

THE GREGORIAN MASS

By Fr. John Flader.

Q. I have sometimes heard of people having “Gregorian Masses” offered for the soul of a deceased person. Could you please explain what this means and how a Gregorian Mass is different from any other Mass?

A. The name “Gregorian Masses” comes from St. Gregory the Great, who was Pope from 590 to 604 A.D. Before becoming Pope, St. Gregory had been a monk in a monastery which followed the Rule of St. Benedict. He tells in his fourth book of Dialogues of a monk in the monastery called Justus who, on becoming sick and approaching death, told his brother Copiosus where he had hidden three gold coins. When Gregory heard this he was very grieved, especially since the rule of the monastery did not allow for the monks to have any property of their own.

Gregory then suggested to the prior that none of the monks should visit Justus in his sickness, so that he would be moved to repent of his sin.

He suggested that Justus’ body not be buried with those other monks but rather in some other place, along with the gold coins, as a lesson to the monks. When Justus was told why the others were not visiting him, he immediately sighed for his sin and expired.

A month later Gregory, moved by compassion, asked the prior to have 30 Masses said on consecutive days for the repose of Justus' soul. On the 30th day Copiosus had a vision in which his brother.

Justus told him that he was now in communion with God. Copiosus went to the monastery to tell the monks what he had seen.

Counting the days, the monks realised that the 30th Mass had been celebrated that very day. Copiosus was unaware that the Masses were being celebrated for his brother.

This is the origin of the "Gregorian Masses", which consist in 30 Masses being celebrated on consecutive days for the repose of the soul of a deceased person. The Masses themselves are no different from any other Mass.

Naturally, one should not expect that just because the Masses are offered the deceased person will necessarily be released from Purgatory on the 30th day, if indeed he or she was there in the first place. It is up to almighty God, ever rich in mercy, to decide the length and intensity of punishment required for each soul before they are ready for heaven.

We can be sure, nonetheless, that 30 Masses will be a big help in speeding souls on their way to eternal life. Perhaps the problem these days is people do not have enough Masses offered for their deceased relatives and friends on the assumption that because they were good people they went straight to heaven.

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