

The Medal or Cross of Saint Benedict

Origin of the Medal of Saint Benedict

For the early Christians, the cross was a favorite symbol and badge of their faith in Christ. From the writings of **St. Gregory the Great** (540-604), we know that St. Benedict had a deep faith in the Cross and worked miracles with the sign of the cross. This faith in, and special devotion to, the Cross was passed on to succeeding generations of Benedictines.

Devotion to the Cross of Christ also gave rise to the striking of medals that bore the image of St. Benedict holding a cross aloft in his right hand and his Rule for Monasteries in the other hand. Thus, the Cross has always been closely associated with the Medal of St. Benedict, which is often referred to as the Medal-Cross of St. Benedict.

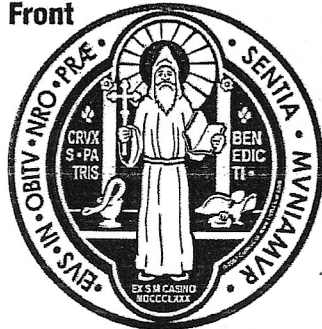
In the course of time, other additions were made, such as the Latin petition on the margin of the medal, asking that by St. Benedict's presence we may be strengthened in the hour of death, as will be explained later.

We do not know just when the first medal of St. Benedict was struck. At some point in history a series of capital letters was placed around the large figure of the cross on the reverse side of the medal. For a long time the meaning of these letters was unknown, but in 1647 a manuscript dating back to 1415 was found at the Abbey of **Metten** in Bavaria, giving an explanation of the letters. They are the initial letters of a Latin prayer of exorcism against Satan, as will be explained below.

The Jubilee Medal of Montecassino

The above features were finally incorporated in a newly designed medal struck in 1880 under the supervision of the monks of Montecassino, Italy, to mark the 1400th anniversary of the birth of St. Benedict. The design of this medal was produced at **St. Martin's Archabbey, Beuron**, Germany, at the request of the prior of Montecassino, **Very Rev. Boniface Krug OSB** (1838-1909). Prior Boniface was a native of Baltimore and originally a monk of St. Vincent Archabbey, Latrobe, Pennsylvania, until he was chosen to become prior and later **Archabbot of Montecassino**.

Front

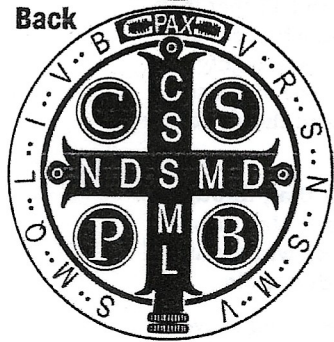


Since that time, the Jubilee Medal of 1880 has proven to be more popular throughout the Christian world than any other medal ever struck to honor St. Benedict.

Description of the Jubilee Medal

Because the Jubilee Medal of 1880 has all the important features ever associated with the Medal of St. Benedict, the following description of this medal can serve to make clear the nature and intent of any medal of St. Benedict, no matter what shape or design it may legitimately have.

Back



The Cross of Eternal Salvation

On the face of the medal is the image of Saint Benedict. In his right hand he holds the cross, the Christian's symbol of salvation. The cross reminds us of the zealous work of evangelizing and civilizing England and Europe carried out mainly by the Benedictine monks and nuns, especially for the sixth to the ninth/tenth centuries.

Rule and Raven

In St. Benedict's left hand is his Rule for Monasteries that could well be summed up in the words of the Prolog exhorting us to "walk in God's ways, with the Gospel as our guide."

On a pedestal to the right of St. Benedict is the poisoned cup, shattered when he made the sign of the cross over it. On a pedestal to the left is a raven about to carry away a loaf of poisoned bread that a jealous enemy had sent to St. Benedict.

C. S. P. B.

Above the cup and the raven are the Latin words: ***Crux s. patris Benedicti*** (The Cross of our holy father Benedict). On the margin of the medal, encircling the figure of Benedict, are the Latin words: ***Eius in obitu nostro praesentia muniamur!*** (May we be strengthened by his presence in the hour of our death!). Benedictines have always regarded St. Benedict as a special patron of a happy death. He himself died in the chapel at Montecassino while standing with his arms raised up to heaven, supported by the brothers of the monastery, shortly after St. Benedict had received Holy Communion.

Monte Cassino

Below Benedict we read: ***ex SM Casino MDCCLXXX*** (from holy Monte Cassino, 1880). This is the medal struck to commemorate the 1400th anniversary of the birth of Saint Benedict.

Reverse Side of the Medal

Crux mihi lux

On the back of the medal, the cross is dominant. On the arms of the cross are the initial letters of a rhythmic Latin prayer: ***Crux sacra sit mihi lux! Nunquam draco sit mihi dux!*** (May the holy cross be my light! May the dragon never be my guide!).

In the angles of the cross, the letters **C S P B** stand for **Crux Sancti Patris Benedicti** (The cross of our holy father Benedict).

Peace

Above the cross is the word *pax* (peace), that has been a Benedictine motto for centuries. Around the margin of the back of the medal, the letters **V R S N S M V - S M Q L I V B** are the initial letters, as mentioned above, of a Latin prayer of exorcism against Satan: ***Vade retro Satana! Nunquam suade mihi vana! Sunt mala quae libas. Ipse venena bibas!*** (Begone Satan! Never tempt me with your vanities! What you offer me is evil. Drink the poison yourself!)

An approved Blessing of the Medal of St. Benedict

V. Our help is in the name of the Lord.

R. *Who made heaven and earth.*

In the name of God, the Father + almighty, who made heaven and earth, the seas and all that is in them, I exorcise these medals against the power and attacks of the evil one. May all who use these medals devoutly be blessed with health of soul and body. In the name of the Father + almighty, of the Son + Jesus Christ our Lord, and of the Holy + Spirit the Paraclete, and in the love of the same Lord Jesus Christ who will come on the last day to judge the living and the dead, and the world by fire. **Amen.**

Let us pray. Almighty God, the boundless source of all good things, we humbly ask that, through the intercession of Saint Benedict, you pour out your blessings + upon these medals. May those who use them devoutly and earnestly strive to perform good works be blessed by you with health of soul and body, the grace of a holy life, and remission of the temporal punishment due to sin.

May they also with the help of your merciful love, resist the temptation of the evil one and strive to exercise true charity and justice toward all, so that one day they may appear sinless and holy in your sight. This we ask through Christ our Lord. **Amen.**