

LEAGUE OF SAINT PETER DAMIAN

March 23, 2019

Dear Brothers and Sister in Christ,

Welcome to the League of Saint Peter Damian.

Two-thousand nineteen *anno Domini* is the year of the League's formation.

Catholics who register with the League during 2019 are considered founding members.

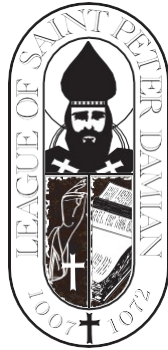
The purpose of this transitional period is to determine the structure, and traditional practices, policies and programs of the League prior to its incorporation and the establishment of a formal website.

As you already know, the League's primary purpose is to foster greater devotion to

Saint Peter Damian, a Doctor of the Church, and to promote his writings, most especially his work, the *Book of Gomorrah* – a blueprint for the moral and spiritual reform of the Catholic priesthood and religious life. The League is also dedicated to strengthening of the daily spiritual life of its clerical and lay members under the inspiration and guidance of Saint Peter Damian.

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LEAGUE OF SAINT PETER DAMIAN

STUDY GUIDE #1

“Let Your Life Always Serve as a Witness”

A Biographical Sketch of Saint Peter Damian

[Note: The following is a brief account of the life and times of Saint Peter Damian, a theological giant and moral reformer of the Middle Ages. Over the next 12 months we will be exploring his life and works in much greater depth and intimacy, but for those who are just making Peter Damian’s acquaintance, this summary can serve as a valuable introduction.]



It appears that whenever Holy Mother Church has had a great need for a special kind of saint for a particular age, God, in His infinite mercy, has never failed to fill that need. And so, in the year 1007 AD, a boy child was born to a noble but poor family in the ancient Roman city of Ravenna, who would become a Doctor of the Church, a precursor of the Hildebrand reform, and a key figure in the moral and spiritual reformation of the lax and incontinent clergy of his time.

Tradition tells us that Peter Damian's entrance into this world was initially an unwelcome event that overtaxed and somewhat embittered his already large family. He was orphaned at a young age. His biographer, John of Lodi, tells us that were it not for the solicitude of his older brother Damian, an archpriest at Ravenna, the youth might have lived out his life in obscurity as a swineherd, but God deemed otherwise. Peter's innate intellectual talents and remarkable piety in the light of great adversity were recognized by the archpriest, who plucked his younger brother from the fields and provided him with an excellent education first at Ravenna, then Faenza and finally at the University of Parma. In return, Peter acknowledged his brother's loving care by adopting Damian as his surname.

Although he excelled in his studies and quickly rose in academic ranks, Peter felt drawn to the religious rather than university life. His spirituality would be formed by his love for the *Rule of St. Benedict* and his attraction to the rigorous penance and individualistic practices of St. Romuald.

In his late twenties he was welcomed into the Benedictine hermitage of the Reform of St. Romuald at Fonte-Avellana where he eventually became prior, a position he retained until his death on February 21, 1072. He also served as Cardinal-Bishop of Ostia, an honor bestowed upon him by Pope Stephen IX in 1057. The life of the well-traveled holy monk was distinguished by his great learning and a marvelous knowledge of Holy Scripture and by great penitential acts, which served both as a rebuke and as an inspiration to his fellow monks and the secular clergy at a time when moral turpitude was endemic in clerical ranks.

Owen J. Blum, O.F.M., Saint Peter Damian's chief translator and biographer in modern times, in one of his many works on the hermit-monk, notes that for the great saint, the spiritual life was first and foremost a life of prayer, penance and reparation. Peter Damian also promoted and practiced a special devotion to the Blessed Virgin.

The two hallmarks of the holy monk's teachings on the spiritual life were his great hatred of sin and his fundamental and overriding interest in the spiritual advancement of the Catholic priesthood. As Blum states, "Peter Damian thought of the priesthood as an order of the greatest dignity. Indeed, it was the exalted nobility of this office that caused him to speak in such dire terms to priests who forgot their position and tarnished their souls with incontinence."

Peter Damian showed remarkable insight into the importance of model episcopal leadership, stating that "the example of a virtuous life" filters down from "the princes of the Church to all levels of the clergy and laity." The holy monk was equally insistent on the deposition of unworthy incumbents to the priesthood, the duty of which fell to the local bishop.

Much of the success of his program of clerical moral reform was due to the fact Peter Damian was able to closely link his own efforts with that of the Papacy. Indeed, his wise council and diplomatic skills were employed by a long succession of Popes.

Peter Damian died in the odor of sanctity on February 22, 1072, in his sixty-sixth year at Faenza while returning to Rome from a papal mission to Ravenna. Although he was never formally canonized, he was revered as a saint immediately after his death and his *cultus* has existed at Faenza, at Fonte-Avellana, at Monte Cassino, and at Cluny to the present day.

Over the centuries his body has been moved six times, each time to a more splendid setting. In 1898, Peter Damian's found his final resting place in a beautiful side chapel dedicated to the saint in the Cathedral of Faenza, seat of the Bishop of Faenza-Modigliana.



[For additional details on Saint Peter Damian's life see *New Advent Catholic Encyclopedia*, "St. Peter Damian," by Leslie A. ST. L. Toke (transcribed by Joseph C. Meyer) pp. 1-2, at <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/11764a.htm>.]

Background on the *Book of Gomorrah* and the Vice of Sodomy

[Note: Today, there is great confusion among many Catholics, both lay and clerics, concerning the nature of the vice of sodomy. Saint Peter Damian's treatise, the *Book of Gomorrah (Liber Gomorrhianus)* written in 1049 AD, contains the most extensive treatment and condemnation by any Church Father of clerical pederasty and homosexual practices. Every issue of this Study Guide will contain an excerpt from the *Book of Gomorrah* and a brief commentary on its relevance to the current state of moral chaos in the Church. The League is currently seeking permission from the Catholic University of America to reprint the entire text of the late Father Blum's translation in pamphlet form to enable members to give the widest distribution possible to the treatise. R.E.]

Church's Perennial Teaching on Sodomy

As the Church's eternal mission is the salvation of souls, so her condemnation of all sin including homosexual thoughts, words, and deeds, deliberately entertained, are joined to that of God's infinite mercy and the need for repentance and reform of one's life. To deliberately indulge in sodomy, in all its forms, is to place one's soul in danger of eternal damnation and renders the sinner incapable of any virtue on a supernatural level. Therefore, direct refutation combined with fraternal correction in the matter is an act of mercy not only for the individual caught in the vice, but as a preservative to keep others from falling into the same pit.

From Saint Peter to Saint Felix I, the early popes together with the early Church Fathers drew up Church general decrees, and later canons and pastoral and penitential codes and instituted a series of synods and councils by which their decrees in matters of faith and morals (including the immorality of all homosexual acts), were made known to the universal Church.

Pope Gregory I at the beginning of the Middle Ages used the Old Testament text from *Genesis 19: 1-25* to describe the terrible fate of Sodom and Gomorrah:

Brimstone calls to mind the foul orders of the flesh, as Sacred Scripture itself confirms when it speaks of the rain of fire and brimstone poured by the Lord upon Sodom. He had decided to punish in it the crimes of the flesh, and the very type of punishment emphasized the shame of that crime, since brimstone exhales stench and fire burns. It was, therefore, just, that the sodomites, burning with perverse desires that originated from the foul odor of the flesh, should perish at the same time by fire and brimstone, so that through this just chastisement they must realize the evil perpetrated under the impulse of a perverse desire.

Sodomy – A Vice and Crime

Throughout the Middle Ages, including the reign of Charlemagne, king of the Franks (768-814) and Holy Roman Emperor (800-814) and well beyond, the moral and legal status of sodomy remained essentially the same.

The Church viewed sodomy as a special evil and always a mortal sin when voluntarily entered into. This teaching has never changed.

At the same time, the State then considered sodomy a crime. This has changed today.

However, in the Middle Ages, the death penalty was normally reserved for sodomitical acts involving the seduction of the young, acts of violence including homosexual rape, murder or blasphemy. In such cases involving clerics and monks, the offenders were first defrocked, punished by the Church and then turned over to the Crown for final sentencing.

In keeping with traditional Church teachings handed down from the time of the Apostles, Saint Peter Damian held that all homosexual acts are crimes against Nature and therefore crimes against God who is the Author of Nature.

It is always refreshing to find an ecclesiastic whose first and primary concern in the matter of clerical sexual immorality is for God's interests, not man's, especially with regard to homosexuality in clerical ranks. Peter Damian's special condemnation of pederastic crimes by clergy against young boys and men (including those preparing for Holy Orders), tends to undermine the excuse of many American bishops and cardinals today who claim that the early

Church lacked specific knowledge and psychological insights by which to assess the seriousness of clerical homosexuality and pederasty.

As Peter Damian's treatise clearly demonstrates, the degradation of human nature as exemplified by sodomitical acts is a universal phenomenon that transcends time, place and culture.

According to Damian, the vice of sodomy "surpassed the enormity of all others":

Without fail it brings death to the body and destruction to the soul. It pollutes the flesh, extinguishes the light of the mind, expels the Holy Spirit from the temple of the human heart, and gives entrance to the devil, the stimulator of lust. It leads to error, totally removes truth from the deluded mind. ...It opens up hell and closes the gates of paradise. ...It is this vice that violates temperance, slays modesty, strangles chastity, and slaughters virginity. ...It defiles all things, sullies all things, pollutes all things. ...This vice excludes a man from the assembled choir of the Church. ...it separates the soul from God to associate it with demons. This utterly diseased queen of Sodom renders him who obeys the laws of her tyranny infamous to men and odious to God. ...She strips her knights of the armor of virtue, exposing them to be pierced by the spears of every vice. ...She humiliates her slave in the church and condemns him in court; she defiles him in secret and dishonors him in public; she gnaws at his conscience like a worm and consumes his flesh like fire ...this unfortunate man (he) is deprived of all moral sense, his memory fails, and the mind's vision is darkened. Unmindful of God, he also forgets his own identity. This disease erodes the foundation of faith, saps the vitality of hope, dissolves the bond of love. It makes away with justice, demolishes fortitude, removes temperance, and blunts the edge of prudence. Shall I say more?

A dominant theme found in Peter Damian's work is the holy monk's insistence on the responsibility of the bishop or superior of a religious order to curb and eradicate the vice of sodomy from their ranks. He minced no words in his condemnation of those prelates who refused or failed to take a strong hand in dealing with clerical sodomitical practices either because of moral indifferentism or the inability to face up to a distasteful and potentially scandalous situation.

Peter Damian did not spare those ecclesiastics who knowingly permitted sodomites to enter Holy Orders or remain in clerical ranks while continuing to pollute their office. The holy monk lashed out at "do-nothing superiors of clerics and priests," and reminded them that they should be trembling for themselves because they have become "partners in the guilt of others," by permitting "the destructive plague" of sodomy to continue in their ranks.

But he saved the bitterest blast of all for those bishops who "commit these absolutely damnable acts with their spiritual sons." "Who can expect the flock to prosper when its shepherd has sunk so deep into the bowels of the devil. ...Who will make a mistress of a cleric, or a woman of a man? Who, by his lust, will consign a son whom he had spiritually begotten for God to slavery under the iron law of Satanic tyranny?" Peter Damian thunders.

Repent and Reform Your Lives

Like every saint before him and every saint who will ever come after him, Peter Damian exhorted the cleric caught in the vice of sodomy to repent and reform his life and in the words of the Blessed Apostle Paul, "Wake up from your sleep and rise from the dead, and Christ will revive (enlighten) you." (*Eph 5:14*)ⁱ In a remarkable affirmation of the Gospel message, he warned against the ultimate sin of despairing of God's mercy and the necessity of fasting and prayer to subdue the passions:

... beware of drowning in the depths of despondency. Your heart should beat with confidence in God's love and not grow hard and impenitent, in the face of your great crime. It is not sinners, but the

wicked who should despair; it is not the magnitude of one's crime, but contempt of God that dashes one's hopes.

Then, in one of the most beautiful elocutions on the grandeur of priestly celibacy and chastity ever written, Damian reminded the wayward cleric or monk of the special place reserved in heaven for those faithful priests and monks who have willingly forsaken all and made themselves eunuchs for Christ's sake. "Their names shall be remembered forever because they have given up all for the love of God."

[The above texts are taken from Father Owen J. Blum, OFM, *Peter Damian, Letters 31-60*, part of the *Fathers of the Church - Medieval Continuation Series* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1990.)]

Saint Peter Damian On The Spiritual Life

"It is truly great to die for Christ, but not less noble to live for Him"

Saint Peter Damian's exquisite devotion to the Virgin Mary, Queen of Heaven, is reflected in the following excerpt taken from one of his many writings on the great dignity of Our Lady:

Among men he is considered noble who bears title to the excellence of his parents; but Mary, although she was born of noble family, received the distinction of the greatest nobility from Him who was begotten of her by a new kind of birth, and by her eminent offspring exceeds all human nobility. She was distinguished by the titles of ancestry, but was incomparably more illustrious by the nobility of her child. She was indeed the daughter of kings, but the mother of the King of Kings But whatever is said of you by mortal man does not equal the merits of your dignity. For human frailty cannot worthily aspire to proclaim her whom an exceeding grace has raised above the angels. We beseech you, most loving Mother of goodness and mercy, that we who rejoice in singing your praises here on earth, may merit to have the aid of your intercession in heaven;

that, as through you the Son of God deigned to come down to us, so may we be able through you to come to union with Him. (PL 144, 761 A).

Special Considerations for the Month of April

Prayers, Fasting and Almsdeeds

“But this kind is not cast out but by prayer and fasting.” [Matthew 17:20]

The issues of **prayer**, **fasting** and **almsgiving** – the triple remedy appointed by God to aid man in the attainment of salvation – are especially important to the future formation of the League of Saint Peter Damian.

A priest friend and associate of the League recently suggested that, once formally established, the League publish a handbook of **prayers** and **spiritual meditations** written by Saint Peter Damian – which is a task the League will certainly pursue.

In that same conversation, he also happened to mention that many Catholics have deformed or uninformed consciences when it comes to abstinence and fasting in the traditional sense. Hence, this short reminder to all members of the League.

The Catechism of the Council of Trent tells us that fasting is most intimately connected with prayer:

For the mind of one who is filled with food and drink, is so borne down as not to be able to raise itself to the contemplation of God, or even understand what prayer means.

In the *Summa Theologiae*, (Question 147. Fasting) Saint Thomas tells us the three-fold purpose of fasting:

First, in order to bridle the lusts of the flesh, wherefore the Apostle says (2 Corinthians 6:5-6): "In fasting, in chastity," since fasting is the guardian of chastity..."

Secondly, we have recourse to fasting in order that the mind may arise more freely to the contemplation of heavenly things: hence it is related (Daniel 10) of Daniel that he received a revelation from God after fasting for three weeks.

Thirdly, in order to satisfy for sins: wherefore it is written (Joel 2:12): "Be converted to Me with all your heart, in fasting and in weeping and in mourning." ... "Fasting cleanses the soul, raises the mind, subjects one's flesh to the spirit, renders the heart contrite and humble, scatters the clouds of concupiscence, quenches the fire of lust, kindles the true light of chastity."

Saint Thomas continues :

Now it has been stated above ... that fasting is useful as atoning for and preventing sin, and as raising the mind to spiritual things. And everyone is bound by the natural dictate of reason to practice fasting as far as it is necessary for these purposes. Wherefore fasting in general is a matter of precept of the natural law, while the fixing of the time and manner of fasting as becoming and profitable to the Christian people, is a matter of precept of positive law established by ecclesiastical authority: the latter is the Church fast, the former is the fast prescribed by nature. (<http://www.newadvent.org/summa/3147.htm>).

On the matter of almsgiving, the *Catechism of Trent* reminds us that, like fasting, it also has an intimate connection with prayer:

For what claim has he to the virtue of charity, who possessing the means of affording relief to those who depend on the assistance of others, refuses help to his neighbor and brother? How can he, whose heart is devoid of charity, demand assistance from God unless, while imploring the pardon of his sins, he at the same time humbly beg of God to grant him the virtue of charity?

In summarizing the links between prayer, fasting and almsdeeds, the *Catechism* notes:

... The wrath of god we appease by pious prayer; our offences against man we redeem by almsdeeds; the stains of our own lives we wash away by fasting.

In writing the *Book of Gomorrah* Saint Peter Damian confronted the dual sins of sodomy and pederasty in clerical and lay ranks. It is any wonder, that during the Middle Ages, sodomy was called “the devil’s congress?”

Jesus tells us that there are certain devils that can **only** be cast out by prayer and fasting. If we take Saint Peter Damian’s words to heart, there is ample proof to support the belief that sodomy, especially when it involves the destruction of innocence of a young boy, is one of those devils about whom Jesus talks.

Over the next nine months, all members of the League of Saint Peter Damian in Formation, most especially members of the clergy are asked to make suggestions on how the three-fold tasks of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving can be incorporated into the League’s work. These comments can be sent by e-mail or by letter. Thank you.

Action Line for April 2019

Each month, the League will ask its members to carry out a specific request related to the future disposition of the League.

This month we are asking our members to send or give a copy of this mailing to your local pastor, and where applicable, to send it to a friendly bishop anywhere in the world asking him to read and comment on the mailing, and asking his support for the League.

Before its formal incorporation the League will need at least one bishop’s approbation. I’ve already contacted the Ordinary of Faenza-Modigliana, Bishop Mario Toso, S.D.B. asking for his blessings and support. In dealing with certain aspects of the League’s formation, for example, indulgences or the imprimatur for prayer books, etc. it will be helpful to have the support of at least one member of the Catholic hierarchy.

Prayer Intensions for April

Your prayers are requested for faithful Catholic priests and religious the world over.

O Jesus, eternal Priest,
keep Your priests within the shelter of
Your Sacred Heart,
where none may touch them.
Keep unstained their anointed hands,
which daily touch Your Sacred Body.
Keep unsullied their lips,
daily purpled with Your Precious Blood.
Keep pure and unearthly their hearts,
sealed with the sublime mark
of the priesthood.
Let Your holy love surround them and
shield them from the world's contagion.
Bless their labours with abundant fruit
and may the souls to whom they
minister be their joy and
consolation here and in
Heaven their beautiful and
everlasting crown. Amen.

Mary Help of Christians, Mother of Priests – Pray for Us

St. Thérèse of Lisieux

A Blessed Easter to All

