

Fr Brian gives us his account of the Gregorian Chant Forum

From the evening of 13 July to the morning of 17 July Quarr and St Cecilia's Abbey once again jointly hosted the Gregorian Chant Forum. Our international group comprised of monks, nuns, religious and lay people providing for us a rich fusion of academic expertise with the lived-out day to day monastic experience of the Chant. We were delighted to welcome back as our main speaker Dr. Guidrius Gapsys, a Lithuanian musicologist who teaches at the Paris Conservatory. He was supported by presentations from Sr Bernadette of St. Cecilia's and Fr Xavier, Prior of Quarr.

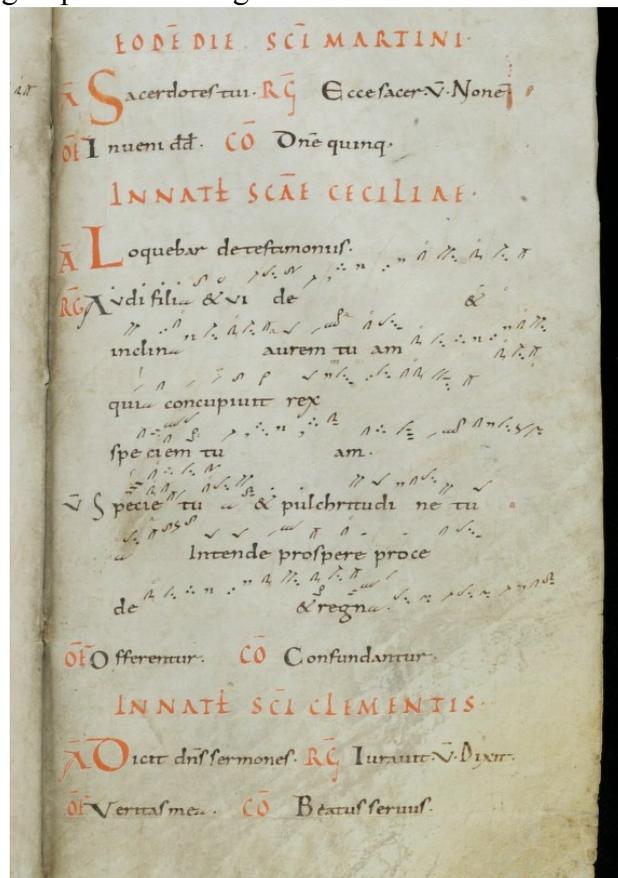
Our Forum this time centred on chants of Our Lady with particular focus on the Assumption. Guidrius demonstrated how Gregorian Chant develops like a "living body". The oldest manuscripts for the Assumption come from Corby Abbey (Picardy, France) about the 9th century. This predates the usage of neumes and so the cantors had to memorize the melodies. In these chant texts there was no explicit mention of the feast, all was simply taken from Psalm 44. The introit "Vultum tuum" which we still sing today on this feast is from this time. Neumes appear with the texts a century later.

The figure opposite shows a page from a manuscript of the St Gall monastery in Switzerland from the early 10th century. This so-called Cantatorium of St Gall is the earliest complete extant musical manuscript with neume notation. It contains the solo chants of the Mass and constitutes one of the main sources for the reconstruction of Gregorian Chant. Neumes were an *aide de memoir* for the cantor indicating the rhythm and identifying the important notes. The page shows the gradual *Audi Filia*. Note that the neume over the first four syllables is a punctum (dot) indicating one note per syllable whereas the next syllable has a torculus (slanted S) indicating three notes for the 'a' of 'filia'. In subsequent centuries composers added new texts explicitly referring to the feast but at times they did so by incorporating them into old melodies. This was

done in a manner which indicates that the composer was mindful of the words of the old text he is replacing and the theological statement which can be understood by comparing the old text with the new.

Another important element in the structure of a Chant piece is its mode. Sr Bernadette noticed a certain persistent presence of the second mode in the Chants of Our Lady. Although the late Middle Ages description of the modes attributed "tristis" (sorrowful) to the second mode, Sr Bernadette argues that this is incorrect. Structured around the minor third re-fa, it is a 'bottom heavy' mode, with a definite pull downwards. It has a small structural *ambitus*. She suggests that 'poverty of spirit' is a better characterization of this mode and thus very suited to Our Lady.

Our week of singing and the mass chants for each day was expertly directed by Fr Xavier who inspired us both by his enthusiasm and his notes on the spirituality of the pieces. He transformed us from a collection of disparate groups to one Gregorian Choir!



Audi Filia: St. Gallen, Stiftsbibliothek, Cod. Sang. 359, p. 137 (<http://www.e-codices.unifr.ch>)