

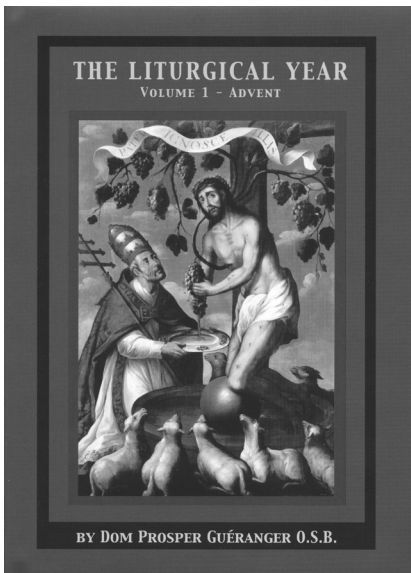
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The Beatification of Dom Guéranger and *The Liturgical Year*

Passages excerpted from Dom Guéranger's *The Liturgical Year: Lent*, Vol. 5, pp.1-42.

Deluxe Edition Sewn Hardcover — Ribbon page markers — 15 volumes — Over 7,300 pages — \$219.00



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On January 20, 2006, in the weekly *La France Catholique*, Fr. Jacques-Marie Guilmard announced the opening of the diocesan proceedings for the beatification of the Servant of God, Dom Prosper Guéranger (1805-75) by Msgr. Jacques Faivre, Bishop of Le Mans, on December 21.

Following a request from the monks of the Solesmes Congregation about 20 years ago to undertake preparatory steps towards the opening of the cause, Dom Jacques de Préville was appointed postulator in 1999. Last December 21st, the bishop of Le Mans recognized Fr. de Préville's request as "legitimate." The bishop named Canon Olivier Le Jariel examining magistrate and Canon Jean Lusseau promoter of justice, as well as Fr. Camille Moulin notary, and Fr. Yves Thorin assistant notary. Fr. Jacques-Marie Guilmard announced that the tribunal thus formed,

...has the mission of listening to the witnesses called to speak about Dom Guéranger, man of God, a holy man of faith, and in particular, speaking of the habitual recourse they have to the intercession of the Servant of God, and the eventual favors received....The theological, philosophical, canonical—with his bishop Msgr. Bouvier—and liturgical controversies in which Dom Guéranger was involved, are no longer prevailing, but that takes nothing away from his greatness in the spiritual realm. On the other hand, we may well think that it is the future demonstration of his sanctity which will compel us to rediscover the validity of his struggles, and to give them back their true doctrinal and spiritual import....

The mystical life of Dom Guéranger was characterized by a profound equilibrium, coming to him, no doubt, from the grace which caused him to refer in all things to the Incarnation,

where Divinity and the most ordinary humanity meet. It is as a result of this that his vision of the natural and of the supernatural world was totally balanced, as were his relationships with others. Dom Guéranger would make an effortless transition from the most solemn liturgical prayer to the real problems of the everyday life of his monastery with a thousand different events of a community to run.... [Dom Guéranger] received the devotion to the Sacred Heart at a very early age, through a particular grace at the Visitation monastery at Le Mans, [and] a short time after, in the same place, it was faith in the Immaculate Conception of Our Lady which forced himself upon him as an evidence.

In all things he wished to serve the Church which he knew through her history and her liturgy and from intimate conversation with God: he could speak with depth and unction of the love of the Church; he knew how to make the liturgy understood and loved, as the prayer of the Church with Her Divine Spouse.

Lastly, we must remember that "his patience was such that his trials were not known even to his entourage. Was this not the fruit of an heroic virtue? His health was ruined following cholera which he contracted in Rome in 1837. Money worries troubled him right from the beginning to the very end of his monastic life. Tragic betrayals and desertions. Above all worries for the universal Church, as much for the faith as for discipline."

The announcement of the opening of the cause for Dom Guéranger's beatification presents *The Angelus* with the opportunity to share with its readers the treasures of *The Liturgical Year*. His magnum opus may be intimidating due to its size, but the incomparable riches that can be found within its pages makes it an invaluable work. We here present a few brief sections of *The Liturgical Year's* section on Lent.

The History of Lent

The forty days' fast, which we call Lent, is the Church's preparation for Easter, and was instituted at the very commencement of Christianity. Our blessed Lord Himself sanctioned it by fasting forty days and forty nights in the desert; and though He would not impose it on the world by an express commandment (which, in that case, could not have been open to the power of dispensation), yet He showed plainly enough, by His own example, that fasting, which God had so frequently ordered in the old Law, was to be also practiced by the children of the new.

The disciples of St. John the Baptist came, one day, to Jesus, and said to Him: "Why do we and the pharisees fast often, but Thy disciples do not fast?" And Jesus said to them: "Can the children of the Bridegroom mourn, as long as the Bridegroom is with them? But the days will come, when the Bridegroom shall be taken away from them, and then they shall fast."

Hence we find it mentioned, in the Acts of the Apostles, how the disciples of our Lord, after the foundation of the Church, applied themselves to fasting. In their Epistles, also, they recommended it to the faithful. Nor could it be otherwise. Though the divine mysteries whereby our Saviour wrought our redemption have been consummated, yet are we still sinners: and where there is sin, there must be expiation.

The Apostles, therefore, legislated for our weakness, by instituting, at the very commencement of the Christian Church, that the solemnity of Easter should be preceded by a universal fast; and it was only natural that they should have made this period of penance to consist of forty days, seeing that our divine Master had consecrated that number by His own fast. St. Jerome, St. Leo the Great, St. Cyril of Alexandria, St. Isidore of Seville, and others of the holy fathers, assure us that Lent was instituted by the Apostles, although, at the commencement, there was not any uniform way of observing it.

The whole subject of Lent has been so often and so fully treated that we shall abridge, as much as possible, the history we are now giving. The nature of our work forbids us to do more than insert what is essential for entering into the spirit of each season. God grant that we may succeed in showing to the faithful the importance of the holy institution of Lent! Its influence on the spiritual life, and on the very salvation, of each one among us, can never be over-rated.

Lent, then, is a time consecrated in an especial manner to penance; and this penance is mainly practised by fasting. Fasting is an abstinence, which man voluntarily imposes upon himself as an expiation for sin, and which, during Lent, is practised in obedience to the general law of the Church. According to the actual discipline of the western Church, the fast of Lent is not more rigorous than that prescribed for the vigils of certain feasts, and for the Ember Days; but it is kept up for forty successive days, with the single interruption of the intervening Sundays.

We deem it unnecessary to show the importance and advantages of fasting. The sacred Scriptures, both of the old and new Testament, are filled with the praises of this holy practice. The traditions of every nation of the world testify the universal veneration in which it has ever been held; for there is not a people or a religion, how much soever it may have lost the purity of primitive traditions, which is not impressed with this conviction—that man may appease his God by subjecting his body to penance.

St. Basil, St. John Chrysostom, St. Jerome, and St. Gregory the Great, make the remark, that the commandment put upon our first parents in the earthly paradise was one of abstinence; and that it was by their not exercising this virtue, that they brought every kind of evil upon themselves and upon us their children. The life of privation, which the king of creation had thenceforward to lead on the earth (for the earth was to yield him nothing of its own natural growth, save thorns and thistles), was the clearest possible exemplification of the law of penance imposed by the anger of God on rebellious man.

During the two thousand and more years, which preceded the deluge, men had no other food than the fruits of the earth,

and these were obtained only by the toil of hard labour. But when God, as we have already observed, mercifully shortened man's life that so he might have less time and power for sin, He permitted him to eat the flesh of animals, as an additional nourishment in that state of deteriorated strength. It was then, also, that Noe, guided by a divine inspiration, extracted the juice of the grape, which thus formed a second stay for human debility.

Fasting, then, is abstinence from such nourishments as these, which were permitted for the support of bodily strength. And firstly, it consists in abstinence from flesh-meat, because this food was given to man by God out of condescension to his weakness, and not as one absolutely essential for the maintenance of life. Its privation, greater or less according to the regulations of the Church, is essential to the very notion of fasting. For many centuries eggs and milk-meats were not allowed, because they come under the class of animal food; even to this day they are forbidden in the eastern Churches.

In the early ages of Christianity, fasting included also abstinence from wine, as we learn from St. Cyril of Jerusalem, St. Basil, St. John Chrysostom, Theophilus of Alexandria, and others. In the west, this custom soon fell into disuse. The eastern Christians kept it up much longer, but even with them it has ceased to be considered as obligatory.

Lastly, fasting includes the depriving ourselves of some portion of our ordinary food, inasmuch as it allows only one meal during the day. Though the modifications introduced from age to age in the discipline of Lent are very numerous, yet the points we have here mentioned belong to the very essence of fasting, as is evident from the universal practice of the Church.

It was the custom with the Jews, in the old Law, not to take the one meal, allowed on fasting days, till sunset. The Christian Church adopted the same custom. It was scrupulously practised, for many centuries, even in our western countries. But about the ninth century some relaxation began to be introduced in the Latin Church.

The Mystery of the Lent

We may be sure that a season so sacred as this of Lent is rich in mysteries. The Church has made it a time of recollection and penance, in preparation for the greatest of all her feasts; she would, therefore, bring into it everything that could excite the faith of her children, and encourage them to go through the arduous work of atonement for their sins. During Septuagesima, we had the number seventy, which reminds us of those seventy years of captivity in Babylon, after which God's chosen people, being purified from idolatry, was to return to Jerusalem and celebrate the Pasch. It is the number forty that the Church now brings before us: a number, as St. Jerome observes, which denotes punishment and affliction.

Let us remember the forty days and forty nights of the deluge sent by God in His anger, when He repented that He had made man, and destroyed the whole human race with the exception of one family. Let us consider how the Hebrew people, in punishment for their ingratitude, wandered forty years in the desert, before they were permitted to enter the promised land. Let us listen to our God commanding the Prophet Ezechiel to lie forty days on his right side, as a figure of the siege which was to bring destruction on Jerusalem.

There are two persons in the old Testament who represent the two manifestations of God: Moses, who typifies the Law; and Elias, who is the figure of the Prophets. Both of these are permit-

ted to approach God: the first on Sinai, the second on Horeb; but both of them have to prepare for the great favour by an expiatory fast of forty days.

With these mysterious facts before us, we can understand why it is that the Son of God, having become Man for our salvation and wishing to subject Himself to the pain of fasting, chose the number of forty days. The institution of Lent is thus brought before us with everything that can impress the mind with its solemn character, and with its power of appeasing God and purifying our souls. Let us, therefore, look beyond the little world which surrounds us, and see how the whole Christian universe is, at this very time, offering this forty days' penance as a sacrifice of propitiation to the offended Majesty of God; and let us hope that, as in the case of the Ninivites, He will mercifully accept this year's offering of our atonement, and pardon us our sins.

The number of our days of Lent is, then, a holy mystery: let us now learn, from the liturgy, in what light the Church views her children during these forty days. She considers them as an immense army, fighting day and night against their spiritual enemies. We remember how, on Ash Wednesday, she calls Lent a Christian warfare. In order that we may have that newness of life, which will make us worthy to sing once more our Alleluia, we must conquer our three enemies: the devil, the flesh, and the world. We are fellow combatants with our Jesus, for He, too, submits to the triple temptation, suggested to Him by Satan in person. Therefore, we must have on our armour, and watch unceasingly. And whereas it is of the utmost importance that our hearts be spirited and brave, the Church gives us a war-song of heaven's own making, which can fire even cowards with hope of victory and confidence in God's help: it is the ninetyeth Psalm. She inserts the whole of it in the Mass of the first Sunday of Lent, and every day introduces several of its verses into the ferial Office.

In order to keep up the character of mournfulness and austerity which is so well suited to Lent, the Church, for many centuries, admitted very few feasts into this portion of her year, inasmuch as there is always joy where there is even a spiritual feast. In the fourth century, we have the Council of Laodicea forbidding, in its fifty-first canon, the keeping of a feast or commemoration of any saint during Lent, excepting on the Saturdays or Sundays. The Greek Church rigidly maintained this point of lenten discipline; nor was it till many centuries after the Council of Laodicea that she made an exception for March 25, on which day she now keeps the feast of our Lady's Annunciation.

The Church of Rome maintained this same discipline, at least in principle; but she admitted the feast of the Annunciation at a very early period, and somewhat later, the feast of the Apostle St. Mathias, on February 24. During the last few centuries, she has admitted several other feasts into that portion of her general calendar which coincides with Lent; still, she observes a certain restriction, out of respect for the ancient practice.

The reason why the Church of Rome is less severe on this point of excluding the saints' feasts during Lent, is that the Christians of the west have never looked upon the celebration of a feast as incompatible with fasting; the Greeks, on the contrary, believe that the two are irreconcilable, and as a consequence of this principle, never observe Saturday as a fasting-day, because they always keep it as a solemnity, though they make Holy Saturday an exception, and fast upon it. For the same reason, they do not fast upon the Annunciation.

Practice During Lent

Having spent the three weeks of Septuagesima in meditating upon our spiritual infirmities and upon the wounds caused in us by sin, we should be ready to enter upon the penitential season which the Church has now begun. We have now a clearer knowledge of the justice and holiness of God, and of the dangers that await an impenitent soul; and, that our repentance might be earnest and lasting, we have bade farewell to the vain joys and baubles of the world. Our pride has been humbled by the prophecy, that these bodies would soon be like the ashes that wrote the memento of death upon our foreheads. During these forty days of penance, which seem so long to our poor nature, we shall not be deprived of the company of our Jesus. He seemed to have withdrawn from us during those weeks of Septuagesima, when everything spoke to us of His maledictions upon sinful man, but this absence has done us good. It has taught us how to tremble at the voice of God's anger. "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom"; we have found it to be so: the spirit of penance is now active within us, because we have feared.

Thus does our Saviour go before us on the holy path of Lent. He has borne all its fatigues and hardships, that so we, when called upon to tread the narrow way of our lenten penance, might have His example wherewith to silence the excuses, and sophisms, and repugnances, of self-love and pride. The lesson is here too plainly given not to be understood; the law of doing penance for sin is here too clearly shown, and we cannot plead ignorance: let us honestly accept the teaching and practise it. Jesus leaves the desert where He has spent the forty days, and begins His preaching with these words, which He addresses to all men: "Do penance, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." Let us not harden our hearts to this invitation, lest there be fulfilled in us the terrible threat contained in those other words of our Redeemer: "Unless you shall do penance, you shall perish."

Now, penance consists in contrition of the soul, and mortification of the body; these two parts are essential to it. The soul has willed the sin; the body has frequently co-operated in its commission. Moreover, man is composed of both soul and body; both, then, should pay homage to their Creator. The body is to share with the soul either the delights of heaven or the torments of hell; there cannot, therefore, be any thorough Christian life, or any earnest penance, where the body does not take part, in both, with the soul.

But it is the soul which gives reality to penance. The Gospel teaches this by the examples it holds out to us of the prodigal son, of Magdalene, of Zaccheus, and of St. Peter. The soul, then, must be resolved to give up every sin; she must heartily grieve over those she has committed; she must hate sin; she must shun the occasions of sin. The sacred Scriptures have a word for this inward disposition, which has been adopted by the Christian world, and which admirably expresses the state of the soul that has turned away from her sins: this word is conversion. The Christian should, therefore, during Lent, study to excite himself to this repentance of heart, and look upon it as the essential foundation of all his Lenten exercises. Nevertheless, he must remember that this spiritual penance would be a mere delusion, were he not to practise mortification of the body. Let him study the example given him by his Saviour, who grieves, indeed, and weeps over our sins; but He also expiates them by His bodily sufferings. Hence it is that the Church, the infallible interpreter of her divine Master's will, tells us that the repentance of our heart will not be accepted by God, unless it be accompanied by fasting and abstinence.

How great, then, is the illusion of those Christians, who forget their past sins, or compare themselves with others whose lives they take to have been worse than their own; and thus satisfied with themselves, can see no harm or danger in the easy life they intend to pass for the rest of their days! They will tell you that there can be no need of their thinking of their past sins, for they have made a good confession! Is not the life they have led since that time a sufficient proof of their solid piety? And why should anyone speak to them about the justice of God and mortification? Accordingly, as soon as Lent approaches, they must get all manner of dispensations.

The Church sees this frightful decay of supernatural energy; but she cherishes what is still left, by making her lenten observances easier, year after year. With the hope of maintaining that little, and of seeing it strengthen for some better future, she leaves to the justice of God her children who hearken not to her when she teaches them how they might, even now, propitiate His anger. Alas! these her children, of whom we are speaking, are quite satisfied that things should be as they are, and never think of judging their own conduct by the examples of Jesus and His saints, or by the undeviating rules of Christian penance.

It is true, there are exceptions; but how rare they are, especially in our large towns! Groundless prejudices, idle excuses, bad example, all tend to lead men from the observance of Lent. Is it not sad to hear people giving such a reason as this for their not fasting or abstaining—because they feel them? Surely, they forget that the very aim of fasting and abstinence is to make these bodies of sin (Rom. 6:6) suffer and feel. And what will they answer on the day of judgment, when our Saviour shall show them how the very Turks, who were the disciples of a gross and sensual religion, had the courage to practise, every year, the austerities of their Ramadan?...

Let, then, the children of the Church courageously observe the lenten practices of penance. Peace of conscience is essential to Christian life; and yet it is promised to none but truly penitent souls. Lost innocence is to be regained by the humble confession of the sin, when it is accompanied by the absolution of the priest; but let the faithful be on their guard against the dangerous error, which would persuade them that they have nothing to do when once pardoned. Let them remember the solemn warning given them by the Holy Ghost in the sacred Scriptures “Be not without fear about sin forgiven” (Ecclus. 5:5)! Our confidence of our having been forgiven should be in proportion to the change or conversion of our heart; the greater our present detestation of our past sins and the more earnest our desire to do penance for them for the rest of our lives, the better founded is our confidence that they have been pardoned. “Man knoweth not,” as the same holy

Volume assures us, “whether he be worthy of love or hatred” (Ecclus. 9:1); but he that keeps up within him the spirit of penance, has every reason to hope that God loves him....

...The faithful observance of Lent naturally produces a saving; let that saving be given to Lazarus. Nothing, surely, could be more opposed to the spirit of this holy season, than keeping up a table as richly and delicately provided as at other periods of the year, when God permits us to use all the comforts compatible with the means He has given us. But how thoroughly Christian is it that, during these days of penance and charity, the life of the poor man should be made more comfortable, in proportion as that of the rich shares in the hardships and privations of his suffering brethren throughout the world! Poor and rich would then present themselves, with all the beauty of fraternal love upon them, at the divine Banquet of the Paschal feast, to which our risen Jesus will invite us after these forty days are over.

There is one means more whereby we are to secure to ourselves the great graces of Lent; it is the spirit of retirement and separation from the world. Our ordinary life, such as it is during the rest of the year, should all be made to pay tribute to the holy season of penance; otherwise, the salutary impression produced on us by the holy ceremony of Ash Wednesday will soon be effaced. The Christian ought, therefore, to forbid himself, during Lent, all the vain amusements, entertainments, and parties, of the world he lives in. As regards theatres and balls, which are the world in the very height of its power to do harm, no one that calls himself a disciple of Christ should ever be present at them, unless necessity, or the position he holds in society, oblige him to it: but if, from his own free choice, he throws himself amidst such dangers during the present holy season of penance and recollection, he offers an insult to his character, and must needs cease to believe that he has sins to atone for, and a God to propitiate. The world (we mean that part of it which is Christian) has thrown off all those external indications of mourning and penance, which we read of as being so religiously observed in the ages of faith....Let us only courageously tread the way of penance, and the light will gradually beam upon us. If we are now far off from our God by the sins that are upon us, this holy season will be to us what the saints call the purgative life, and will give us that purity which will enable us to see our Lord in the glory of His victory over death. If, on the contrary, we are already living the illuminative life; if, during the three weeks of Septuagesima, we have bravely sounded the depth of our miseries, our Lent will give us a clearer view of Him who is our light; and if we acknowledged Him as our God when we saw Him as the Babe of Bethlehem, our soul's eye will not fail to recognize Him in the divine Penitent of the desert, or in the bleeding Victim of Calvary.



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