



## ST. BENEDICT

Homily of the Right Reverend Dom Jean PATEAU  
Abbot of Our Lady of Fontgombault  
(Fontgombault, July 11<sup>th</sup>, 2025)

*Quasi arcus refulgens inter nebulas gloriae.*  
Like the rainbow gleaming in clouds of glory.  
(*Si* 50:6)

Dear Brothers and Sisters,  
My dearly beloved Sons,

**T**ODAY'S EPISTLE considers the high priest Simon, and the grandiose work he carried out: restoring the house of God. With untiring zeal, this religious and political chief of Israel didn't confine his efforts to restoring the sole Temple of Jerusalem. He cared about protecting the people from destruction, and therefore he had the city enlarged and its defences reinforced. He had new water reserves excavated.

However, Ben Sira, the author of the Book of Ecclesiasticus, doesn't linger on infrastructure. The people of Israel is the people of God. Therefore, the author delights first and foremost in describing the cult and worship rendered to God during the days of Simon.

The conclusion of these lines is a thanksgiving:

And now bless the God of all, Who in every way does great things; Who exalts our days from our mother's womb, and deals with us according to His mercy. May He give us joyfulness of heart, and may He grant peace in our days in Israel,

a. *Si* 50:22-24. for the days of eternity. May He entrust to us His mercy, and may He deliver us in our days.<sup>a</sup>

Through the praise given to the high priest, the author praises the divine gift, namely, holiness. The saints build the city of God by edifying their brothers. Each soul which raises itself, raises the world.

On this feast day, the translation of St. Benedict's relics from Italy to France, the sons of the holy patriarch gladly apply the praise given to Simon to their founder. The monasteries of Subiaco and Monte Cassino remain linked to the earthly life of our Blessed Father. Yet, this is not the key issue, as shown by the recommendation St. Benedict makes to the abbot:

Above all, he should not neglect or undervalue the salvation of the souls that have been entrusted to him; therefore, let him not have too great a concern about fleeting, earthly, and perishable things; but let him always consider that it is souls which he has received to govern, souls of which he will have to give an account.<sup>b</sup>

b. *Rule*, ch. 2.

The life of St. Benedict written by St. Gregory the Great, and above all his Rule, reflect his concern: to make himself a servant of God's plan in each soul.

The fruits are visible. The few monastic houses founded by Benedict during his life have multiplied as centuries elapsed, to such an extent that they covered first Europe, and now the whole world. In these houses, the Rule of the holy patriarch remains the source from which every one draws resources to carry out, day after day, his quest of God, and to walk on the path leading to Eternity, which is the aim to which Benedict calls his sons and daughters.

The driving force behind St. Benedict's life has precisely been this quest of God. Whereas the prospect of brilliant studies was offered to him, he preferred to forsake the world and depart for the desert, "*scienter nescius et sapienter indoctus*, skilfully ignorant and wisely unlearned."<sup>c</sup> Renouncing studies was however not enough. In his place of retreat, Benedict performed a miracle by making whole a sieve to cleanse

c. ST. GREGORY THE GREAT, *Life of St. Benedict*, Introduction.

wheat, accidentally broken by his nurse who had followed him to take care of him. The perfection of the holy man was now patent for all. After forsaking studies, he now had to flee the consideration of men and glory.

If God had permitted such a path, it's because He wanted to keep exclusively for Himself the heart of Benedict. Benedict was seeking God, and God was protecting Benedict's quest. Or rather, even before Benedict had started seeking God, God was already seeking Benedict.

Benedict was seeking a remote place, and on his way, he met a monk called Romanus. The latter gave him the habit of holy conversion, and promised to help him when he would have reached his place of retreat, as well as keep his secret.

Was Benedict to remain in his solitude? According to St. Gregory, such was not the plan of God:

It pleased Almighty God that Romanus should rest from his labours, and that the life of Benedict should be manifest to the world for an example to all men, that the candle set upon a candlestick might shine and give light to the whole household of God.<sup>d</sup>

*d. Life, ch. 1.*

Thus, Benedict was eventually led to appropriate the Psalmist's words, and build monasteries:

One thing have I asked of the Lord, this I shall seek; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to visit His temple.<sup>e</sup>

*e. Ps 26 [27]:4.*

God had build the heart of Benedict, and Benedict was now building a house for God, a house to receive disciples who would seek God.

On the occasion of the Jubilee of Sport, Pope Leo boldly drew a parallel between the Trinity and sport. Let us make bold to draw a parallel between monastic life and sport. Pope Leo pointed out three features that make of sport "a precious means for training in human and Christian virtues": sport teaches the value of cooperating, working together and sharing. It incites to effort, it helps to preserve a healthy contact with nature and with real life, where genuine love is experienced. Last, it confronts us with "one of the deepest truths

of our human condition: our fragility, our limitations and our imperfections.” Regarding this point, let us quote the Pope:

Athletes who never make mistakes, who never lose, do not exist. Champions are not perfectly functioning machines, but real men and women, who, when they fall, find the courage to get back on their feet.<sup>f</sup>

f. Homily,  
June 15<sup>th</sup>, 2025.

A monk is therefore a sportsman. St. Benedict invites him to run, for that matter, not from province to province, from business to business, but on the road of God’s commandments, on the path leading to holiness. There, time is running out.

However, a monk is not immune to falling, for narrow, hard, and harsh is the path leading to holiness. In a few words, St. Benedict entrusts him with a treasure: “Never despair of God’s mercy.”<sup>g</sup>

g. *Rule*, ch. 4, n. 72.

Isn’t that the hundredfold promised to those who will have forsaken everything to follow Christ? The grace to understand that a friend of Christ is above all he who knows that he is deeply loved, to such an extent that he will never despair of God’s mercy, and, let us make bold to add, of his own brothers’ mercy. Among men, a monk is one of those who have more received God’s mercy. Still, he must learn to accept it. And since we’ve mentioned competitive sport, he should know that he will always be beaten by Mary, the Full of grace, the Immaculate Conception, she whom monks like to consider as their sweet Mother and Abbess.

Amen.

