

# Baculus Pastoralis

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By studying the various *Ordines Cassinenses*, we can reconstruct the whole history of the paschal liturgy at Monte Cassino.

In the ninth century, the paschal *vigilia* began at None on Holy Saturday, and consisted of the ancient twelve lessons with alternate gradual responsories, amongst which were the traditional *Benedictiones* which follow the Lesson from the Book of Daniel. Contrary to the use of other churches in Spain, Gaul, etc., the blessing of the candle and of the water – stripped of every allusion to baptism as being unnecessary in a monastery, the abode of a *gens æterna in qua nemo nascitur* – followed immediately after the lessons; then came the procession accompanied by the singing of a triple litany, going from the Basilica of St. Martin first to that of St. Peter, and then to the neighboring one of St. Benedict, where the Mass of the vigil was celebrated.

Towards the end of the same century – that is, in the time of Abbot Bertarius – the bells were rung when the celebrant intoned the *Gloria in Excelsis*, and after the Epistle the abbot distributed candles to those present. Vespers having been sung, the choir moved in procession to the refectory, chanting the antiphon *Vespere autem sabbati*, and it was only when the priest had recited the collect that the officiating clergy laid aside their vestments. It is well known, indeed, that among the faithful of early days, the *Triclinium* and the refectory were regarded as having an important liturgical character, and the community meal, owing to the benedictions and prayers which accompanied it, brought to mind the first years of Christianity, when the eucharistic agape was the most complete and efficacious expression of the Church's unity of life.

The blessing of the monastery of Monte Cassino took place on Easter Sunday, and that of the adjoining buildings on the Monday following, the whole community being present at the ceremony. To the singing of litanies, the precious crosses and the relics of the saints were carried in procession, so that the whole monastery might be sanctified by their passing. On the Tuesday the liturgy was solemnized in a still more dramatic form. For among our forefathers it was not regarded as something to be hidden in sanctuaries and sacristies, but as the expression of the life and polity of the Christian people in all its fullness; and, as such, was brought out into the light of day, into the free air of the streets and squares, to be greeted by the joyful cries of the populace who came to meet the clergy with smoking censers.

Thus, also on Monte Cassino, the monks of the head monastery came down on that day from the heights to share the holy joys of Easter with their brethren of the monastery of the Saviour, which lay at the foot of the Sacred Mount. The two communities met in the village of San Pietro, where the modern town of Cassino stands. The priests and other clergy of the two houses wore their finest vestments for the occasion, all the silver objects, the reliquaries, and the precious vessels were borne in procession, whilst the monks of both communities exchanged in a brotherly spirit the scriptural greeting: *benedictus qui venit in nomine Domini*. The two choirs then exchanged a fraternal embrace, and the monks of the *Salvatoris*, acting as hosts, led those of Monte Casino to the chanting of the litanies into their Basilica of St. Peter, where they together recited the Office of Terce.