



‘Legio Sanctae Familiae’

The Legion of the Holy Family

Under the Patronage of
The Sacred Heart of Jesus
The Immaculate Heart of Mary
The Most Chaste Heart of St Joseph



Legio Sanctae Familiae

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THE SEASON OF ADVENT - PREPARING FOR CHRIST'S BIRTH



St Joseph Seeks Lodgings in Bethlehem - Tissot (1836 - 1902)

The Season Of Advent



John Lacken
'Legio Sanctae Familiae'

I am very blessed to be able to attend the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, daily. I attend the Latin Mass in Limerick with The Institute of Christ the King, Sovereign Priest, and I find great solace in following the liturgical cycle of the Church. I have also prayed the Office of Lauds most mornings, for many years now and I try to say the Office of Compline before I retire in the evenings, although I have not been too successful at this just yet.

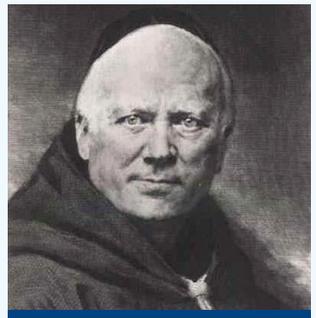
It often strikes me that we have lost a certain sense of the Liturgical Year with some of the changes that were brought in after the Second Vatican Council. A simple example is the dropping of the many Octaves that are marked in the Traditional Church Calendar. These Octaves, are where certain significant feasts are marked by eight days in the Liturgical Cycle. For example, there is an Octave for All Saints and for the Sacred Heart of Jesus in the Traditional liturgical cycle which are no longer celebrated in the new liturgical cycle. I think this is a pity as it can lead us to lose a proper sense of the seasonal nature of the liturgical year.

On Sunday 27th November, 2022, we entered the new liturgical year which is marked by the first Sunday of Advent. The great Benedictine monk and Abbot of Solesmes Monastery in France, Dom Prosper Gueranger, wrote fifteen volumes on 'The Liturgical Year', which follow each day of the year with a commentary on the readings; on the saints whose feast days are celebrated; and on the seasons throughout the liturgical year. Dom Gueranger gives us great insights into certain problems that have arisen on account of the laity becoming disconnected from the prayer of the Church. He begins the preface to the first volume on the Season of Advent as follows. (All quotes that follow will be from Volume 1 of 'The Liturgical Year')

“Prayer is man’s richest boon. It is his light, his nourishment, and his very life, for it brings him into communication with God, who is light, nourishment, and life. But of ourselves we know not what we should pray for as we ought; we must needs, therefore, address ourselves to Jesus Christ, and say to Him as the apostles did: ‘Lord, teach us how to pray.’ He alone can make the dumb speak, and give eloquence to the mouths of children; and this prodigy He effects by sending His Spirit of grace and of prayers, who delights in helping our infirmity, asking for us with unspeakable groanings.” (Romans 8:26)

Dom Gueranger also speaks of the prayer of the Church, which consists of the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass and the Divine Office. The Divine Office consists of the 'hours' of the day - Lauds, Prime, Terce, Sext, None, Vespers, and Compline. These hours come from Chapter 16 of the Rule of St Benedict where St Benedict tells us that, “As the Prophet saith: “Seven times a day I have given praise to Thee” (Psalm 118:164)

Dom Gueranger tells us “The prayer of the Church is, therefore, the most pleasing to the ear and heart of God, and therefore the most efficacious of all prayers. Happy, then, is he who prays with the Church, and unites his own petitions with those of this bride, who is so dear to her Lord that He gives her all she asks. It is for this reason that our blessed Saviour taught us to say our Father, and not my Father; give us, forgive us, deliver us, and not give me, forgive me, deliver me.



Dom Prosper Gueranger

Hence we find that, for upwards of a thousand years, the Church, who prays in her temples seven times in the day and once again during the night, did not pray alone. The people kept her company, and fed themselves with delight on the manna which is hidden under the words and mysteries of the divine liturgy. Thus initiated into the sacred cycle of the mysteries of the Christian year, the faithful, attentive to the teachings of the Spirit, came to know the secrets of eternal life; and, without any further preparation, a Christian was not infrequently chosen by the bishops to be a priest, or even a bishop, that he might go and pour out on the people the treasures of wisdom and love, which he had drunk in at the very fountain-head. For whilst prayer said in union with the Church is the light of the understanding, it is the fire of divine love for the heart.”

Later on, Dom Gueranger, who is writing ‘The Liturgical Year’ from around 1841 until his death in 1875, laments the fact that the laity have fallen away from the practice of following the Divine Office with the Church.

“But now for many ages past, Christians have grown too solicitous about earthly things to frequent the holy vigils, and the mystical Hours of the day. Long before the rationalism of the sixteenth century had become the auxiliary of the heresies of that period by curtailing the solemnity of the divine service, the people had ceased to unite themselves exteriorly with the prayer of the Church, except on Sundays and festivals. During the rest of the year, the solemn and imposing grandeur of the liturgy was gone through, and the people took no share in it.

Each new generation increased in indifference for that which their forefathers in the faith had loved as their best and strongest food. Social prayer was made to give way to individual devotion. Chanting, which is the natural expression of the prayers and even of the sorrows of the Church, became limited to the solemn feasts. That was the first sad revolution in the Christian world.”

Nowadays, for many Catholics, their faith is trimmed to fit in with their work life, their social life, and other activities in their lives which have become more important than prayer. Instead of putting their Catholic Faith at the forefront of their lives to guide all of these other, lesser activities, the traditional liturgical and devotional practices have either been dropped altogether or relegated to some occasional rituals which become like some Heavenly insurance policy deemed to guarantee them a place in Heaven. Dom Gueranger continues with some further reflections on the damage the reformation caused for Catholics.

Praying With The Church - The Divine Office

“Then came the so-called reformation, and at the outset it attacked the very life of Christianity: it would put an end to man’s sacrifice of praise to God. It strewed many countries with the ruins of churches: the clergy, the monks, and virgins consecrated to God were banished or put to death; and in the churches which were spared, the divine Offices were not permitted. In other countries, where the persecution was not so violent, many sanctuaries were devastated and irremediably ruined, so that the life and voice of prayer grew faint. Faith, too, was weakened; rationalism became fearfully developed; and now our own age seems threatened with what is the result of these evils — the subversion of all social order.

For, when the reformation had abated the violence of its persecution, it had other weapons wherewith to attack the Church. By these, several countries which continued to be Catholic were infected with that spirit of pride which is the enemy of prayer. The modern spirit would have it that prayer is not action; as though every good action done by man were not a gift of God: a gift which implies two prayers, one of petition that it may be granted, and another of thanksgiving because it is granted. There were found men who said: ‘Let us abolish all the festival days of God from the earth; and then came upon us that calamity which brings all others with it, and which the good Mardochai besought God to avert from his nation, when he said: ‘Shut not, Oh Lord, the mouths of them that sing to Thee.’”

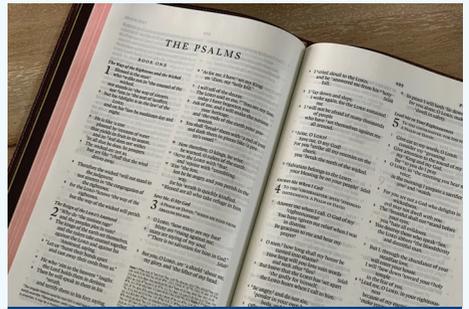


The Triumph of Mardochai
Pieter Lastman (1583–1633)
You can read of Mardochai, how he saved the King and the Jewish people in the book of Esther.

The decline in the practice of the faith was somewhat halted in the early 1900s, but the decline has greatly accelerated since the Second Vatican Council. At some stage, an impartial investigation will have to be held within the Church to identify precisely what has caused this rapid acceleration in the decline of the practice of the faith. My guess is, that the changes in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, the changes to the requirements for reciting the Divine Office, the change from the didactic method of education which included rote learning, to what is termed the experiential method, where feelings and emotions are given too important a role, and the de-emphases on the primary end of marriage being children, have all played their part in undermining the practice of the Catholic Faith in recent decades.

Dom Gueranger’s comments on the reformation were mirrored in the last three years when Catholics across the world were unjustly denied entry to their Catholic Churches for almost two years because of the alleged presence of a deadly virus. Catholics were denied access to the sacraments and therefore, were denied

access to Jesus Christ. Some Catholic Churches in Ireland have yet to restore the powerful sacramental Holy Water to their Holy Water fonts, instead, offering Catholics hand sanitiser, which is of no spiritual benefit and which is of doubtful benefit to the overall health and well being of the people who attend Catholic Churches. Trust in Jesus Christ and His sacraments has been replaced by trust in the government, the department of health, and the so called medical experts. This same government and department of health continues to undermine the well being of the people through promoting and facilitating the murder of unborn children and by promoting contraceptives to children thus undermining their chastity and purity. Through the secular Relationships and Sexuality Education programmes, the secular governments seek to corrupt children at ever younger ages and seek ways to bypass parental objections in any way they can, often resorting to lies and bullying.



Praying the Psalms

Advent provides us with a great time to take stock of our lives and to question our own fidelity to Jesus Christ and the teachings of His Catholic Church. Properly observed, Advent can be a personal or family mini-retreat, whereby we seek to identify areas in our lives where we need to improve and where we try to cultivate the habit of practising the virtues of Faith, Hope, Charity, Prudence, Justice, Fortitude, and Temperance. Advent was also a traditional time of prayer and penance in preparation for the coming of our Saviour Jesus Christ. The greater our preparation, the greater our inner Joy and peace will be during the Christmas season.

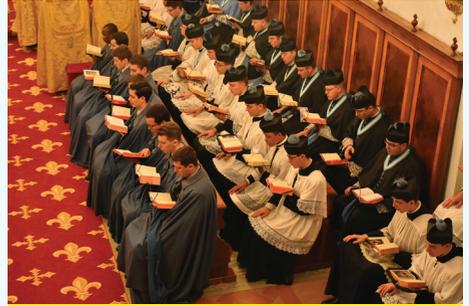
I would like to dwell a little more on the teachings of Dom Prosper Gueranger because it is important for modern day Catholics to regain their liturgical sense of prayer and to understand the importance of praying 'with the Church', individually and as families. I will also upload Dom Gueranger's writings on Advent for those who have access to the internet on www.truedevotions.ie. To emphasise the importance of liturgical prayer and to encourage us to take part in it, Dom Gueranger tells us:

"But this liturgical prayer would soon become powerless were the faithful not to take a real share in it, or at least not to associate themselves to it in heart. It can heal and save the world, but only on the condition that it be understood. Be wise, then, ye children of the Catholic Church, and obtain that largeness of heart which will make you pray the prayer of your mother. Come, and by your share in it fill up that harmony which is so sweet to the ear of God. Where would you obtain the spirit of prayer if not at its natural source? Let us remind you of the exhortation of the apostle to the first Christians: "Let the peace of Christ rejoice in your hearts; let the word of Christ dwell in you abundantly, in all wisdom;

teaching and admonishing one another, in psalms, hymns, and spiritual canticles, singing in grace in your hearts to God.” (Colossians 3:15-16)

Dom Gueranger warns us of the dangers of seeking out methods of prayer apart from liturgical prayer or which, whilst good in themselves, can distract one from praying with the Church in the true sense. First place must be given to liturgical prayer because it is the prayer of our Mother, the Catholic Church.

“For a long time, a remedy has been devised for an evil which was only vaguely felt. The spirit of prayer, and even prayer itself, has been sought for in methods and prayer-books, which contain, it is true, laudable, yea, pious thoughts, but after all only human thoughts. Such nourishment cannot satisfy the soul, for it does not initiate her into the prayer of the Church. Instead of uniting her with the prayer of the Church, it isolates her.”



The Office of Vespers
Institute of Christ the King Seminary, Italy

Anticipating that some might object to such a statement because, perhaps they believe that so long as we are praying, that is enough, Dom Gueranger responds.

“It may perhaps be objected that, were all practical books of Christian piety to be reduced to mere explanations of the liturgy, we should run the risk of impoverishing, and even destroying, by excessive formalities, the spirit of prayer and contemplation, which is such a precious gift of the Holy Ghost to the Church of God. To this we answer, firstly, that by asserting the immense superiority of liturgical over individual prayer, we do not say that individual methods should be suppressed; we would only wish them to be kept in their proper place. Then secondly, we answer that in the divine psalmody there are several degrees: the lowest are near enough to the earth to be reached by souls that are still plodding in the fatigues of the purgative way; but in proportion as a soul ascends this mystic ladder, she feels herself illuminated by a heavenly ray; and still higher, she finds union and rest in the sovereign Good.”

The writings of Dom Gueranger on this subject are so beautiful that it is difficult to be selective, because so much must be omitted. He tells us that the reason that the Protestants do not have any ascetic writers is because in denying the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist, they have also abandoned liturgical prayer and therefore their prayers are less efficacious.

“But in nothing is the excellency of the liturgy so apparent, as in its being milk for children, and solid food for the strong; thus resembling the miraculous bread of the desert, and taking every kind of taste according to the different dispositions of those who eat. It is, indeed, a divine property, which has not infrequently

been noticed even by those who are not of the true fold, and has forced them to acknowledge that *the Catholic Church alone knows the secret of prayer.* (emphasis added)

Nay, might it not be said that the reason that the Protestants have no ascetic writers, is that they have no real liturgical prayer? It is true that a sufficient explanation of the absolute want of unction, which characterizes all that the reformation has produced, is to be found in its denying the holy Sacrament of the Eucharist, which is the centre of all religion: but this is virtually the same as saying that Protestants have no liturgical prayer, inasmuch as the liturgy is so essentially and intimately connected with the Eucharist. So true is this, that wherever the dogma of the real Presence has ceased to be believed, there also have the canonical Hours ceased, and could not but cease.”

No amount of that false ecumenism, which does not seek the conversion to the Catholic Church of those non-Catholics we engage in dialogue, can make up for this deficit. Because, as Dom Gueranger explains, “It is therefore Jesus Christ Himself who is the source as well as the object of the liturgy; and hence the ecclesiastical year, which we have undertaken to explain in this work, is neither more nor less than the manifestation of Jesus Christ and His mysteries, in the Church and in the faithful soul. It is the divine cycle, in which appear all the works of God; each in its turn: the seven days of the creation; the Pasch and Pentecost of the Jewish people; the ineffable visit of the Incarnate Word; His sacrifice and His victory; the descent of the Holy Ghost; the holy Eucharist; the surpassing glories of the Mother of God, ever a Virgin; the magnificence of the angels; the merits and triumphs of the saints.”

The season of advent begins on the fourth Sunday before Christmas and the number of days in Advent depends on which day of the week Christmas day falls. This year, Christmas day falls upon a Sunday, and so we have the longest possible duration for advent which is 28 days. This gives us plenty of time to prepare well for Christmas day. Dom Gueranger has a chapter in his book on what we should do during Advent, here are some excerpts.



An Advent Wreath

“If our holy mother the Church spends the time of Advent in this solemn preparation for the threefold coming of Jesus Christ; if, after the example of the prudent virgins, she keeps her lamp lit ready for the coming of the Bridegroom; we, being her members and her children, ought to enter into her spirit, and apply to ourselves this warning of our Saviour: ‘Let your loins be girt, and lamps burning in your hands, and you yourselves be like unto men who wait for their Lord!’ (Luke 12:35-36)

Preparing Well For Christmas

The Church and we have, in reality, the same hopes. Each one of us is, on the part of God, an object of mercy and care, as is the Church herself. If she is the temple of God, it is because she is built of living stones; if she is the bride, it is because she consists of all the souls which are invited to eternal union with God. If it is written that the Saviour has purchased the Church with His own Blood, may not each one of us say of himself those words of St. Paul, 'Christ has loved me, and has delivered Himself up for me.' (Galatians 2:20) Our destiny being the same, then, as that of the Church, we should endeavour during Advent, to enter into the spirit of preparation, which is, as we have seen, that of the Church herself.

And firstly, it is our duty to join with the saints of the old Law in asking for the Messiah, and thus pay the debt which the whole human race owes to the divine mercy. In order to fulfil this duty with fervour, let us go back in thought to those four thousand years, represented by the four weeks of Advent, and reflect on the darkness and crime which filled the world before our Saviour's coming. Let our hearts be filled with lively gratitude towards Him who saved His creature man from death, and who came down from heaven that He might know our miseries by Himself experiencing them, yes, all of them excepting sin.

Let us cry to Him with confidence from the depths of our misery; for, notwithstanding His having saved the work of His hands, He still wishes us to beseech Him to save us. Let therefore our desires and our confidence have their free utterance in the ardent supplications of the ancient prophets, which the Church puts on our lips during these days of expectation; let us give our closest attention to the sentiments which they express."

"Now, during the season of Advent, our Lord knocks at the door of all men's hearts, at one time so forcibly that they must needs notice Him; at another, so softly that it requires attention to know that Jesus is asking admission. He comes to ask them if they have room for Him, for He wishes to be born in their house. The house indeed is His, for he built it and preserves it; yet He complains that His own refused to receive Him; (John 1:11) at least the greater number did. 'But as many as received Him, He gave them power to be made the sons of God, born not of blood, nor of the flesh, but of God.'" (John 1:12-13)

Let us strive to grow in our desire to welcome Jesus into our hearts this Christmas by preparing well during the season of Advent. Then the words of Our Lord will apply to us, "If any one love Me, he will keep My word, and My Father will love him, and We will come to him, and will make Our abode with him." (John 14:23) Let us strive to follow the Advent liturgies which teach us the best way to prepare. If you would like to begin taking part in the Divine Office, I recommend starting with the Office of Compline as practised by the Benedictines. It is a short Office which does not vary from day to day. There are many online resources where this can be found

Wishing you all the blessings of Advent and Christmas.



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