

Saint of the Month for December 2012

(A monthly series compiled by Tom Quinlan)

**Saint Ambrose, Bishop and Doctor of the Church**  
**Friday, December 7**

St. Ambrose was born in 340 A.D., and served the imperial Roman government while living in Milan, in the northern part of modern day Italy. He was baptized and elected bishop of the city by popular acclaim (the church had different procedures then!). He distinguished himself by his apostolic zeal, service to the poor, and effective care of all the faithful. He was a powerful and influential preacher. He defended the official doctrine of the Church against the Arians, who claimed that Jesus was created and, therefore, not divine, by his writings and actions.

(Arius was a monk in Alexandria, Egypt, who was excommunicated in 319 A.D., although this heresy lasted for centuries. The Council of Nicea in 325 A.D. specifically addressed and condemned his proposition, and declared that Jesus the Christ is the Son of God and of the same substance as the Father. The Council of Constantinople in 381 A.D. affirmed Nicea, and also taught the consubstantiality of the Holy Spirit; these wordings are reflected in the English translation of the Creed from Nicea and Constantinople that we have today in the Roman Missal, Third Edition.)

Ambrose's work in the service of God moved the reluctant Augustine, later a great saint himself, to be converted and baptized by St. Ambrose. Ambrose died in 397 A.D. His commemoration is given the rank of Obligatory Memorial. (Magnificat, December 2012; Daily Roman Missal, Third Edition; Catholic Dictionary)

A number of prayers and chants and rituals are attributed to (or perhaps were directly written by) St. Ambrose. These include the Ambrosian Chant and the Ambrosian Rite.

I have included at the end a very good prayer of preparation for Mass that is his legacy; I think that many of us might have said such prayers (especially shorter ones!) in the past, but that the practice might have fallen somewhat out of use. I found this prayer very useful and comprehensive.

The Ambrosian Chant is a set of melodies attributed to St. Ambrose or his followers for use in the Ambrosian Rite of Milan, as distinguished from the Gregorian Chants (Pope St. Gregory I, the Great, Pope from 590 to 604 A.D.) of the Roman Rite. (The Catholic Church today has multiple rites, with the Roman or Latin rite the most common; all these rites are in communion with the Pope, as distinguished from the multiple Orthodox churches, which are not.)

The Ambrosian Rite for the Mass and Divine Office (the Liturgy of the Hours) prevailed for centuries in the territory of the Archdiocese of Milan, and was attributed to St. Ambrose. When Vatican II reformed the liturgy, the Ambrosian Rite was brought into conformity with the Roman Rite (1976), but in a way that respected its traditions. Some

variations in the Divine Office and the Mass (notably, the offertory procession before the Creed) were continued.

**Collect from the Mass of St. Ambrose:**

O God, who made the Bishop Saint Ambrose  
a teacher of the Catholic faith  
and a model of apostolic courage,  
raise up in your Church men after your own heart  
to govern her with courage and wisdom.  
Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,  
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
one God, for ever and ever. (Roman Missal, Third Edition)

Not all of us have such great influence over the lives of others, but we can try to live our lives in a way that might help others to be attracted to God and Jesus. Most saints are not canonized saints, so maybe someone might be helped along the road to sainthood by our example. Saint Ambrose, pray for us!

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**Prayer of Saint Ambrose (Preparation for Mass)**

I draw near, loving Lord Jesus Christ,  
to the table of your most delightful banquet  
in fear and trembling,  
a sinner, presuming not upon my own merits,  
but trusting rather in your goodness and mercy.  
I have a heart and body defiled by my many offenses,  
a mind and tongue  
over which I have kept no good watch.

Therefore, O loving God, O awesome Majesty,  
I turn in my misery, caught in snares,  
to you the fountain of mercy,  
hastening to you for healing,  
flying to you for protection;  
and while I do not look forward to having you as Judge,  
I long to have you as Savior.

To you, O Lord, I display my wounds,  
to you I uncover my shame.  
I am aware of my many and great sins,  
for which I fear,  
but I hope in your mercies,  
which are without number.

Look upon me, then, with eyes of mercy,  
Lord Jesus Christ, eternal King,

God and Man, crucified for mankind.  
Listen to me, as I place my hope in you,  
have pity on me, full of miseries and sins,  
you, who will never cease  
to let the fountain of compassion flow.

Hail, O Saving Victim,  
offered for me and for the whole human race  
on the wood of the Cross.  
Hail, O noble and precious Blood,  
flowing from the wounds  
of Jesus Christ, my crucified Lord,  
and washing away the sins of all the world.

Remember, Lord, your creature,  
whom you redeemed by your Blood.  
I am repentant of my sins,  
I desire to put right what I have done.  
Take from me, therefore, most merciful Father,  
all my iniquities and sins,  
so that, purified in mind and body,  
I may worthily taste the Holy of Holies.

And grant that this sacred foretaste  
of your Body and Blood  
which I, though unworthy, intend to receive,  
may be the remission of my sins,  
the perfect cleansing of my faults,  
the banishment of shameful thoughts,  
and the rebirth of right sentiments;  
and may it encourage  
a wholesome and effective performance  
of deeds pleasing to you  
and be a most firm defense of body and soul  
against the snares of my enemies.

Amen. (Roman Missal, Third Edition)