

April 2011

A.D.:Anno Domini

A Church history supplement for adult Catholics

This Month's Focus: A.D. 900-1000



Diocesan Mission Statement

"We the Catholic faithful of the Diocese of Scranton, in union with our Holy Father, the Pope, are called through baptism to share in the mission which Jesus Christ has entrusted to the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church. Priests, deacons, religious and laity, under the leadership of our Bishop, cooperate to proclaim the Gospel in accordance with the teaching of the Church to celebrate the sacraments, especially the Eucharist, for the salvation of all, and to witness by grace to the Kingdom of God so as to promote a culture of life, justice and peace."

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Key Events: A.D. 900-1000

900: During the 10th century, society in Western Europe is at its lowest ebb; only monasteries and bishoprics preserve knowledge and communications between numerous small kingdoms.

909: Duke William the Pious donates land in Cluny, France for the formation of a monastery. St. Berno was named abbot and, with 12 companions, began a reform movement to strengthen religious life in the Church. The monks at Cluny emphasized a return to the strict observance of the Rule of St. Benedict; the cultivation of the interior life; and the importance of the choir office and sacred worship.

939: St. Adalbert is born. He is often referred to as the "apostle of the Prussians." Adalbert had to flee Prague several times because of opposition to his reforms. During one of his exiles he became the confessor to Emperor Otto III, who was greatly impressed by his personal example. He was martyred in 997 by a group of pagans in Prussia.

960: St. Dunstan is appointed Archbishop of Canterbury. Dunstan was famous as a scholar, but the king also entrusted him with the task of rebuilding Glastonbury Abbey which, like most English monasteries, had been destroyed by Viking raiders. Dunstan was

successful and, by the time of his death, monasticism was flourishing in England once more.

975: St. Stephen the Great is born. He and his father were baptized by St. Adalbert. Stephen became Hungary's first king and established dioceses and monasteries.

989: St. Vladimir is baptized. A pagan chieftain, he immediately dismissed his five wives; he tore down the idols and shrines he had established (building churches instead); and he hosted enormous banquets for the poor (and sent food to those who could not attend).

Key Concept: Cluny

As mentioned above, Cluny was founded in the 10th century as a reform movement aimed at strengthening the spiritual life of the Church. In this regard it was tremendously successful and influential. The name of Cluny was quickly associated with saintliness—so much so that in only a few years of its founding six other monasteries copied its model and four of its abbots would go on to

be canonized saints. The monks of Cluny were distinguished from their contemporaries in several ways. First, they returned to a strict observance of the Benedictine rule. Second, they strove to build up the spiritual life of each individual monk (the idea being that a holy community is built upon all its members striving for holiness in their

personal lives). In connection to this, they focused on the Liturgy of the Hours and the sacred liturgy—often lengthening both—so as to encourage active, continuous prayer.

The influence of Cluny was massive. Within 200 years of its founding there were over 10,000 monks living in 1,450 monasteries under the rule of Cluny.



St. Odo was famous for his love of the poor. He called them "the doorkeepers of heaven."

"To those who met him he gave coins that he carried for this purpose, and that he gave secretly either himself or through a reliable servant"



St. Gerald was a layman who had lived not far from Odo's monastery. Researching his life, he became convinced of his sanctity.

Get to Know: Saint Odo of Cluny (A.D. 879-942)

Saint Odo was the son of a knight, but was raised in the household of Duke William the Pious, who donated the land on which the monastery of Cluny was built in A.D. 909. While a young cleric, Odo read *The Rule of St. Benedict* and was deeply moved. He had a strong desire to live the type of life described by Benedict. In 909 he joined a Benedictine monastery in Baume. That same year his abbot, St. Berno, left to become the abbot of the new monastery in Cluny, so Odo joined him.

In A.D. 927 Odo succeeded Berno as abbot and did much to extend the influence of Cluny

throughout Europe. He reached out to monasteries whose spiritual life was lax and encouraged them to return to the form of monastic life envisioned by St. Benedict—a life of prayer, manual labor, and community life under the direction of a spiritual father.

While his suggestion was not welcomed by all, many monasteries began to choose more worthy abbots, placed more emphasis on the spiritual lives of their monks, and worshipped with a greater sense of reverence. Some communities, however, responded with disdain. In Fleury, for example, the monks violently resisted him visiting their abbey. Odo simply

spoke calmly and soothingly to them, waited three days, and then humbly rode a donkey into the abbey. His overtures won them over. Thus, through his personal influence, Odo was largely responsible for the sweeping reform of monastic life that took place over the next two centuries.

Beyond his efforts among his brother monks, Odo was often called upon by the Pope to intercede in tumultuous political affairs—particularly between the king of Italy and the Patrician Alberic. It was on his return from one such mediation that died in 942. His feast day is celebrated on November 19.

In Their Own Words: *The Life of St. Gerald of Aurillac* by St. Odo

"Chairs for the poor were always placed in his presence and at intervals meals were put in front of them, that he might see for himself what and how much food was given to them. Nor was he limited to receiving a certain number, but when more happened to be present, at least of those who seemed deserving, more were brought in to him. No one was ever turned away from his door without alms being given.

His servants so arranged that he always had dishes at hand that he might give. Drink also was brought, which he distributed after inspecting and tasting it, so that those might first drink to whom he gave a portion of his bread. Believing that he received Christ in the poor, and reverently

honoring Him in them, he brought Christ to himself in their persons, whose delight it is, according to the prophet, to 'give rest to the weary' (Is. 28:12). How much do those diminish the merit they receive who send out their alms but do not bring in the poor to themselves. For in this way they exclude from their houses Christ Himself, who says, 'I was a stranger and you welcomed me' (Mt. 25:35).

In order to surpass the justice of the Pharisees, as the Lord commanded (see Mt. 5:20), he had a ninth part of the produce of his fields set apart. From this the poor were fed in certain of his houses, and clothes and shoes were provided for them in these places. To those who met him he

gave coins that he carried for this purpose, and that he gave secretly either himself or through a reliable servant; sometimes when money was bequeathed for some man, he received it along with the needy, rejoicing and choosing to be joined to the poor; he distributed it at once and compensated those who had given by a generous performance of the divine office in return for the small gift."