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Seasoning the Seasons™

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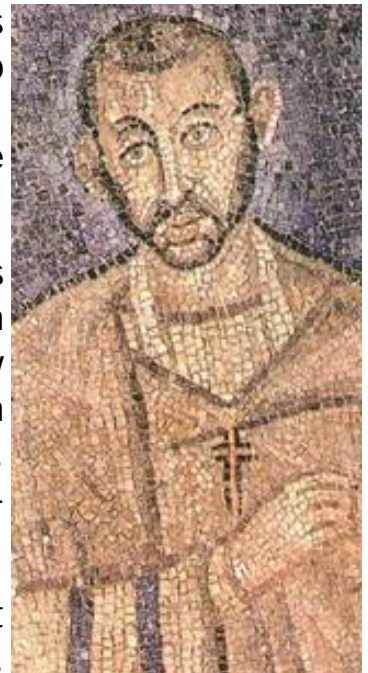
Saint Ambrose

Saint Ambrose, Bishop & Doctor of the Church

The “honey-tongued” preacher, Ambrose, was born in Trier (Germany) around the year 340. His father was the prefect, or governor, of this area. After his father’s death, Ambrose and his sister returned to Rome with their mother. In Rome, he was classically educated. He was then sent to what is now northern Italy as governor. He lived in the city of Milan.

Ambrose was very involved in the issues of his day and was very concerned about justice. At that time there was conflict in the Church, especially due to the Arian heresy. Arius incorrectly taught that Jesus Christ had not always existed, but had been created by God the Father, and was not equal to God the Father. There were people who followed this teaching of Arius, and others who did not.

At this time in the Church’s history, it was the people, not the Pope, who chose bishops. So when the Bishop of Milan died, the people of Milan gathered to choose their next bishop. But because of the Arian heresy, people were divided and arguments broke out as to who should be the next Bishop of Milan. As governor of this area, Ambrose was sent in to settle the argument. At this point in his life, Ambrose was a catechumen (someone preparing for baptism). The story goes that a little boy in the crowd shouted out that Ambrose should be the next bishop, so by popular acclaim the people chose Ambrose as the new Bishop of Milan. He was baptized and ordained a priest and on December 7, 374 was ordained Bishop of Milan.



Mosaic of St. Ambrose
St. Ambrogio Church in Milan

Bishop Ambrose studied Scripture and theology and became a very famous preacher. When Augustine came to Milan, followed by his mother, Monica, Ambrose

was very influential in their lives. Ambrose was Monica's spiritual guide. When she became confused at the difference in the practice of fasting in Rome from her native North Africa, she asked Ambrose for advice. He told her that when in Rome you should do as the Romans do! We still use this saying today. And eventually, Augustine was baptized by Bishop Ambrose.



Augustine Baptized by St. Ambrose
Nicolo di Pietro, 1415

Bishop Ambrose continued to be very outspoken, very involved in the issues of his day, and a very strong defender of his faith. One time, when the Empress Justina, mother of the Emperor Valentinian, wanted to give two churches to the Arian followers, Ambrose intervened and led a protest. He and his followers refused to leave the Cathedral for a week until the Empress backed down. During this week in the Cathedral, when the people became disgruntled, Bishop Ambrose calmed them by having them sing hymns he had written. Yes, Ambrose also wrote beautiful hymns, some of which we still sing today, such as the Advent hymn, "*Savior of the Nations Come!*"

Another example of Bishop Ambrose's outspoken defense of justice involved the Emperor Theodosius. As an act of retaliation, in the year 390 Theodosius ordered the massacre of numerous innocent people in Thessalonica (a city in northern Greece). Bishop Ambrose denounced this sinful action, and exiled Theodosius from the Church and made him do public penance.

Bishop Ambrose died on Holy Saturday in the year 397. In 1298, Saint Ambrose was declared a Doctor of the Church by Pope Boniface VIII.

Saint Ambrose is the patron saint of Milan, Italy, where he is buried in the church named for him, Saint Ambrogio. Each year in the city of Milan, the famous La Scala Opera House begins its season on December 7th, the feast of Saint Ambrose.

Saint Ambrose is also the patron saint of bees, beekeepers, and wax workers. In art, Saint Ambrose is often depicted with a bee or beehive. Recall that he was called the honey-tongued preacher because of his preaching



Saint Ambrose forbids Emperor Theodosius I
to enter the Church
Anthonis van Dyck, 17th Century

skills. A legend grew out of this description. People began to say that as an infant, bees flew in and out of Ambrose's mouth carrying honey. Honey was also likened to "ambrosia," which sounds a lot like the name Ambrose! Ambrosia is something very sweet to taste and smell, and in Greek mythology was called the food of the gods.

Celebrate Saint Ambrose's feast day each year on December 7th. Listen to opera, sing the wonderful Advent hymn which Saint Ambrose composed ("Savior of the Nations, Come"), eat some Milanese food, have some honey, and remember Bishop Ambrose, the honey-tongued preacher people chose as their bishop before he was even baptized!

