

Christmas: Live as Gift

“Unto us a child is born, a son is given”. Handel in his Messiah set these words of Isaiah to an unforgettable melody. What a joy, they say, when a new member of our human family is born! Not every one is the long-expected Messiah, but each one is special, unique, worth celebrating.

Life is given us through the life of others. Similarly, their demise seems to put to death something in us. We are born again with the new-born babe. We die in the departure of our brethren. Nothing is so wrong as to imagine that my birth and my death belong only to me – that your life and your death concern only you. We are not separated individuals. We are connected members of a wider family. For all our solitude, our birth and our death are part of the lives of others.

Hence our responsibility. Not for our birth, obviously – we did not make ourselves –, but for the life we have received. This is a gift given to me to be shared with others. You have received: become a giver. Give yourself – your hands and your heart, your mind and your presence, your talents and your limits. You have been given “unto us”: agree to make of yourself a gift to us all. Give yourself: you will be a human person; you will find yourself in the very gift of yourself. For your self is neither a product to be consumed by you alone nor a castle to be built to your unique glory, but rather a house to open welcomingly to those who pass you by.

Think of it: a welcoming house where compassion is

offered, and joy shared with simplicity and dignity. How much we need such a house: to welcome us when we are born, to shelter us when we grow, to care for us when we get sick or older, to give us a place at the hour of our death.

Jesus, born in Bethlehem, had no house but the manger of animals and the hearts of his parents. Jesus dying on the Cross had nowhere to

receive care and compassion but for the presence of Mary, his mother, and John, his friend. We do not need that many things, but we do need the one thing that only the presence of a human person can give us. One loving presence can change everything.

I am sorry, but I cannot let you die in the solitude of your decision to end your own life. I cannot let you take away the gift that you are. I need you till the end. Your life till the end builds up our society. Till the end, you are an essential gift: to you, to me, to all. I want us all to care for you, to value you, to be grateful for you, to accompany you in dignity and compassion till the end – whoever you are, whatever you have done.

Life is a gift, from the beginning to the end. When you die, the gift that you are remains. You die in us and you live on in us. How much more so in God, our Creator and Father! Even: “I am not dying, but entering life”, said Thérèse of the Child Jesus. Birth: the door into this life. Death: the door into the Life. Let none of us close these precious doors! Let us rather leave it to our Father in heaven to open them at the right time.

Abbot Xavier



Picture: Hudson Media



Friends of Quarr by Cheryl Fontana

Members of the Friends of Quarr met for their annual meeting on Saturday 28th September. At the meeting Dr Dominic Fontana talked about the many events of the last year. He spoke of the role of the Friends in supporting the activities of the Abbey, whether that was volunteering in the bookshop, taking guided tours around the Abbey or helping to produce and man exhibitions.

He also said that it was important to maintain dialogues with people who are interested in the work of the Abbey and to try to create networks of those who would like to offer their support. There have been substantial fundraising initiatives throughout the year led by individual Friends of Quarr, with money raised towards the guest house refurbishments and the new organ. Twelve new members have joined in the course of the year bringing the total membership to nearly 150 people and requests for membership continue to come in through the website.

Fr Xavier spoke to the meeting of the importance of growing the community and of welcoming a new postulant to join the monastery soon. The presence of some very good interns on the internship programme continues to be an important part of life at the Abbey, as these young men participate in following the monastic way of life

and work. The community was also delighted to welcome a visit from the Primate, Abbot Gregory Polan in August, shortly before the end of his term as the tenth Abbot Primate of the Benedictine Order.

After the meeting and lunch in the teasop there was a concert in the Abbey church to raise money on behalf of the Friends of Quarr. A selection of motets by Sir Karl Jenkins was performed in the Abbey Church by Salutaris, an Island choral group. Conducted by Jurgita Leistrumaite, the singers gave an outstanding and inspiring performance set against the beautiful backdrop of the statue of Our Lady and framed by Dom Bellot's stunning brick arches. Many of the motets are now well known, particularly Cantate Domino from Adiemus and Benedictus from the Armed Man, as Jenkins is one of the most performed living composers globally. The choir

brought out the haunting spirituality of all the pieces with great skill and passion. It is Sir Karl's eightieth birthday this year and The Friends of Quarr were pleased to mark the occasion with this concert, which attracted a capacity audience and raised over £650 in donations. As a result, the sum of money needed to complete the payment for the new pipe organ has now been raised.

We now look forward to the coming of the new organ in December and to a future occasion when we hope to hear Salutaris perform once again.

If you are interested in joining the Friends of Quarr and being informed about what is happening at the Abbey, please look on the Quarr Abbey website for further details on this link:

<https://quarrabbey.org/support/friends-of-quarr/>

Dom Prosper Guéranger

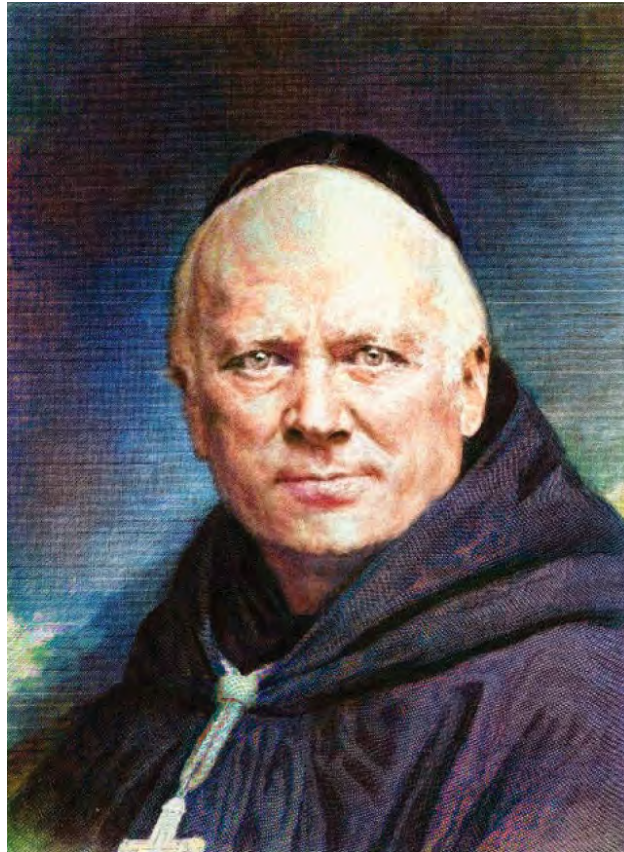
Prosper Louis Pascal Guéranger was born to a middle class, devout Catholic family on April 4th 1805 in Sablé-sur-Sarthe, a small town in the Pays de la Loire region of France. He was baptised on the very day of his birth and was drawn to the Church from a young age.

It was his mother who taught him to read and he developed a passion and capacity for reading which stayed with him for the rest of his life. Thanks to the help of a young chaplain at 'The Collège Royal' in Angers, Guéranger had the opportunity as a student to read nearly all the great French and foreign literature. He frequently read 'The Genius of Christianity' by François-René de Chateaubriand - a book which defended the wisdom and beauty of the Catholic faith against the attacks of the French Revolution.

In 1821 the Guéranger family left Sablé for Le Mans where Prosper entered seminary in 1822. During his time at seminary his reading of the Church Fathers left a profound impression on him and sowed seeds of desire for the Benedictine life. Also at seminary, he further developed his love for the liturgy and expressed a strong interest in Church history.

On October 7th 1827 at the young age of 22, he was ordained priest at Tours in what was a very simple ceremony. He celebrated his first Mass at the Cathedral in Tours and quickly gained a reputation for being ready to preach on any subject at the drop of a hat. His sermons were direct and simple in style, always with a clear message and delivered with enthusiasm. He suffered from a slight speech impediment which was said to impact his eloquence, but when he spoke from the heart it vanished.

Those who knew him told of how he inherited 'lively and playful' traits of his mother while retaining 'tranquil and strong' qualities of his father. He was short and more stout than thin, with blond hair and a constant smile, his clear and lively gaze from intensely



blue eyes tended to surprise people!

Abbot Guéranger was called to serve the Church through his studies and believed the spiritual strength of the Church in France depended on the revival of monastic life. By the age of 25 he had a unified train of thought and was already publishing quality articles on Catholic liturgy. He greatly influenced the Church's understanding of the faith and liturgy with his nine-volume written masterpiece: 'L'Année Liturgique'. In all his works he paid homage to the Pope and said: "Love for the Sovereign Pontiff is a mark of God's blessing."

In the spring of 1831, the derelict priory of Solesmes was put up for sale. Père Guéranger, although facing a complete lack of resources and lack of reliable contacts, felt strongly drawn by God to acquire the property and re-establish the Order of St. Benedict. His wish was simple - to gather together some like-minded priests and live the monastic life, he said -

"It is thanks to the rule of Saint Benedict that we shall become true Benedictines."

Despite all logistical and financial challenges, in 1833 Guéranger purchased the abandoned monastery and the restoration of Solesmes began. In those early years, poverty always prevailed and the local community played an essential role in helping the newly found religious house to survive. In 1837 Dom Guéranger went to Rome seeking the approval for his new monastery and all requests were granted, constitutions approved and the Solesmes priory was raised to Abbey status with Dom Guéranger as Abbot - he was just 32. A new era had dawned and he went on to rule as abbot for the next 38 years, dying peacefully on the 30th January 1875.

The Solesmes monastery became a visible affirmation of the freedom the Church was regaining in France at the time. The new monks put all their heart into the task of ceremonies and soon attained a beautiful liturgy, which remains today. Abbot Guéranger also played a key part in the revival of Gregorian chant and succeeded in giving Gregorian melodies an accent and rhythm that no one seemed to have dreamed possible. A 'Solesmes style' of chant was established, recovering and promoting the musical patrimony of the Church.

Abbé Guéranger was a remarkable man of many gifts and talents and his legacy continues to resonate through the Solesmes congregation and Church today. On November 8, 2023 the cause for Guéranger's canonization was opened and we pray he is on the road to Sainthood.

Br. Matthew Landells



Picture: Marie-Line Burguiere

Chronicle

It was a long time in the coming, but The Ryde Art Collective's (T.R.A.C.) Quarr themed exhibition finally appeared in Quarr Abbey Art Gallery in September 2024. Its origin lies back five years ago in 2019 but various events conspired to hinder it. First of all, it was stopped by Covid in 2020. And then, as the passing of time led to group membership changes, more time was needed for new artists to plan work. Finally, an over-booked Gallery meant space was unavailable in 2023. But, at last, five years after the initial inspiration, everything came together.

Although inspired by Quarr, the exhibition was not confined to Quarr. It was sufficiently large to spread itself across three Island venues: Quarr Abbey Art Gallery, the Clayden Gallery at Quay Arts in Newport and the "very small" Lind Street Telephone Kiosk Gallery in Ryde.

It is always interesting to see how outsiders see us, if somewhat disconcerting at times: it is certainly not as we see ourselves. But, this time at least, it was refreshing.

The first thing to be struck by, was the great variety of media employed by the nine artists. There were paintings, sculptures, fabrics, ceramics, photographs, music and film, and some works which defied categorisation.

Equally various were the elements of our life which attracted their attention: Gregorian Chant, the life of Saint Benedict, trees, bees, brick and stone, the quirky corners of the guesthouse, the history of the monastery, and its atmosphere, the stillness and peace.

All fed into a complex and multi-faceted vision of an Abbey showing itself to a remarkable group of artists.

On a Thursday afternoon walk, a number of the community visited the Quay Arts extension of the exhibition. We are a very varied lot but we each came away with some fresh appreciation of the vision Quarr offers to the world.

Dr. Dominic Fontana, Chairman of the Friends of Quarr is a man of many parts. As well as his work for Quarr he is involved with the Mary Rose Museum in Portsmouth and the Classic Boat Museum in Cowes, Isle of Wight. It was with great pleasure that the community accepted his invitation to a private guided tour of the latter museum on October 1.

After passing through the entrance hall and greeting Cheryl, Dominic's wife, we entered an area devoted to the sinking of the Mary Rose at the battle of the Solent in 1545. A full size reproduction of the Cowdray engraving, made after the original

painting at Cowdray House in Sussex, ran along one wall. The depiction of a running battle around Bembridge harbour brought the invasion fears of the time home to an Island resident.

Elsewhere I was attracted to a video display of coloured engravings made by Thomas Rowlandson after an island tour in the 1780's. One engraving in particular stood out. It showed the Needles, and looked rather odd! Then, my eyes were opened; the lighthouse was missing, because not yet built. How unfamiliar such an iconic view can appear!

There was a splendid display of photographs and models showing the building of motor torpedo boats at boatyards on the River Medina around 1900. They were very narrow and of extraordinary length to accommodate boilers; very fast and very advanced for the time.

But perhaps the most revolutionary design on display comes from our own day. Video footage of Britain's America's Cup entry, Britannia, on

trials, showed the slim-lined vessel flying rather than sailing on her narrow foils, well above the waves, kept aloft by the hands and arms of a hard-working crew. It was a fitting end to a tour through some five hundred years of maritime history around the Isle of Wight.

Much work of renovation has been done in the guesthouse this year; a roof has been replaced, concrete lintels renewed, window frames repaired, and two rooms turned into a new ensuite facility. Over £118,000 has been sourced for the project, and even yet there is still more work to be done. But it was time to celebrate what had been achieved and to thank all who had made it possible.

A "Topping Out" ceremony was therefore arranged for October 12, and friends and benefactors invited to Quarr for an afternoon of events. These included the newly elected M.P. for East Wight, the honourable Joe Robertson, his wife and two children.

At 3.00p.m. Father Abbot gave an illustrated talk in the nave of the Abbey Church. He covered the history of the Abbey guesthouse from its beginnings, and recounted our more famous guests including Jacques Maritain, Philippe de Gaulle, Ludwig Wittgenstein, Monsignor Montini, and Alec Guinness. He concluded with photographs following the work of

refurbishment, so necessary to meet the needs of present day guests, both men and women.

Father Abbot's talk was followed by a tour of the renovated areas. The corridors seemed too narrow and the rooms too small for the unusual crush of visitors, but with good humour and genuine appreciation everyone got to see everything.

After the tour's informal chaos, it was a relief to settle down for tea in a less confined space, a much more orderly affair. Tracy, Douglas and the Teashop did us all very well, it was warm enough and the M.P.'s children were soon running around the garden. It was a happy afternoon, but we now have to get down to all that remaining work.

October 31 is celebrated each year, for the most part, as Hallowe'en, with pumpkins, trick or treat, and images of ghosts and ghouls and witches. Many Christians are unhappy with casual play-acting which mimics the dark side of things. The Devil is not to be fooled with, and if he has a sense of humour, it is not our own.

In origin Hallowe'en is All Hallows, or All Saints, Eve, the day of preparation for the Solemnity of All Saints. To make this preparation a reality at Quarr we have inaugurated a Saints Trail about the estate, a Trail

which has children especially in mind. A booklet is provided with information on selected saints, and clues which lead from one station to another along the route. At each station an image is found; of Saint Bede, Saint Cecilia, Saint Francis or another saint, together with a brief word about their life and virtues. Hopefully, at the end of the trail, Hallowe'en will have come forth into its true light.

Father Luke has published a number of books during his time at Quarr, including his popular, "The Joy of God" which introduces our monastic life to the general enquirer. Now, a new book is on the horizon and is coming toward us. It is concerned with the thorny question of Truth, a currently much debated topic.

I asked Father Luke for a word about his main thesis. He had this to say: *"In this age of algorithms, it is all too easy to lose touch with reality. My new book, "Truth in Person", argues that only through the human person can we have access to truth. This is supereminently so of our Saviour who bore witness to the truth before Pilate, paid the price for it, and overcame the darkness. The book is to be published in April 2025 by Angelico Press"*

Look out for it! A review will be published in this newsletter shortly after its appearance.

Br. Duncan Smith

Picture: Marie-Line Burguiere



1925-2025: A Modest Centenary on the Way to 2032's Ninehundredth Anniversary

On the 15th of January, our community will celebrate a humble but important centenary. One remembers that the monks of Solesmes arrived on the Isle of Wight in 1901. They settled first at Appuldurcombe. In 1907, they bought the house and estate of Quarr. From 1907 to 1914, they built the present monastery. In 1922, a major part of the monastic community of more than one hundred monks went back to France.

Although the anti-clerical legislation had not been abolished, the anti-clerical climate had very much subsided. Nevertheless, Abbot Germain Cozien, needed courage and audacity to arrange the move of the well-known Solesmes community back to the monastery of which they had been despoiled twenty-one years earlier.

Dom Cozien was born in 1878 in Pleyben, in Western Brittany, of farming stock. He first joined the ranks of the diocesan clergy of Quimper diocese. After earning a Doctorate degree in Rome, he felt the call to monastic life and joined the exiled community of Solesmes on the Isle of Wight where he made his monastic profession in 1911. In 1921, he was elected abbot following the resignation of Dom Paul Delatte. He was to remain in this office until 1959 overseeing the return to Solesmes, the building of the wing of the library and the so-called 'new cloister', the difficult years of the second world war when a great number of monks were prisoners, the foundation of Fontgombault in 1948 and the building of a new wing of the monastery. He died in 1960.

In 1922, twenty-five monks, fifteen priests and ten brothers, remained at Quarr. The abbey and the estate could not be so easily relinquished even though their future could seem a bit uncertain. Nevertheless, as soon as 1924, Dom Cozien, made plans for the foundation at Quarr of a second English house of the Solesmes Congregation (the first one being the abbey of St Michael of Farnborough, founded in 1895). He consulted with the communities of both Solesmes and Quarr who formally agreed on this project. At first, Dom Cozien wanted to revive the title of the old abbey



St. Benedict blesses St. Maurus

of Quarr thus bridging a continuity between the pre-Reformation Cistercians and the Benedictine monks of our time. However, his petition, duly made to the Roman Curia, was not granted. It was deemed prudent to wait till the new community had reached the point when, after sufficient growth in numbers, it would be possible to elect an abbot. This was to be the case in 1937 when Dom Tissot was nominated the first abbot of the newly erected monastery of St Mary of Quarr.

In the meantime, on 15th January 1925, Quarr was canonically constituted as a simple Priory and granted its own novitiate. The monks remained for the time being members of the Solesmes community and professions were still to be made for Solesmes. But the intention to work toward the moment when the Quarr community would be able to become an independent abbey was clearly expressed. This date can therefore be considered as the foundation day of our community.



Abbot Cozien and Prior Bouvet

The 15th of January was at the time the feast of St Maurus. This close disciple of St Benedict was credited with bringing his Rule into Gaul. He had therefore been chosen to be the patron of this French Benedictine congregation that was made famous in the seventeenth and eighteenth Centuries by its outstanding works of scholarship. Dom Guéranger, who restored Benedictine life in France after the French Revolution, was not allowed to retake the title of *Congrégation de Saint-Maur* for his monasteries. But the *Congrégation de France* of which he became the first abbot and president naturally took Saint Maurus for its patron saint. The meaning of the date was clear: just as Saint Maurus had brought the Rule to France, the monastery whose existence officially began under his patronage was meant to live in the spirit of St Benedict, bringing its own modest contribution to the rich Benedictine tradition of England.

The memory of this day was to be expressed in a painting by Dom Subercaseaux for the altar of St Maurus in the crypt of the abbey. It features a venerable St Benedict giving his blessing to St Maurus whose face

is portrayed in the semblance of our first Prior, Dom Emile Bouvet.

The latter was born in Normandy in 1872. After a time in the clergy of the diocese of Sées, he entered the Solesmes novitiate in 1900. From the start, he was involved in the installation of the French monks first at Appuldurcombe, then at Quarr. On the 26th of June 1907, he led the group of four monks (Dom Bouvet, Dom Paul Bellot – who was to be the architect of the new monastery –, Dom George Bellot – the latter's brother –, and Frère Jean-Baptiste Parc) who first settled at Quarr. He was thus able to celebrate the first Mass said at Quarr since the Reformation on the 27th of June 1907.

While the Solesmes community was at Quarr, Dom Bouvet was in charge of the lay-brothers – a group of around 30 monks – and the farm. His good command of the English language, his knowledge of English spiritual authors and literature, and his great practical sense, made of him a keyperson in the history of our house. Our necrology speaks highly of this great monk:

"In his strong personality, he combined the shrewd realism of his Norman yeoman

background with a rare gift of kindly human understanding and a wide and deep culture. Besides being Prior he was Novice Master. He was the ideal interpreter of a great French monastic tradition to English novices. He was also much involved in the material administration and in the welcome of guests for which he was particularly gifted. Above all, he was a monk, a man of God and man of prayer."

Quarr owes a lot to these two remarkable monks and superiors. The Breton Dom Cozien brought the constancy of an indefatigable resolution strongly rooted in faith. The Norman Dom Bouvet added his own capacities for adaptation and translation. As true founders, they lay down the basis on which the Quarr community is still relying today.

In celebrating the 100th anniversary of the foundation of Quarr, we remember the monks who generously renounced going back to France and fully engaged in the adventure of the beginnings of a new monastery. May it be given us to continue the work to which they dedicated themselves in the same Spirit of faith, hope and love.

Abbot Xavier

Saint of Darkness

Mother Teresa

In Dark Divine,
My Thirst, your light.
I know your pain.
Dissolve self-will
In Sacred Potation.
Drink deep within
My Blood poured out,
My Thirst to quench,
My Will to gain,
And be My Light.
By you I write
My Love Divine
Etched on fabric
Of human plight.
Expand your love
Become divine.
As My servant¹ wrote
'Love makes lovers equal'.
Bear Me to My poorest
Following My Mother,
She who was
My first
Missionary of Charity.

Dom Brian Gerard Kelly



Photo courtesy of Mother Teresa Center

¹ St Francis De Sales: 'Treatise on the Love of God', Book 5