

## //49 THE LIFE OF ST. BENEDICT

**S**t. Benet was born of the province of Nursia, and was sent to Rome for to study, but in his infancy he left the schools and went into a desert, and his nourice, which tenderly loved him, went alway with him till they came to a place named Æside, and there she borrowed a vessel for to purge or winnow wheat; but the vessel fell to the earth for negligence, and was broken in two pieces. And when St. Benet saw his nurse weep he had great pity, and made his prayers to Almighty God, and after made it also whole as it had been tofore, then they of the country took it and hung it on the front of the church in witness of one so fair a miracle.

### THE SECRET HERMITAGE

**T**hen left St. Benet his nurse and fled secretly, and came into a hermitage where he was never known of no man but of a monk named Romain, which ministered to him meat for to eat. And because that there was no way from the monastery of Romain unto the pit where St. Benet was, he knit the loaf in a cord and so let it down to him, and because he should hear when Romain should let down the bread he bound a bell on the cord, and by the sound thereof he received his bread, but the devil, having envy of the charity of that one, and of the refection of that other, cast a stone and brake the bell, but nevertheless Romain left not to minister to him.

*Benet is said because he blessed much people, or else because he had many benedictions in this life. Or forasmuch as he deserved for to have blessings or benedictions perpetual. And the holy doctor, St. Gregory, wrote his life.*

### A PRIEST BRINGS HIM FOOD FOR EASTER

**I**t happed that there was a priest on an Easter day that had arrayed his dinner for himself, and our Lord appeared to him and said: Thou ordainest for thyself delicious meats, and my servant dieth for hunger in such a pit, and named him the place. Then the priest arose and bare his meat with him and sought so long that he found St. Benet in great pain. When he had found him he said to him: Arise and take thy meat and refection for it is Easter Day.

He answered, I know well that it is the feast of Paske, because that I see thee.

The priest said to him: Certainly this day is the day of Easter, and St. Benet wist it not because he had dwelled there so long and so far from people. Then said they graces, and made the benediction, and took their refection.

### A BLACKBIRD PECKS AT ST. BENEDICT'S FACE

**I**t happed after this that a black bird, that is called a merle, came on a time to St. Benet and pecked with his bill at his visage, and grieved and noyed him so much that he could have no

rest for it, and could not put it from him, but as soon as he had made the sign of the cross, anon the bird vanished away.

### **A GREAT TEMPTATION OF THE FLESH**

**A**nd after that came to him a great temptation of the flesh, by the which the devil tempted him in showing him a woman, and he burnt sore, and was inflamed in his courage, but anon he came again to himself; and after, he despoiled himself all naked and went among thorns and wallowed among the nettles, so that his body was torn and pained, by which he healed the wounds of his heart. Then after that time he felt no more temptation of his flesh.

### **ST. BENEDICT'S FIRST SERVICE AS ABBOT**

**I**t happed that the abbot of a monastery was dead, and for the good renomee of this holy man St. Benet, all the monks of the abbey gave their voices and elected St. Benet for their abbot, but he accorded not thereto, ne agreed to them, for he said that his conditions and manners were not according to theirs. Notwithstanding he was vanquished, and so instantly required, that at the last he consented.

But when he saw they lived not ne were not ruled according to their religion and rule, he reproved and corrected them vigorously. And when they saw that they might not do their wills under him, they gave him venom meddled with wine for to drink, but St. Benet made the sign of the cross over it and blessed it, and anon the vessel brake in pieces, which was of glass. When St. Benet then knew so that in that vessel was mortal drink, which might not abide ne suffer the sign of the cross, he rose up and said: God have mercy on you fair brethren; I said to you well, at the beginning, that my conditions and manners appertain not to yours, from henceforth get to you another father, for I may no longer dwell here.

Then went he again to desert, where God showed for him many signs and miracles, and founded there two abbeys.

### **THE DEVIL IN LIKENESS OF A LITTLE BLACK CHILD**

**N**ow it happed that in one of these two abbeys, was a monk that might not endure long in prayers, and when the other of his fellows were in prayer he would go out of the church. Then the abbot of that abbey showed this to St. Benet, and anon he went for to see if it were true. And when he came he saw that the devil, in likeness of a little black child, drew him out of the church by his cowl.

Then said St. Benet to the abbot and to St. Maur: See ye not him that draweth him out?

They said: Nay. Then said he: Let us pray to God that we may see him.

When they had made their prayers St. Maur saw him, but the abbot might not see him. The next day St. Benet took a rod and beat the monk, and then he abode in prayer, like as the

devil had been beaten, and durst no more come and draw him away, and from then forthon he abode in prayer and continued therein.

### **WATER ON THE MOUNTAINTOP**

**O**f the twelve abbeys that St. Benet had founded, three of them stood on high rocks, so that they might have no water but by great labour. Then came the monks to him and prayed him that he would set these abbeys in some other place, because they had great default of water.

Then went St. Benet about the mountain, and made his orisons and prayers much devoutly; and when he had long prayed he saw three stones in a place for a sign, and on the morn, when the monks came for to pray, he said to them: Go ye to such a place where ye shall find three stones, and there dig a little and ye shall find water. Our Lord can well provide for you water.

And they went and found the mountain all sweating where as the three stones were, and there they digged and anon they found water, so great abundance that it sufficed to them, and ran down from the top of the hill unto beneath into the valley.

### **THE MIRACLE OF THE AXE**

**I**t happed on a time that a man hewed bushes and thorns about the monastery, and his axe or instrument of iron that he hewed with, sprang out of the helve and fell into a deep water; then the man cried and sorrowed for his tool, and St. Benet saw that he was over anguished therefor and took the helve and threw it after into the pit, and anon the iron came up and began to swim till that it entered in to the helve.

### **ST. MAUR WALKS ON WATER TO RESCUE A CHILD**

**I**n the abbey of St. Benet was a child named Placidus, which went to the river for to draw water, and his foot slode so that he fell into the river which was much deep, and anon the river bare him forth more than a bow-shot. And when St. Benet, which was in his study, knew it, he called to St. Maur, and said that there was a child which was a monk that was about to be drowned, and bade him go to help him.

And anon St. Maur ran upon the water like as it had been on dry ground and his feet dry and took up the child by the hair, and drew him to land, and after, when he came to St. Benet, he said that it was not by his merit but by virtue of his obedience.

### **FLORENTIN, THE RAVEN, AND THE SEVEN NAKED MAIDS**

**T**here was a priest named Florentin which had envy on St. Benet, and he sent to him a loaf of bread envenomed. After, when St. Benet had this loaf he knew, by the inspiration, that it was envenomed. He gave it to a raven that was wont to take his feeding of St. Benet's hand, and commanded him to bear it unto such a place that no man should find it.

Then the raven made semblant for to obey to the commandment of St. Benet, but he durst not touch it for the venom, and fled about it howling and crying.

St. Benet said to him: Take this bread hardily and bear it away. At the last the raven bare it away into such a place that there was never heard tidings thereof after, and came again the third day after and took his refection of St. Benet's hand as he was wont to do tofore.

When this priest Florentin saw that he could not slay St. Benet, he enforced him to slay spiritually the souls of his disciples. He took seven maidens, all naked, and sent them into the garden to dance and carol for to move the monks to temptation. When St. Benet saw the malice of Florentin he had fear of his disciples, and sent them out of that place.

When Florentin saw that St. Benet and his monks went out, he demened great joy and made great feast, and anon the solar [an upper chamber] fell upon him and slew him suddenly. When St. Maur saw that Florentin was dead, he ran after St. Benet and called him, saying: Come again, for Florentin that hath done so much harm to you is dead.

When St. Benet heard this he was sorry for the perilous death of Florentin, and because St. Maur was glad for the death of his enemy, as him seemed, he enjoined him penance therefor.

### **CONVERSIONS AT MOUNT CASSIN**

**A**fter this he went to Mount Cassin, where he had another great adversary, for in the place where that Apollo was adored, he made an oratory of St. John Baptist, and converted all the country about to the Christian faith, whereof the devil was so tormented that he appeared to St. Benet all black, and ran upon him with open mouth and throat, and had his eyes all enflamed and said to him, Benet! Benet! and St. Benet answered not. The devil said: Cursed and not blessed, why have I so much persecution?

### **THE DEVIL ASSAILS A BUILDING PROJECT**

**I**t happed on a time that as the monks should lift a stone for a work of an edifice, they might not move it, then there assembled a great multitude of people, and yet they all might not lift it, but anon as St. Benet had blessed it, they lifted it anon. Then apperceived they that the devil was upon it and caused it to be so heavy. And when they had a little made the wall high, the devil appeared to St. Benet and bade him go see them that edified [were building].

Then St. Benet sent to his monks and commanded that they should keep them well, for the devil went [planned] to destroy them. But ere the messenger came to them the devil had thrown down a part of the wall, and had therewith slain a young monk. Then they brought the monk, all tobruised, in a sack to St. Benet, and anon St. Benet made upon him the sign of the cross and blessed him, and raised him to life and sent him to the work again.

### **THE LAYMAN WHO BROKE HIS FAST**

**A** lay man, of honest life, had a custom once in the year to come to St. Benet all fasting, and on a time as he came, there was one that bare meat accompanied with him, and desired that he would eat with him, but he refused it. After, he prayed him the second time, and yet he refused it, and said he would eat no meat till he came to St. Benet. At the third time he found a fair fountain and a much delitable place, and began sore to desire him to eat with him, and at the last he consented and ate.

And when he came to St. Benet he said to him: Where hast thou eaten?

Which answered, I have eaten a little.

O fair brother, the devil hath deceived thee, but he could not deceive thee the first ne the second time, but the third time he hath surmounted thee.

Then the good man knelt down to the feet of St. Benet and confessed him of his trespass.

### **ATTILA TRIES TO DECEIVE THE SAINT**

**A**ttila, the king of Goths, would once prove if St. Benet had the spirit of prophecy, and sent to him his servant, and did do array him with precious robes, and delivered to him a great company as he had been the king himself. When St. Benet saw him come, he said to him: Fair son, do off that thou wearest, it is not thine, and the man fell down anon to the ground because he mocked the holy man, and died anon.

### **THE CLERIC WHO TOOK ORDERS**

**A** clerk that was vexed with the devil was brought to St. Benet for to be healed, and St. Benet put him out, and after, said to the clerk: Go, and from henceforth eat no more flesh, and go no more to none order, for what day thou goest and takest orders, the devil shall re-enter into thee.

This clerk held him long time without taking any, till at last he saw younger than he that went to take orders, and had forgotten the words of St. Benet, and took orders, and anon the devil entered in to his body and tormented him till he died.

### **THE GIFT OF TWO FLAGONS**

**T**here was a man that sent to St. Benet two flagons of wine, but he that bare them hid that one, and presented that other without more. When St. Benet had received the present he thanked him much and said to him: Fair brother, take good heed how thou shalt do with that which thou hast hid, and drink not thereof for thou knowest not what is therein.

Then he was ashamed, and so confused went from him, and when he came to the place where he had hid it, he would wit what was therein like as St. Benet had told to him, and bowed it a little, and anon a serpent issued out.

### **THE PRIDEFUL YOUNG MAN**

**I**t happed on a time that St. Benet ate, and a young man which was son to a great lord held to him a candle, and began to think in his heart who is this that I serve? I am son unto a great man; it appertaineth not that one so gentle a man as I am be servant to him.

When St. Benet saw by experience the pride that arose in this monk, he called another monk and made him to hold the candle, and after said to him: What is that thou hast? bless thy heart brother, bless it, God forgive it thee, now thou shalt serve me no more; go into thy cloister and rest thee there.

### **THE ARIAN KING**

**T**here was a man of the king of Goths which was named Gallas, which tormented over cruelly the Christian men, because he was of the sect of the Arians, in such wise that where he found clerks or monks he slew them.

Then it happed on a day that he tormented a villain or a carle for the covetise of his good; when the carle saw that he would take all, he gave all that ever he had to St. Benet. Then left Gallas to torment him a little, but he bound him with the reins of his bridle, and drove him tofore, and he rode after till that he came to the abbey of St. Benet, and bade him that he should show to him this Benet.

When he came thither he saw St. Benet stand tofore the gate alone and studied in a book; then said the villain to the tyrant: Lo! there is Benet that thou demandest after.

When Gallas had looked on him cruelly, like he had been accustomed, he had supposed to have dealt with him like as he had done with other Christian men, and said to St. Benet: Arise up anon and deliver to me the goods of this carle which thou hast by thee.

When St. Benet heard, he lift up a little his eyes and beheld the carle that was tofore him, and anon by great marvel his arms were unbounden, he stood tofore the tyrant appertly, without dread. And anon Gallas fell down to the feet of St. Benet and recommended him to his prayers. And never for all this left St. Benet to read on his book, but called his monks and commanded that his meat should be brought to him, and the monks did so, and sith bare it away. Then admonested St. Benet the tyrant, and said to him that he should leave his cruelty and his woodness, and he departed and never after that day he demanded of villain any good, ne of the man that St. Benet had unbounden only by his sight.

## **THE FAMINE**

**I**t happed over all Champagne, whereas he dwelt that so great a famine was in the country that much people died for hunger. Then all the bread of the abbey failed, and there was within but five loaves for all the convent.

When St. Benet saw that they were abashed he began debonairly to chastise and warn them that they should have their hearts on high to God, and said to them: Wherefore are ye in so great misease for bread? If ye have none this day ye shall have it tomorn.

Now it happed that on the morn they found at their gate two hundred muddes of meal, which were properly sent from God, for never man wist from whence they came. When the monks saw that they thanked God, and learned that they ought not doubt ne of abundance ne of poverty.

## **ANOTHER BUILDING PROJECT**

**I**t happed on a time that St. Benet sent his monks for to edify an abbey, and said that at a certain day he would come see them and show them what they should do. Then the night tofore that he had said to come he appeared to the master and to his monks, and showed to them all the places that they should build, but they believed not this vision and supposed it had been but a dream.

Then when they saw that he came not, they returned and said to him: Fair father, we have abided that thou shouldst have come to us like as thou promisedst us.

Then answered he: What is that ye say? Remember ye not that I appeared to you that night that I promised you and enseigned and told how ye should do? Go your way and do in such wise as I have devised to you in the vision.

## **THE TALKATIVE NUNS**

**T**here were two nuns nigh unto his monastery which were of much noble lineage, which were much talkative, and restrained not well their tongues, but tormented overmuch him that governed them. And when he had showed this to St. Benet, he sent them word that they should better keep silence and rule their tongues, or he would curse them. But they for all that would not leave it, and so anon after, they died and were buried in the church.

And when the deacon cried in the end of the mass that they that were accursed should go out of the church, the nurse that had nourished them and that every day had offered for them, beheld and saw that, when the deacon sang so, they issued out of their sepulchres and went out of the church, and when St. Benet knew hereof he offered for them himself and assoiled them. Then after that when the deacon said so as afore, they never issued out after as their nurse had seen them.

### **THE MONK WHO LEFT ON A VISIT**

**T**here was a monk gone out for to see his father and mother, without licence and blessing of his abbot, and the day after he came thither he died; and when he was buried in the earth the earth cast him out again, and so it did twice. Then came the father and mother to St. Benet and told him how the earth threw him and would not receive him, and prayed that he would bless him. Then took he the blessed sacrament and made it to be laid on the breast of the corpse, and when they had done so they buried him, and the earth threw him no more out, but received the body and held it.

### **THE TRUANT MONK AND THE DRAGON**

**T**here was a monk that could not abide in the monastery, and prayed so much to St. Benet that he let him go, and was all angry, and anon as he was out of the abbey he found a dragon with open mouth; and when he saw him he had fear that he would have denounced him, and cried loud: Come hither and help me! come hither, for this dragon will devour me!

Then the monks ran, but they saw no dragon, and brought again the monk trembling and sighing. Then the monk promised that he never would depart from the abbey.

### **ANOTHER FAMINE**

**I**n a time there was in that country a great famine, and all that ever St. Benet might get and have, he gave it to the poor people, in so much that he had no more in the abbey but a little oil, and he commanded yet to the cellarer to give it to a poor man. The cellarer understood him well, but he gave it not because there was no more in the convent. And when St. Benet knew it he took the vessel and cast it out of the window, and it was of glass, and it fell on a stone and brake not; then he reprov'd the cellarer of inobedience and of the little hope that he had in God; and after he went unto his prayers, and anon a great empty tun that was there was full of oil, insomuch that it ran over.

### **A VISIT TO ST. SCHOLASTICA**

**I**t happed another day that St. Benet went to visit his sister, named Scholastica, and as they sat at table she prayed her brother that he would abide there all that night, but he in no wise would grant her, and said he might not live out of his cloister. And when she saw that he would not grant to her to abide, she inclined her head and made her prayers to our Lord, and anon it began to thunder and to lighten, and the air to wax dark which tofore was fair and clear, and a great rain fell down so that for nothing he might depart.

And like as she wept with her eyes, right so forthwith the rain and storm came, and then she lifted up her head. Then St. Benet said to his sister: Almighty God forgive you that ye have done, for ye have letted me that I may not depart hence.

And she said: Fair brother, God is more courteous than ye be, for ye would not accept my prayer, but God hath heard me, now go if ye may.

And then St. Benet abode there all the night, speaking of God between him and his sister without sleeping, till they were both eased. On the morn St. Benet went to his abbey, and on the third day he lift up his eyes to heaven, and saw the soul of his sister mount up into heaven in the likeness of a dove, and anon he did the body of her to be brought to his abbey, and did it to be buried in his tomb which he had do made for himself.

### **THE DEATH OF ST. BENEDICT**

**O**n a night as St. Benet was in his prayer at a window, he saw the soul of St. Germain, bishop of Capua, mount into heaven, and like as a light sudden that enlumineth all the darkneses of the world, so the light of that soul gave a great light; and after he knew that the soul of St. Germain passed that same hour.

After this, when time came that St. Benet himself should depart out of this world, he showed it to his monks six days tofore, and did do make his pit. And after that a fever took him strongly, which held him every day, and at the sixth day he did himself to be borne to the church, and there received the body of our Lord Jesu Christ, and after, among the hands of his disciples, his own hands lifting up to heaven in making his orison, he rendered his soul unto his creator.

The same hour was a revelation showed to two monks, for they saw a way to heaven all covered with palls and mantles of gold, and full of torches burning which illumined all the heaven, which came from the cell of St. Benet unto heaven.

And there was a man in a fair habit to whom these monks demanded what way that was, and he answered that it was the way by which St. Benet mounted up to heaven. Then the body of St. Benet was buried in the oratory that he had made of St. John, where as was wont to be the altar of Apollo, the year of our Lord five hundred and eighteen. To whom let us pray devoutly that he pray to our Lord for us, that we may have grace after this life to come to everlasting bliss in heaven. Amen.

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