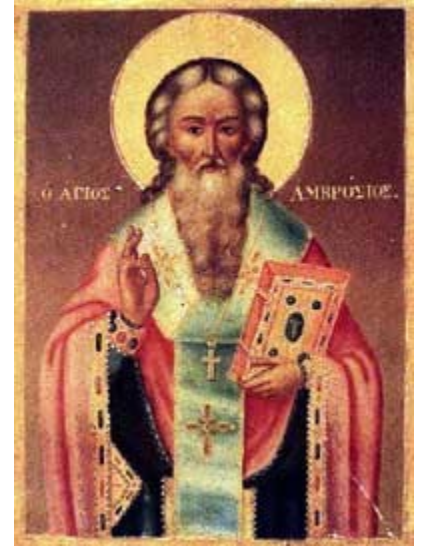


AMBROSE OF MILAN

BISHOP AND DOCTOR (7 DEC 397)

Ambrose was governor of Northern Italy, with its capital at Milan. When the see of Milan fell vacant, it seemed likely that rioting would result, since the city was evenly divided between Arians and Athanasians. (*Explanatory Note:* Athanasians affirm that the Logos or Word (John 1:1) is fully God in the same sense that the Father is, while Arians affirm that the Logos is a creature, the first being created by the Father. East Orthodox, Roman Catholics, Anglicans, Lutherans, Prebyterians, Reformed, Baptists, Methodists, etc. are Athanasians. The Watchtower Society (J's Witnesses), the Philippine group called the Iglesia ni Christi (spelling?), and some other groups are Arians. The Unitarians started out as Arians, and some of them still hold this position.) Ambrose went to the meeting where the election was to take place, and appealed to the crowd for order and good will on both sides. He ended up being elected bishop with the support of both sides. He gave away his wealth, and lived in simplicity. By his preaching, he converted the diocese to the Athanasian position, except for the Goths and some members of the Imperial Household. (*Note:* The Arian emperor Constantius (son of Constantine the Great) had sent missionaries (Arians, of course) to convert the Gothic tribes. The Goths were the chief source of mercenary troops for the Empire. Thus for many years the Army was Arian although a majority of civilians were Athanasian.) On one occasion, the Empress ordered him to turn over a church to the Arians so that her Gothic soldiers could worship in it. Ambrose refused, and he and his people occupied the church. Ambrose composed Latin hymns in the rhythm of "Praise God from Whom all blessings flow," and taught them to the people, who sang them in the church as the soldiers surrounded it. The Goths were unwilling to attack a hymn-singing congregation, and Ambrose won that dispute.



He subsequently won another dispute, when the Emperor, enraged by a crowd who defied him, ordered them all killed by his soldiers. When he next appeared at church, Ambrose met him at the door and said, "You may not come in. There is blood on your hands." The emperor finally agreed to do public penance and to promise that thereafter he would never carry out a sentence of death without a forty-day delay after pronouncing it. Less creditable, to modern Christians, is Ambrose's dispute with the emperor when certain Christians burned a Jewish synagogue, and the emperor commanded them to make restitution. Ambrose maintained that no Christian could be compelled to provide money for the building of a non-Christian house of worship, no matter what the circumstances.

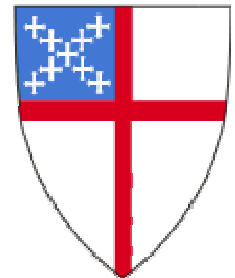
Ambrose was largely responsible for the conversion of St. Augustine. The hymn *Te Deum Laudamus* ("We praise Thee, O God") was long thought to have been composed by

Ambrose in thanksgiving for that conversion. The current opinion is that Ambrose did not write it, but that he may well have written the Creed known as the Athanasian Creed. He is perhaps the first writer of Christian hymns with rhyme and (accentual) meter, and northern Italy still uses his style of plainchant, known as Ambrosian chant, rather than the more widespread Gregorian chant. On the negative side, many Christians will regret his contribution to increased preoccupation with the relics of martyrs. He died 4 April 397, but (because this date so often falls in Holy Week or Easter Week) he is commonly remembered on the anniversary of his consecration as bishop, 7 December.

Ambrose is regarded as one of the Eight Great Doctors (=Teachers) of the Undivided Church. The list includes four Latin (Western) Doctors (Ambrose, Jerome, Augustine, and Pope Gregory the Great), and four Greek (Eastern) Doctors (Athanasius, John Chrysostom, Basil the Great, and Gregory of Nazianzus -- not to be confused with Gregory of Nyssa, the brother of Basil).

by James Kiefer

**The Lessons Appointed for Use
on the Feast of
Ambrose
Bishop of Milan, 397
December 7**



The Collect

O God, you gave your servant Ambrose grace eloquently to proclaim your righteousness in the great congregation, and fearlessly to bear reproach for the honor of your Name: Mercifully grant to all bishops and pastors such excellence in preaching and faithfulness in ministering your Word, that your people may be partakers with them of the glory that shall be revealed; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

The First Lesson

Ecclesiasticus 2:7-11,16-18

You who fear the Lord, wait for his mercy; do not stray, or else you may fall. You who fear the Lord, trust in him, and your reward will not be lost. You who fear the Lord, hope for good things, for lasting joy and mercy. Consider the generations of old and see: has anyone trusted in the Lord and been disappointed? Or has anyone persevered in the fear of the Lord and been forsaken? Or has anyone called upon him and been neglected? For the Lord is compassionate and merciful; he forgives sins and saves in time of distress. Those who fear the Lord seek to please him, and those who love him are filled with his law. Those who fear the Lord prepare their hearts, and humble themselves before him. Let us fall into the hands of the Lord, but not into the hands of mortals; for equal to his majesty is his mercy, and equal to his name are his works.

The Psalm

Psalm 27:5-11 Page 617, BCP

5 One thing have I asked of the LORD;
one thing I seek; *
that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days
of my life;
6 To behold the fair beauty of the LORD *
and to seek him in his temple.
7 For in the day of trouble he shall keep me safe
in his shelter; *
he shall hide me in the secrecy of his dwelling
and set me high upon a rock.
8 Even now he lifts up my head *
above my enemies round about me.
9 Therefore I will offer in his dwelling an oblation
with sounds of great gladness; *
I will sing and make music to the LORD.
10 Hearken to my voice, O LORD, when I call; *
have mercy on me and answer me.
11 You speak in my heart and say, "Seek my face." *
Your face, LORD, will I seek.

The Gospel

Luke 12:35-37,42-44

Jesus said to his disciples, "Be dressed for action and have your lamps lit; be like those who are waiting for their master to return from the wedding banquet, so that they may open the door for him as soon as he comes and knocks. Blessed are those slaves whom the master finds alert when he comes; truly I tell you, he will fasten his belt and have them sit down to eat, and he will come and serve them. And the Lord said, "Who then is the faithful and prudent manager whom his master will put in charge of his slaves, to give them their allowance of food at the proper time? Blessed is that slave whom his master will find at work when he arrives. Truly I tell you, he will put that one in charge of all his possessions."