

been burned and the monks ill-treated by the anti-reform party. These events still further increased the repute of Vallombrosa.

After the founder's death the order spread rapidly until in 1808, Napoleon's troops plundered Vallombrosa, and the monastery lay deserted until 1815. It was finally suppressed by the Italian Government in 1866. A few monks remain to look after the church, but the abbey buildings have become a school of forestry founded in 1870. Vallombrosa is also a health resort. The decline of the order may be ascribed to the hard fate of the motherhouse and to the perpetual wars which ravaged Italy. Practically all the surviving monasteries were suppressed during the course of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Passignano, where St John Gualbert is buried has survived along with several others.

St. John adopted the Rule of St Benedict but added greatly to its austerity and penitential character. His idea was to unite the ascetic advantages of the eremitic life to a life in community, while avoiding the dangers of the former. Severe scourging was inflicted for any breach of rule, silence was perpetual, poverty most severely enforced. The rule of enclosure was so strict that the monks might not go out even on an errand of mercy. The main point of divergence lay in the prohibition of the manual work, which is prescribed by St. Benedict. St. John's choir monks were to be pure contemplatives while lay-brothers attended to the secular business.



Saint John Gualbert

Feast Day: July 12



**The Figure on the Crucifix bowed Its head to him
in recognition of his generosity and,
by the same token, forgiving him all his sins.**

*(excerpted from: www.newadvent.org; www.catholic.org; [//vultus.stblogs.org](http://vultus.stblogs.org);
www.holyspiritinteractive.net)

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Saint John Gualbert

*Saint John Gualberto, son of the noble Florentine Gualbert Visdomini, was born in 985 (or 995), and died at Passignano, near Florence, Italy on July 12, 1073. He was canonized in 1193. Although he enjoyed the benefits of an early Christian education, his youthful heart was soon attracted to the vanities of the world. A painful incident was the means God made use of, to open his eyes. Hugo, his only brother, had been murdered by a man who was supposed to have been Hugo's best friend. Supported by his father and fed by his own anger, John decided to track down his brother's killer and resolved to avenge his death.

John Gualbert's monastic vocation unfolded in dramatic circumstances. As a medieval Florentine nobleman, he lived in an age and culture that, in spite of the Gospel, exalted vengeance as a matter of honor. When his elder brother was murdered, John felt compelled to avenge him.

On a certain Good Friday, riding through a narrow mountain pass, John came face to face with his brother's killer. The man was alone. The place was isolated. There was no escape. John drew his sword, ready to exact a bloody vengeance. The murderer threw himself upon the ground with arms outstretched in the form of a cross, and, in the Name of Jesus Crucified, begged John's forgiveness.

Cut to the heart by the grace of the Cross, John dropped his sword, embraced his enemy, and on his way home, he entered the Benedictine Church at San Miniato to pray, and the figure on the crucifix bowed its head to him in recognition of his generosity and,

by the same token, forgiving him all his sins. This story forms the subject of Burne-Jones's picture "The Merciful Knight", and has been adapted by Shorthouse in "John Inglesant" also, a splendid stained-glass window telescopes the story into one scene. John is shown as a young nobleman. With his eyes fixed on the image of the Crucified, he is embracing his enemy, the murderer of his brother.

He now entered the Order of Saint Benedict at San Miniato, but left that monastery to lead a more perfect life. His attraction was for the cenobitic (community living) not eremitic (hermit) life, so after staying for some time with the monks at Camaldoli, he settled at Vallombrosa, where he founded his monastery a little before 1038. Here it is said he and his first companions lived for some years as hermits, but this is rejected by Martène as inconsistent with his reason for leaving Camaldoli.

The holy lives of the first monks at Vallombrosa attracted considerable attention and brought many requests for new foundations, but there were few postulants, since few could endure the extraordinary austerity of the life. Thus only one other monastery, that of San Salvi at Florence, was founded during this period. But when John mitigated his rule somewhat, three more monasteries were founded and three others reformed and united to the order during his lifetime.

In the struggle of the popes against simony (paying for sacraments), the early Vallumbrosans took a considerable part, of which the most famous incident is the ordeal by fire undertaken successfully by St Peter Igneus in 1068 (see Delarc, op. cit.). Shortly before this the monastery of San Salvi had