

# True and False St. Benedict Medals?



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## Introduction by St. Paul Street Evangelization

In September of 2020, St. Paul Street Evangelization published an essay concerning allegedly “false” Miraculous Medals said to be in circulation.<sup>1</sup> Another claim has arisen that states there are “false” medals of St. Benedict in circulation.<sup>2</sup> Similar to the claims of “false” Miraculous Medals, it is alleged that there is a Freemasonic conspiracy that puts Masonic elements into the St. Benedict medal. After a review of the claim and the source(s) behind it, St. Paul Street Evangelization would like to issue the following information.

As it is presented, the claim that there are false St. Benedict medals in circulation appears to be dubious, spurious, and based upon ignorance of the historical facts. An older version of a St. Benedict medal was in circulation for many years. The famous Abbot of Solemnes, Dom Prosper Guéranger, wrote an essay about it that was published in 1862. Eighteen years later (1880), there was a commemoration of the 1400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the birth of St. Benedict (480). A desire to strike a new medal arose on the occasion of this anniversary, and was approved by Pope Bl. Pius IX in 1877. It became known as the “Jubilee Medal,” and its design is the one most people are familiar with today. The new medal was overseen by the monks of Beuron (Germany).

The website *Traditions-Monastiques*, an apostolate of the [Abbey of St. Joseph of Clairval](#) (France), published a very helpful article in French that covers important aspects of the history and development of the St. Benedict medal.<sup>3</sup> St. Paul Street Evangelization has translated this document into English and provides it here for the edification of the reader. We believe that it addresses satisfactorily the claim of allegedly “false” St. Benedict medals in circulation.

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<sup>1</sup> [“Concerning the Miraculous Medal: Examining an Objection.”](#) St. Paul Street Evangelization (September, 2020).

<sup>2</sup> “The Medallion of Saint Benedict – true and false.” [sanctamissa.pl](#) (Date unknown); “Saint Benedict Medal.” [sanctamatermaria.com](#) (Date unknown).

<sup>3</sup> [“Vraies et fausses médailles de saint Benoît.”](#) Traditions-Monastique (December 20, 2018).



## The portrait of St. Benedict on the back



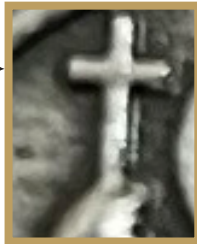
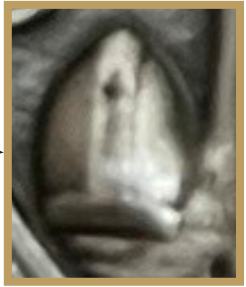


St. Benedict is represented with a cross in his hand. This alludes to different episodes of his life told by his biographer St. Gregory the Great. This disciple of St. Benedict tells how the patriarch of the monks of the West repelled the temptations, attacks and vexations of the Devil by the simple sign of the cross.

The face of St. Benedict is unknown to us, therefore, when we represent it in an image, we add attributes so that it can be identified without hesitation. Thus, on the medal of St. Benedict that Dom Guéranger took up at the beginning of his work, several attributes were represented, in addition to the cross in the hand:

- monastic cowl [cuculla],
- the rule book in hand,
- a miter on the foot,
- a crow.

## Identification of the portrait of St. Benedict

Taken separately, these attributes are not sufficient to identify the person of St. Benedict in a certain way, except perhaps the Rule. But taken together, the identification of St. Benedict becomes certain:

- the cross recalls his victories over the demon, → 
- the miter indicates that he is abbot, the patriarch of the monks of the West, → 
- the book in the hand symbolizes the monastic Rule he wrote, → 
- the crow recalls an episode in his life where this bird carried out a mission requested by St. Benedict: to throw poisoned bread where no one can find it. → 



## Different portraits of St. Benedict?

In his book, Dom Prosper Guéranger emphasizes the importance of the representation of St. Benedict and objects to certain alterations, which do not lose the title of “medal of St. Benedict” but are a serious impropriety. He rightly recalls the maintenance of the attributes that the ecclesiastical tradition assigned to each saint under pain of irreverence. But he does not say, as some people want us to believe, that all these attributes are necessary for the true medal or cross of St. Benedict.

## Essential elements of the St. Benedict Medal



Pope Benedict XIV (r. 1740-1758)  
Pierre Subleyras, Public domain,  
via [Wikimedia Commons](#)

We can therefore wonder: what are the essential elements for a medal of St. Benedict to be authentic?

In the problem at hand, our work is well facilitated by the brief of [Pope] Benedict XIV in which is described what is the medal or cross of St. Benedict. As it is a document of the Supreme Pastor, his authority cannot be questioned. Here is the way he describes the St. Benedict medal:

“...Medals known as the Cross of St. Benedict, and one side of which represents the image of St. Benedict, and the other a Cross with these letters or characters at its circumference meaning respectively the following: ...” (then comes the whole series of letters found on all medals).

The Roman Pontiff simply speaks of an image without specifying any attribute. This gives a certain freedom. It is therefore sufficient that the representation is such that it leaves no doubt about the identity of the person engraved on the medal. It is not necessary to focus on this or that detail, but to see the whole. When we look at the different models of medals of St. Benedict, we notice that they have an inscription either on the perimeter “S. Benedicti Monachorum Patriarch,” either on either side of the silhouette of St. Benedict “Crux S. P. Benedicti.” Such an inscription is sufficient to remove any doubt about the identity of the character. This inscription refers us to the iconographic tradition of the Eastern Churches according to which an icon of a saint is completed by the inscription of the name of the saint. From there, it appears that for the authenticity of a medal of St. Benedict in terms of the image of the saint, it suffices to represent the face of a monk with one or more attributes specific to St. Benedict and to engrave the name of the Holy Patriarch. In this way, no doubt is possible about the identity of the person represented.



## The PAX or IHS inscription of the medal

Reading carefully the brief of Benedict XIV, there is no mention of this inscription when he could very well have spoken of it when he carefully describes the front of the medal of St. Benedict with all the series of letters. We are therefore entitled to conclude that IHS is not a fundamental element of the St. Benedict medal.

Furthermore, it is quite possible that on the first medals, IHS was not present since it comes from St. Bernardin of Siena in the 15th century and the Jesuits who frequently used this monogram of the name of Jesus in the decoration and for the promotion of the Catholic counter-reform.

On the other hand, by recalling the origin of the PAX, it will become clearer that the IHS is not compulsory.



## The Jubilee Medal

In 1880, the Order of St. Benedict was preparing to celebrate the 1400th anniversary of the birth of the Holy Patriarch of the monks of the West. For this occasion, the Abbey of Beuron struck a new medal of St. Benedict, known as the Jubilee Medal. Instead of IHS, it includes the Benedictine PAX motto. This medal was approved by Pope Pius IX in 1877. With such approval, is it not to recognize that this medal is an authentic medal of St. Benedict? Is this not implicitly recognizing that the IHS is not an essential element of the cross of St. Benedict?



Since then, this model has become the most widespread. Many medals of St. Benedict sold on our religious shop use this model: [Traditions Monastiques [Store](#)/St. Paul Street Evangelization [Store](#)]

Some medals have both PAX and IHS (enough to satisfy everyone).



## Conclusion

From all of this, we can conclude that the concept of authenticity should not be understood in too narrow or too material a way. Based on official documents, the brief of Benedict XIV, it is easy to recognize that the supreme authority leaves certain latitudes. Pope Pius IX, approving the Jubilee Medal, confirms this interpretation. We cannot simply rely on the authority of Dom Guéranger to discern the real medals of St. Benedict from the false as do certain articles that we can read on the Internet.



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