So each one of them asks him questions and we see this man so learned, so enlightened... answer all the questions you ask with childlike simplicity. He never seems to find our request too naïve; but sometimes he bursts out laughing, and says, ‘Oh! My little children, my little children, how sweet you are!’ and then, with his usual gentleness, he explains, asks if we have understood correctly, and having thus satisfied all the requests, he takes up the subject of his conference.”¹¹

¹⁰ From an anonymous manuscript ‘Portrait de Dom Guéranger’.

¹¹ Letter of Sr Pudentienne Marsille to her mother, cited in Oury’s *Lumière et Force* p.132.

This simplicity and availability of Dom Guéranger were all the more admirable because he led an impossible life, overburdened in an incredible manner, with the government of his monastery, the direction of his monks and that of the guests who flocked more and more to him and who overwhelmed him, his writings, the foundations, Sainte-Cécile, his immense correspondence, his tiring travels, all with a poor health that made him habitually ignore his physical well-being. "It's a terrible life to lead," he wrote to Léandre Fonteinne. He often complained to his correspondents about this excessive overload to apologize for the delay in his answers. "A delay of at least 200 letters," he confessed to Mère Elisabeth de la Croix. This should console other superiors!



What could have affected his cheerfulness and good humour was the attitude of some of the monks towards him. He had an extremely sensitive and delicate heart. "My attachments run deep; God made me so." Very often his letters end with the words: "Love me as I love you," which, beyond the ready-made formula, reveals a real need for affection, attention, gratitude, delicacy. Now, to say nothing of the monks who, unfaithful to their monastic life, caused him the worst bitterness, he did not always meet in his community with the return of affection that he himself showed. He confided this to Dom Bouleau, a monk who was much loved by him and to whom he could speak very freely:

"Believe me, I am all the more sensitive to your attachment, which is very undeserved, because the Lord has not always seen fit to make me taste this reciprocity of affection on the part of those to whom I have had the good fortune to do some good. That's the way life is; and the life of a monk especially, in order to be in conformity with God's intention, needs those little crosses which raise us above the present and carry us into the supernatural life."

The same echo is expressed in a letter to Dom Bérengier, a very faithful disciple of his abbot:

"If it pleased God to make me find more sympathy in some of my religious, nothing would be wanting to my happiness in your midst; but I must not live without the cross. It would probably be heavier still if I were more worthy. God spares the wind for the shorn sheep; you and many others amply compensate me; but I often ask God to grant to many a spirit of justice and charity, a distrust of themselves, which would be necessary for them to come forward to God [he does not say, to have more regard for me!]. At last, God knows what I need, and I place myself in his hands, in the midst of all those thorns that attract me instead of repelling me."

Outside the monastery, he had many friends who were very attached to him and to whom he himself was very faithful. But he also had bitter enemies, which could not fail to make him suffer. The abrupt end of his friendship with Montalembert in 1853 was extremely painful for him. He said it took him many years to come to terms with it.

External events would also have darkened his life. In fact, his view of the world is quite pessimistic. It should be remembered that he lived in particularly troubled times. In France, six successive political regimes, two revolutions, a coup d'état, the war of 1870, the Prussian invasion that reached Solesmes, the Paris Commune, the serious riots in Marseilles that endangered the young foundation, and also the often tragic situation in Rome and in the Papal States. ... He saw all the evils of his time, but without despair. ...

In his spiritual direction, he wanted to communicate his joy to others, and we often find in his letters exhortations to chase away sadness, to be simple, cheerful, happy like him. The first letter to the Abbé Fonteinne which has been preserved for us is remarkable in this respect. The Abbé Fonteinne is a year older than the Abbé Guéranger, and the latter already treats him as a son: he rebukes him for his tendency to melancholy, to restlessness, to discouragement.

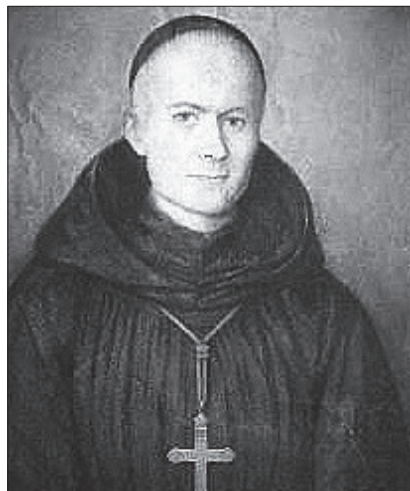
“O my good friend, I will not repeat to you all that I have told you so many times, you know that too well; but I will pray you, I will implore you once more to be happy, because it depends on you and depends only on you... [Virtue] is simply about bringing peace to your interior. Is it, then, so difficult, and even if it were so much so, is it sweeter to be torn, gnawed, devoured, as you are day and night, you who are so made for happiness, you who are so much in need of calm, harassed as you are at twenty-six years of age? Laugh at your follies, your miscalculations, your faults, your despairs, in a word, at everything except your happiness, for God wills this happiness, and you would be more guilty than foolish if you did not want it.”

Translated by Sr MBR.

This essay was first published in Le Charisme de Dom Guéranger (Éditions de Solesmes, 2008), and is printed here in translation by kind permission of the Éditions de Solesmes.

Update on the cause for beatification of Dom Prosper Guéranger

There have been some exciting new developments in the cause for Dom Guéranger's beatification recently, just in time for the upcoming 150th anniversary of his death in 1875.



Dom Prosper Guéranger

In June 2023, Madame Hélène de Courrèges, professor of History of Law and Institutions at the University of Rouen, was chosen to succeed Dom Jacques de Préville of Solesmes as postulator of the cause and is proving to be a dynamic force in this effort. The recently retired abbot of St Pierre, Solesmes, Dom Philippe Dupont, has been appointed as the vice-postulator, bringing a wealth of familiarity and insight into Dom Guéranger's person and work. In August 2023, a new association based in the abbey of St Pierre was established. This association is dedicated to promoting the life, spirituality and teaching of Dom Guéranger by disseminating his writings, highlighting his role in the history of monastic life and the universal Church, as well as promoting his cause for beatification and canonization.

On 8th November of last year, the bishops of France gathered in Lourdes voted to open the cause, with a view to a possible beatification. A new ecclesiastical tribunal was subsequently appointed: Father Edmond Samson, priest of the diocese of Le Mans, was appointed judge; and Don Martin Vивиès, of the Saint-Martin Community, became promoter of justice. The first general assembly of the Association took place on 13th April, 2024 at Solesmes.

Dom Prosper Guéranger (1805-1875), father of our branch of Benedictine life and restorer of so much for the Church after the ravages of the French Revolution, is currently recognised as a Servant of God. How we would like to see him beatified and canonised. Regulations for causes have changed in recent years and because everything must be submitted in a certain order, much of the work that has been done in the past must now be redone afresh. Père Abbé Dupont has done an enormous work in resourcing all of Dom Guéranger's writings. These are so extensive that 14 theologians have been called in (all approved by the bishop of the

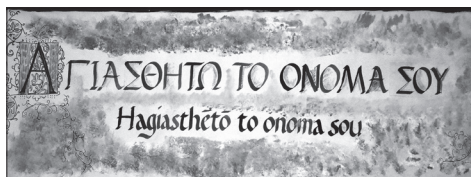
diocese) with Dom Dupont deciding how to make best use of each one's expertise.

Mme de Courrèges has plans to make Dom Guéranger better known beyond the monastic world. She hopes to make his tomb more accessible to the huge numbers of visitors to St Pierre Solesmes, and the relevant archives available to interested scholars too. The website (www.domgueranger.net) is already impressive. Though an official English version is not yet available, in-browser translations are able to give a very good idea of what is available on it. It is bound to grow. It includes some of Dom Guéranger's work, as well as commentaries on his influence.

For English-speakers who would like to get to know Dom Guéranger better we recommend our own book by Sr Mary David Totah, *The Spirit of Solesmes* (2nd Edition, Gracewing 2016), and the translation of Dom Oury's biography *Dom Gueranger: A Monk at the Heart of the Church 1805-1875* (translation by Hope Heaney, Loreto Publications, 2020). Of the writings by Dom Guéranger, rather than about him, his most famous is surely his fifteen-volume *The Liturgical Year*. It was popular even in his own day: for instance, chapters were read daily in the family of St Thérèse of Lisieux. It was translated by his younger contemporary, Dom Laurence Shepherd, a monk of Ampleforth, and is still in print. PDF versions are also available online.

Of course, if miracles through intercession to Dom Guéranger are not approved, the work on our giant is still worth doing. The point of all these efforts is not to "get Dom Guéranger beatified" but to spread his work and message, and to make him better known and loved, so that his particular charisms can be channels of grace for the faithful.

While Dom Guéranger's body is at St Pierre, his heart is under the sanctuary of Ste Cécile, the monastery of his protégée Mme Cécile Bruyère, where it is said that he poured out all that he had learned as he forged Benedictine life anew in an age and a country where it had all but died out. He was truly a man who put his heart into serving God and His Church; by his example and intercession, may we do the same.



Refectory Decorations

Prayer to request the beatification of Dom Guéranger

God our Father, your servant Dom Prosper Guéranger, Abbot of Solesmes, guided by the Holy Spirit, helped a multitude of your faithful to rediscover the meaning of the liturgy as the source of true Christian life. May his devotion to the Holy Church and his filial love for the Immaculate Virgin, inspired by the mystery of the Incarnate Word, be a light for the Christians of our day.

*Deign, Lord, to grant us the favour that we ask you by his intercession, so that his sanctity may be recognized by all and that the Church may soon allow us to invoke him as one of your blessed and one of your saints.
Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

When a person of somewhat rigid character said to Dom Guéranger that, having the task of guiding others, he found it repugnant to use any artifice in leading them toward God, the Abbot of Solesmes smiled and replied: "Our Lord is constantly using his ingenuity with us. Do you consider that artifice? Certainly not, it is love. And so, love those souls and you will be skilled with them, without being humanly calculating. Love alone will give you inexhaustible resources with which to lead them to God."

Both his impact on the monastic world and his activity in the wider affairs of the Church have tended to overshadow the warmth and charm of Dom Guéranger's character, his tender regard for individuals. For the abbot of Solesmes, each person was a world, a special creation; and the work of spiritual direction an exercise of docility to the Holy Spirit, a question of humility. "When I get to heaven," he used to say, "God will not ask me whether I have written books, but whether I have taken care of the souls entrusted to me." "People are so used," wrote Dom Delatte in his life of Dom Guéranger, "to seeing in the abbot of Solesmes the tireless champion of the Church's rights that they do not think of the fervent monk, the enlightened director of souls, of the superior wholly devoted to the good of those in his charge, who were truly his children."

Extract from *The Spirit of Solesmes* by Sr Mary David Totah, p.211

House Chronicle Advent 2023 – Advent 2024

The beginning of Advent saw us welcome Sr Josephine Parkinson of Stanbrook Abbey at the invitation of Mother Abbess to speak to us about “safeguarding” in contemplative communities. We were greatly engaged by her presentation and enjoyed getting to know her better over her short stay.

Fr Dominic Allain again celebrated the liturgy of Christmas here which, as well as his celebration of Holy Week, has happily become a firm custom. More customary visits on other feasts throughout the year are being added over time, too! We were particularly glad to celebrate his silver jubilee of ordination here later in the year on the solemnity of Ss Peter and Paul.

Foreseeing that the now traditional visit from our brothers of Quarr Abbey for tea and alternated Vespers together on the feast of St Scholastica would be impossible this year, on 27th December we added carol singing en famille with the monks in the big parlour to the usual programme, to everyone’s delight. On the feast of the Epiphany, the novitiate entertained us with a play about boxes. Yes, you have read that correctly! These essential items occasion quite a lot of discussion in a monastery and so we were able to enjoy some healthy (and amusing) perspective on our preoccupation.

In January, we welcomed Sr Mary Helen Jackson, prioress of the Monastery of Our Lady of Hynning in Lancashire, for an all-too-brief visit during which we caught up on news of the Bernadines. Soon afterwards, Mother Abbess travelled to Shanti Nilayam Abbey in Bangalore, to assist at their canonical visitation.

We were blessed to have many priest-friends celebrate Mass here throughout the year as they made retreats or visits; the first of 2024 was Mother Prioress’ newly ordained cousin and monk of Pluscarden Abbey, Fr Joseph Carron. He was closely followed by Fr Daniel Seward of the York Oratory, to our delight.

On the Feast of the Presentation, we rejoiced to see Adelheid Theisen receive the monastic habit and the name Sr Lucy – a fitting patron for a clothing on Candlemas. Two days later we enjoyed a fascinating talk on our own buildings and grounds from Dr Colin Pope, who had recently advised us on tree-planting and was inspired to do his own further research, unearthing much in public records we had never seen before. Looking much, much further afield, we learned



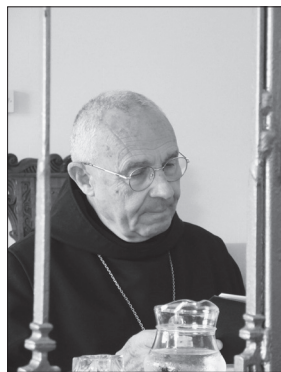
Sr Lucy

that same day that *The Joy of God* would soon be translated into Korean! This will be the fifth translation of this collection of Sr Mary David's writings.

Just after Lent began, our novice mistress Sr Elizabeth made her way to our sisters of Ste Cécile de Solesmes, where she stayed for some weeks before beginning a monastic formators' course at Sant' Anselmo in Rome. Most of us never get further from the monastery than our visits to the dentist, but provision is made for courses of study if the abbess thinks it useful or necessary for the community. Through Sr Elizabeth's regular letters home, we learned – among many other things – much about the various expressions of Benedictine and Cistercian life. Thus the course was enriching for the community as a whole, not least those who are being, or one day will be, formed in this community.

We made a Lenten push, under the valiant organisation of Sr Laetitia, to do a final proof-reading of the new English translation of the Mass lectionary for use in Scotland, England and Wales. It was truly a community effort to check the text of just over 3,600 pages, but a joy to offer this concrete service to the Church. The new lectionary will come into public use this Advent 2024, Deo gratias.

We had the privilege of our Bishop Philip Egan celebrating the feast of Pentecost here which was a beautiful way for us to mark the birth of the Church. We went to the parlour after Mass to enjoy his company and to re-invigorate our prayers for the renewal of our diocese.



Mgr Robert Le Gall

In June, we took advantage of the part-time presence at Quarr of Mgr Robert Le Gall, former abbot of Kergonan and archbishop emeritus of Toulouse, who gave us our annual retreat. We relished the thoroughly Benedictine character of his conferences on the Psalms and came away refreshed in our zeal for the psalmody. We were also blessed by homilies from our brothers of Quarr throughout the year, so we have drawn spiritual profit vastly disproportionate to the petrol used on the short journey from Quarr to Ryde!

Almost as soon as our conferences from Mgr Le Gall came to an end, we thoroughly enjoyed two more, as lively as they were instructive, from Professor Marsha Dutton, executive editor for Cistercian Publications and a specialist in the works of Aelred of Rievaulx.

In July, we had the honour of welcoming the Abbot Primate of the Benedictine Confederation, Fr Gregory Polan, who came to England to celebrate Stanbrook

Abbey's 400th jubilee. Although he was about to retire and is determined to resume a simple monastic life in his home monastery of Conception Abbey, Missouri, we hope his retirement might not preclude another visit to the Isle of Wight. Two days later, we enjoyed a day with an old friend, Bishop Erik Varden, hearing about his current work in Trondheim and beyond. He re-delivered for us a talk he gave publicly at Quarr Abbey some days before: 'Can Literature Save Lives? On the Power of the Word', which was typically rich and thought-provoking.

Towards the end of July, Mother Abbess travelled to Notre Dame de Wisques in the very north of France, to help conduct their canonical visitation with the Abbot-President of the Congregation. Although the houses of nuns in our congregation keep in touch by regular circular letters, it is always special to make personal contact when necessity requires it, and providence allows it.

Soon after Mother Abbess's return, we rejoiced to welcome Sr Elizabeth home at long last, after her final brief stop with our sisters at St Michel de Kergonan.



Notre Dame de Wisques

On the feast of the Transfiguration, Sr Maria Michaela completed her three years of temporary profession and renewed her vows for one year, according to the new formation requirements. To mark such occasions, we have composed a simple and dignified ceremony to take place in Chapter. On the 28th, we had a renovation of charges with some notable changes. To name but a few: Sr Mary Thomas Brown was named as Zelatrix, picking up the baton from Sr Bernadette Byrne after more than twenty years of devoted service; Sr Bernadette was presented with a certificate from her grateful former charges declaring her a 'Zelatrix Extraordinaire'! Sr Mary Antonia Badger was named as Mistress of Juniors; Sr Margaret Ross was given charge of the Refectory, Sr Rachel Appleby the charge of the altar-bread department, and Sr Mary Benedict Ryan the charge of the Portery.

An attentive reader may notice that the term 'Mistress of Juniors' is an unfamiliar one in these pages. With the necessary permissions from the Abbot President, we have created a 'Juniorate' to see if this arrangement will allow us better to form those in temporary vows ahead of full integration into the community. The Juniorate now forms a distinct group in the house, with its own area in the house, separate lessons and recreations and so on, while the novices and postulants

remain in the Novitiate. This has become more usual in the monastic world as the period of formation has generally been extended but has not yet been tried in our Congregation, so we await to see its unfolding.

September saw our enclosure doors open to welcome two new postulants in quick succession: Rahel Leul on the 2nd and Allison Graham on the 14th. Though the former came only from Portsmouth and the latter all the way from Texas, every entrant makes a great journey in leaving all things to follow Christ. Please keep them and their families in your prayers. Later in the month we were delighted to welcome Mother Nirmala Narikunnel of Shanti Nilayam Abbey, who came here for a rest after a meeting in Rome. This was just in time for Mother Abbess's feast on the 28th, with refectory decorations of illuminated verses of the Our Father in the various languages of the house, and also of Scripture or its early translations – no one in the community being a native Aramaic speaker! The community performed a moving play originally composed in our sister-house of Westfield in Vermont based on the last night of Blessed Angel Fuertes Boira, a monk of Ligugé who was martyred in the Spanish Civil War.



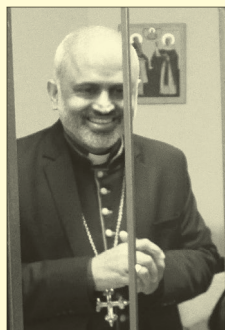
Sr Martina

More angels, this time the Guardian Angels whose memoria we keep on the 2nd of October, were on hand to rejoice with us as Martina Jelínková received the monastic habit, keeping her baptismal patron of St Martin of Tours, as Sr Martina.

We gave thanks for an abundant harvest in the garden, courgettes and beetroot having particularly good crops this year. Thanks to the green fingers of our gardeners, our tomatoes are still producing even into late October! Meanwhile in the altar-bread department, we changed over to a new accounting and invoicing system – with all the mishaps that that initially entails – to ensure a more accurate and streamlined paperwork process.

We were happy to welcome oblates from near and far for our oblates' weekend in October, with spiritual talks and time for prayer, as well as a chance to share with one another about living one's faith in an often indifferent or even hostile world. It was also a pleasure to make the acquaintance of Dom François Filloux of Notre Dame de Fontgombault who came to draw up the customary economic report ahead of our canonical visitation next spring.

Another visitor made our Congregation feel even closer, as Sr Martine Marie Roy of Sainte Marie de Deux Montagnes stayed for some weeks soon after. The



Mar Joseph Srampickal

visit was not sufficiently long to admire her skills as an accomplished iconographer, but her charitable slipping into the daily round here was an icon of a different order.

In late October, we were honoured by a visit from Mar Joseph Srampickal, the Apostolic Eparch for Syro-Malabar Catholics in Great Britain. We were fascinated to learn more about the liturgy, traditions and contemporary life of this ancient rite from which so much new life is springing.

On the 5th of November, Mother Abbess travelled to Ireland to represent us at the abbatial blessing of an old friend of the community, Mother Karol O'Connell of Kylemore Abbey, 20th abbess of that monastery. As this goes to press we look forward to the temporary profession of Sr Joseph Marie O'Riordan on 22nd November, feast of St Cecilia. May this and every profession be a sign to the world that our lives are made to be placed in the hands of God in trust and love.

We commend to your prayers all the family members of the community who have died this year, especially John Scollard, brother of Sr Anselma; Mrs Mary Totah, mother of Sr Mary David RIP; Mrs Jutta Grumm, mother of Sr Maria Magdalen, and Brendan Keohane, grandfather of Sr Mary Benedict. Among our wider monastic family, we also pray especially for the repose of the souls of Mére Marie-Bernadette de Maigret, 5th Abbess of Sainte Cécile de Solesmes; Sr Rosemary Clare Skinner of the Sisters of the Blessed Virgin Mary; and Fr Finbar Kealy, Abbot Emeritus of Douai and former Prior-Administrator of Quarr Abbey.



Abbot Gregory Polan with the Community

We are keenly aware many lives in today's world are threatened not only by war, but also by misguided efforts to extend human freedom in the choice of life or death. As we look to the Jubilee Year of 2025 and the commemoration of the great doctrinal statements of the Council of Nicaea in 325, we ask that the

God who became man in order to free us from sin and death may lead all our readers and the whole world to that fullness of life which He alone can give.

With our prayers for peace at Christmas and in the New Year

Sr. Eustochium Lee Sr. Ninian Eaglesham
Sr. M. Bernard Eckhardt
Sr. Caecilia Schunke Sr. Elizabeth Burgess
Sr. Maria Faustina Sr. Bede M. Barker
Sr. M. Germain Fievet Sr. Joseph Marie O'Riordan
Sr. Claire Waddell Sr. Maria Michaela de Paula
Sr. Mary Benedict Ryan
Sr. Rachel Appleby Sr. Mary Thomas Brown
Sr. Mechthild Hansen Sr. Medelen McCann
Sr. Gertrude Quigley Sr. Mary Annalia Badger
Sr. Anne-Marie O'Keeffe Sr. Marie-Thérèse
Sr. Margaret Ross Sr. Marie Angela Conway
Sr. Bernadette Byrne Sr. Martina Pellukova
Sr. Constance Casow Sr. Rachel
Sr. Anne Alison
Sr. Lucia Theisen
Sr. Agnes Mary
Sr. Teresa Benedicta
Sr. Laetitia Payne
Sr. Anselma Scoppa
Sr. Luiz Marie