

December 7

Ambrose, Church father and pastor

Ambrose (339-397) Church father and pastor

On Holy Saturday of the year 397, Ambrose, a Church father and one of the most beloved pastors in Christian antiquity, died in his bishop's residence in Milan.

Born into a noble family, Ambrose began training for a political career at a young age. He served as governor of the Roman provinces of Liguria and Emilia, and in this capacity he became known for the integrity of his conduct. After the death of Ausenzio, Milan's Arian bishop, Ambrose was elected pastor of that city by popular acclaim, even though he was still a catechumen.

Aware of his lack of preparation, especially in theology, Ambrose came to terms with his poverty and set out in search of the one thing necessary, Christ's presence in the believer's soul. He delved into Scripture and the writings of the Eastern fathers, and in just a few years' time he had acquired an extraordinary *sensus fidei*.

Having focused his gaze on the essentials of Christian faith, he invited the flock God had entrusted to him to do the same, and in this way he did much to draw together a society that was losing its cohesion.

Ambrose worked to regenerate the spirituality of the clergy, and he strongly encouraged the faithful to recognize the importance of their Christian witness. He promoted religious life, especially for women, seeing in it a possibility to renew eschatological tension in the Church at a time in which it was being weakened by the newly established Christian regime.

A defender of the poor and weak, Ambrose spoke assertively against usury and the appropriation of the world's wealth in the hands of a few. In the name of evangelical *parresia*, he openly opposed bishops and emperors who had fallen into moral or doctrinal error, without ever letting his invective overshadow the message of God's unfailing mercy towards those who had erred.

His example made a deep impression upon Augustine, who asked to be baptized by Ambrose on Easter night of the year 387.

PRAYER

Our God,
you gave us in Ambrose
an example of apostolic strength
and a shepherd faithful to his flock:
continue to raise up holy guides in your Church today
who will lead us to you with courage and wisdom.
Through Christ our Lord.

BIBLICAL READINGS

1 Tim 6:11-19; Jn 10:1-10

THE CHURCHES REMEMBER...

ANGLICANS:

Ambrose, bishop of Milan, teacher of the faith

WESTERN CATHOLICS:

Ambrose, bishop and doctor of the church

Nicholas (d. 343), bishop (Spanish-Mozarabic calendar)

COPTS AND ETHIOPIANS (28 hatur/hedar):

Sarapamon (3rd-4th cent.), bishop of Niku, martyr (Coptic Church)

Liqanos (5th-6th cent.), monk (Ethiopian Church)

LUTHERANS:

Witnesses to the point of bloodshed of «Thorner Blutgericht» (d. 1724), in Poland

MARONITES:

Ambrose, bishop of Milan, confessor

ORTHODOX CHRISTIANS AND GREEK CATHOLICS:

Ambrose, bishop of Milan

Philothea of Arges (d. 1218), martyr (Romanian Church)

Philothea, hermit (Bulgarian Church)

EAST SYRIAN ORTHODOX:

Ambrose, bishop (Malabar Church)