



150TH ANNIVERSARY OF DOM GUÉRANGER'S DEATH

Homily of the Right Reverend Dom Jean PATEAU
Abbot of Our Lady of Fontgombault
(Fontgombault, January 30th, 2025)

Dear Brothers and Sisters,
My dearly beloved Sons,

ON JANUARY 30th, 1875, one hundred and fifty years ago, Dom Prosper Guéranger, restorer of monastic life in the abbey of Solesmes, inspirer of the liturgical movement, which eventually led to the Vatican II Council, and initiator of the renewal of Gregorian chant, gave up his soul to God in the abbey he had governed for 42 years. In thanksgiving for the work of this eminent son of the Church, we celebrate this morning the votive Mass of St. Benedict, and we would like to share with you a few words concerning him, and uttered by him, whom Bl. Pope Pius IX called *Verus Benedicti discipulus*, “a true disciple, a true son of St. Benedict.”

On November 8th, 2023, at the closing session of their plenary assembly, the Bishops of France announced the opening of his cause of beatification. Without anticipating the Church's judgment nor prejudging its outcome, we might recognise in the life of Dom Guéranger some of the elements applied by Ben Sira to King David, thus enabling us to think that our monk, born in Sablé, had been endowed with gifts in proportion with the mission to which he had been called.

The disciple will prefer nothing to the work of God.^a Let us quote the following remembrance of Dom Guépin, which is, as it were, an illustration to the request of St. Benedict to his sons to make their hearts consistent with their voice, *Ut mens nostra concordet voci nostrae*^b :

a. Cf. *Rule*,
ch. 43.

b. *Rule*, ch. 19.

Especially on feast days, Dom Guéranger was transfigured. He was living the mystery of the solemnity. His heart and thoughts were then so intimately united with the Child Jesus, or the glorious Risen One, to the Blessed Virgin, to St. Benedict or St. Peter, that everything else was forgotten. He was radiant with joy, he felt no weariness, and was always strong enough to sing at the top of his voice a hymn, a canticle, or a Christmas carol.¹

c. *Mk* 10:30. The Gospel tells us the promise the Lord made to those who will have forsaken everything to follow Him: a hundredfold, and as their inheritance life everlasting.⁶ We believe that Dom Guéranger has already obtained eternal life. What shall we say about the hundredfold? It is revealed by some character traits of the Abbot of Solesmes.

First of all, joy, but not any sort of joy. A few weeks after the official resumption of monastic life in Solesmes, on July 11th, 1833, he wrote:

When I tell you, dear friends, that it's a dog's life, both physically and morally, you won't be surprised; but what will astonish you is that, all in all, I'm so well that I've never been better. I'm not tired by the chant, the morning rise, the fixed hours, the thousand petty hassles, worries and persecutions, none of which can take away my cheerfulness.²

Dom Guéranger had a charism in this domain:

I have received a special grace against spleen. It has never set foot in me, and I cast it away from everywhere.³

A man of joy, Dom Guéranger was above all a man of prayer and a man of faith. God had given him a simple faith, made alive by a constant communion with his Lord. He who will later become a promoter of the definition of the Immaculate Conception tells Mother Cécile Bruyère how he consented to this truth in a very revealing way:

1. Dom Alphonse GUÉPIN, *Souvenirs de ma jeunesse monastique*, unpublished, p. 11.

2. Letter to Édouard Guéranger, Arch. Abbaye de Solesmes, *Lettres de dom Guéranger à sa famille*, Archives dom Guéranger, XIII, Solesmes, 2004, p. 162.

3. Quoted by Dom Jacques DE PRÉVILLE, in *Le charisme de Dom Guéranger*, « La joie chez Dom Guéranger », Solesmes, 4-8 April 2005, p. 365-366.

I was doing my silent prayer, and I was changed in a single moment. All the arguments against this truth suddenly became in favour of it, and I went out totally opposed to the feelings I had when I had entered, and I was happy! happy! You have no idea how happy.⁴

Dom Guéranger will be eager to share with others the path leading to spiritual joy. The *Rules for the Novitiate* evoke “the enthusiasm for the divine mysteries.” He writes:

Faith is the element of the novice, his food, his joy. [...] Hope will maintain in the novices the joy of the heart, inner meekness, the deepest peace. [...] We can be happy but by the love of the good, and the good is God. [...] Finally, a religious should deem himself the happiest of all men.⁵

There is a joy, a peace inside us which should never be impaired by any circumstance whatsoever, because it resides inside us in this very part of us where God reigns and dwells.⁶

During this year which is the Jubilee of the apparitions in Paray-le-Monial, we shouldn't fail mentioning the devotion of the Abbot of Solesmes to the humanity of Christ, and most especially to His Heart:

“Learn of me that I am meek and humble of heart.”^d Such is the last word of Our Lord Jesus Christ concerning His own heart. And is that not what our holy Patriarch himself recommends us? St. Benedict wants indeed his monk to be a man of peace, and hence a man of meekness and humility. It is through meekness and humility that our lawmaker has solved the whole problem of monastic organisation. Therefore, since meekness and humility are the basis of the sanctification of the soul, and since the Heart of Jesus has practised these two virtues in such a way that the Gospel summarizes in them His character and His life, let us be firmly persuaded that if we possess them, we shall fulfil all justice, and succeed in carrying out what Our Lord expects us to do. Let

d. Mt 11:29.

4. Mother Cécile BRUYÈRE, *Souvenirs*, Manuscript, p. 5.

5. Dom Prosper GUÉRANGER, *Règlement du noviciat*, Solesmes, Imprimerie Saint-Pierre, 1885, p. 21; 68; 81; 84-85; 87.

6. Letter dated August 30, 1831, to Euphrasie Cosnard, in *Lettres de Dom Guéranger à Euphrasie Cosnard*, p. 28.

e. Ps 32 (33):22.

us be fervent adorers of the Sacred Heart during our lives, and when we depart from this world, we shall be assured to be well received by Our Saviour, since on this earth we shall have taken Him, so to speak, by His sensitive side! He will give us glory, and His mercy will manifest itself upon us in proportion with the hope we shall have placed in His divine Heart: “*Fiat misericordia tua, Domine, super nos: quemadmodum speravimus in te.*”⁶ Let Thy mercy, O Lord, be upon us, even as we have hoped in Thee.”⁷

Dom Guéranger has tirelessly been at the service of those who had been entrusted to him, and has tirelessly shared what he was and the gifts he had received. That is what he wrote ten years after the foundation of Solesmes:

Pray that I should be the good shepherd, totally belonging to his fold for the love of the supreme Shepherd, but also for the love of the sheep themselves.⁸

Let us also keep these mottoes he gave: “Know how to be humble, simple, and childlike, as is your duty. That only will give you peace.”⁹ And to Cécile Bruyère: “Be full of joy in all things, offering yourself to Him [Our Lord] such as you are.”¹⁰

Amen.



7. Dom Prosper GUÉRANGER, quoted by Dom Ursmer BERLIÈRE, *La dévotion au Sacré-Cœur dans l'ordre de Saint Benoît*, Maredsous, 1923, p. 158 and 160-161.

8. Letter dated May 30, 1843, to Dom René Bouleau, in *Lettres de Dom Guéranger à ses moines*, vol. 1, p. 95.

9. Letter dated November 25, 1842, to Dom Louis David, in *Lettres de Dom Guéranger à ses moines*, vol. 1, p. 149.

10. Letter dated January 17, 1862, to Cécile Bruyère, in *Lettres de Dom Guéranger à Madame Cécile Bruyère*, p. 40.