

## 57// OF ST. AMBROSE

**S**t. Ambrose was son of Ambrose, provost of Rome, of whom it happed as he lay in his cradle in the hall of the pratorium, that there came a swarm of bees which fell on his visage and his mouth, and after, they departed and flew up in the air so high that they might not be seen. When this was done, the father, which was hereof dismayed, said: If this child live, there shall be some great thing of him.

After, when he was a little grown, he beheld his mother and his sister, which was a sacred virgin, kiss the priests' hand when they offered, and he playing with his sister put forth his hand for to kiss, and said that so behoved her to do to him. And she, not understanding him, refused it.

### THE PEOPLE OF MILAN CHOOSE AMBROSE BISHOP

**A**fter, he was set to school at Rome, and became to be so good a clerk that he determined the causes of the palace, and therefore Valentinian the emperor delivered him to govern, two provinces named Liguria and Æmilia. Then when he came into Milan it happed that the bishop was dead, and the people were assembled to provide for another, but, between the Arians and the good Christian men, for the election, fell a great sedition and discord. And Ambrose for to appease this sedition went thither, and the voice of a child was heard saying: Ambrose ought to be bishop: and anon all the people accorded thereto wholly, and began for to cry: Ambrose! Ambrose!

But Ambrose defended as much as he might, and alway the people cried: Ambrose! Then for to make the people cease, he went out of the church, and went up on a scaffold, and made the people to be beaten, against the usage and custom, for to let them, that they should name him no more. But yet they left not for all that, but the people said: Thy sin be upon us.

Then he being sore troubled, went home, and suffered common women to enter openly into his house, to the end that when the people saw that, they should revoke their election; but for all that they cried as they did tofore and said: Thy sins be upon us.

When St. Ambrose saw that he might not empesch the election he fled away, but the people awaited upon him and took him at the issue of the gate, and kept him so long till they had

*Ambrose is said of a stone named ambra, which is much sweet, odorant and precious, and also it is much precious in the church, and much sweet smelling in deeds and in words. Or Ambrose may be said of ambra and syos which is as much to say as God, for Ambrose is as much to say as amber of God, for Ambrose felt God in him, and God was smelled and odoured by him over all where as he was. Or he was said of ambor in Greek, which is to say as father of light, and of sior, that is a little child that is a father of many sons by spiritual generation, clear and full of light in exposition of holy Scripture, and was little in his humble conversation. Or thus as is said in the glossary, Ambrose is odour and savour celestial, he was odour of heaven by great renomee smelling, savour by contemplation within him, an honeycomb by sweet exposition of scriptures, meat of angels by his glorious life. And Paulinus, bishop of Volusian, wrote his life unto St. Austin.*

grant of the emperor. And when the emperor knew hereof he had great joy, because that the judge that he had sent for the provinces was chosen to be their bishop, and also he was glad because his word was accomplished, for the emperor said to Ambrose when he sent him thither: Go, said he, and abide not there as a judge but as a bishop.

St. Ambrose in the meanwhile that they abode the answer of the emperor fled yet away, but he was taken again and was baptized, for he was not tofore baptized, how well that he was Christian in will. And the eighth day after he was consecrate and stalled bishop of Milan. And four years after that he went to Rome, and there his sister, the virgin, kissed his hand as of a priest, and he smiling said: Lo! as I told thee, now thou kissest my hand as of a priest.

### **CONFLICT WITH THE EMPRESS JUSTINA AND THE ARIANS**

**I**t happed after that, when St. Ambrose went to another city to the election of a bishop, Justina the empress, and others of the sect of the Arians would not consent to the good Christian men, but would have one of their sect. Then one of the virgins of the empress, much fair, took St. Ambrose and drew him by his vestments and would have made him to be beaten because he would not hold the party of the women.

Then St. Ambrose said to her: If I be not worthy to be a bishop, yet thou oughtest not to lay hand upon me ne none other bishop, thou hast laid hand on me, thou oughtest much redoubt and dread the judgment of God. And therefore God confirmed his sentence on her, for the next day she was borne to her grave and was dead. Thus was she rewarded for the villainy that she had done, and all the other were thereby sore afraid.

After this, when he was returned to Milan he suffered many assaults and persecutions of the empress Justina, for she moved, by gifts and by honours, much people against St. Ambrose, and many there were that enforced them to send him in exile, and among all others there was one mounted in so great madness and fury against him, that he hired him an house by the church because he would have therein a cart for to set St. Ambrose thereon and lead him in to exile. But that same fell to him, for he himself was sent in exile in the same cart the same day that he would have led away St. Ambrose. To whom yet St. Ambrose did good for evil, for he ministered to him his costs and necessaries. St. Ambrose also established in the church, song and offices at Milan first.

There were at that time in Milan many men vexed and beset with devils, which cried with high voice that St. Ambrose tormented them thus, but the empress Justina and the Arians said that St. Ambrose made them to say so for money that he gave to them. Then it happed that one of the Arians was out of his mind and said thus: Be they all tormented as I am that consent not to St. Ambrose, and therefore the other Arians drowned him in a deep piscine or pit.

There was another heretic and an Arian, a sharp man and so hard that he was inconvertible, because no man might convert him to the faith. On a time he heard St. Ambrose preach, and he saw at his ear an angel that told him all that he preached, and when he had perceived this he began to sustain the faith to which he had been contrary.

### **ST. AMBROSE AND THE ENCHANTER**

**A**fter this it happened that an enchanter called devils to him and sent them to St. Ambrose for to annoy and grieve him, but the devils returned and said that they might not approach to his gate because there was a great fire all about his house. And this enchanter, after, when he was tormented of the provost for certain trespasses, he cried and said that he was tormented of St. Ambrose.

### **THE DEVIL'S FEAR OF ENTERING MILAN**

**T**here was a man that had a devil within him and after went to Milan, and anon as he entered the city, the devil left him, and as soon as he went out of the city the devil re-entered in him again. Then he demanded him why he did so, and he answered because he was afeard of Ambrose.

### **AN ATTEMPT ON HIS LIFE**

**A**fter, it happened that a man being conducted and hired of Justina the empress, went to the bedside of St. Ambrose and would have put and riven his sword through his body, but anon his arm was dried up.

### **A DEVIL ACCUSES ST. AMBROSE**

**A**nother that was vexed with a devil said that St. Ambrose tormented him, but St. Ambrose made him to be still, for[, he said,] Ambrose tormenteth none, but that doth the envy of thee, for thou seest men ascend from whence thou art fallen, and that is it which tormenteth thee, for Ambrose cannot be so blown and swollen as thou art; then was he still and spake not.

### **THE LAUGHING MAN**

**W**hen St. Ambrose went into the town he saw a man laugh because he saw another fall, then said Ambrose to him: Thou that laughest, beware that thou fall not also, and after he fell, and thus was he taught that he should not mock his fellow.

### **THE JUDGE WHO BARRED ST. AMBROSE FROM THE PALACE**

**O**n a time St. Ambrose went unto the palace for to pray for a poor man, but the judge made to close the gate that he might not enter in; then St. Ambrose said: Thou shalt come for to enter into the church, but thou shalt not enter, and yet shall the gates be open. And so it happened that after, the judge doubted his enemies and went to the church, but he might not enter in, and yet the gates were open.

### **HIS QUALITIES**

**S**t. Ambrose was of so great abstinence that he fasted every day save the Sunday or a solemn feast. He was of so great largess that he gave all to poor people and retained nothing for

himself. He was of so great compassion that when any confessed to him his sin, he wept so bitterly that he would make the sinner to weep. He was of so great doubt that, when it was told to him of the death of any bishop, he would weep so sore that unnethe he might be comforted, and when it was demanded him why he wept for the death of good men, for he ought better to make joy because they went to heaven, then he answered: I weep not because they go tofore me, but because that unnethe and with great pain may any be found for to do well such offices. He was of so great steadfastness and so established in his purpose that he would not leave, for dread ne for grief that might be done to him, to reprove the emperor ne the other great men when they did things that they ought not to do, ne he would flatter no man.

### **THE MISSHAPEN MAN**

**T**here was brought once tofore him a man which was grievously mismade; then said St. Ambrose: The body must be delivered to the devil and that the flesh go to the death, by which the spirit may be saved. Unnethe was the word out of his mouth but the devil began to torment him.

### **THE RICH MAN**

**A**fter, as it is said, on a time he went to Rome, and when he was on a time by the way harboured with a rich man, St. Ambrose began to demand him of his estate. That rich man answered: Sir, mine estate is happy enough and glorious, for I have riches enough, servants, varlets, children, nephews, cousins, friends, and kinsmen which serve me, and all my works and besoins come to my will, ne I have never thing that may anger ne trouble me. Then said St. Ambrose to them that were with him: Flee we hence, for our Lord God is not here, haste you fair children, haste you and let us abide here no longer lest the vengeance of God take us, and that we be not wrapped in the sins of these people.

They departed and fled anon, but they were not gone far but that the earth opened and swallowed in all the house of this rich man, and there abode not as much as the step ne of himself ne of all that ever he had. Then said St. Ambrose: behold fair children how great pity and how great mercy God doth to them that have adversity in this world, and how wroth he is to them that have the wealth and riches of this world. Of which thing appeareth yet the pit or foss which endureth into this day in witness of this adventure.

### **ST. AMBROSE'S DEATH AND BURIAL**

**W**hen St. Ambrose beheld that avarice, which is root of all evils, grew more and more in much people, and specially in great men and in them that were in most great estate, which sold all for money, and with the ministers of the church he saw simony reign, he began to pray to God that he would take him away from the miseries of this world, and he impetred that which he desired.

Then he called his fellowship, and said to them, in joying, that, he should abide with them unto the resurrection of our Lord. And a little tofore that he lay sick, as he expounded to his notary the forty-fourth psalm, suddenly, in the presence and sight of his notary, a fire in the

manner of a shield covered his head and entered into his mouth. Then became his face as white as any snow, and anon after it came again to his first form, and that day he left his writing and inditing.

Then began his malady to grieve him, and the Earl of Italy which was then at Milan called the gentlemen of the country, and said to them that if so great and good a man should go from them it should be great pity and great peril to all Italy, and said to them that they all should go with him to this holy man and pray him that he would get grant of our Lord of space and longer life. When St. Ambrose had heard their request he answered: Fair sons, I have not so lived among you that I am ashamed to live if it please God, ne I have no fear ne dread of death, for we have a good Lord.

In this time assembled his four deacons and began to treat who should be a good bishop after him, and they named secretly among themselves, that unneth they themselves heard it, Simplician. St. Ambrose was far from them, they weened that he might not have heard them, and he cried on high thrice: He is old and he is good. When they heard him they were much abashed and departed, and sith after his death they chose the same Simplician for the good witness that St. Ambrose had borne of him.

A bishop which was named Honorius, that abode the death of St. Ambrose, slept and heard a voice that thrice called him and said: Arise thou up for he shall go his way anon. Then he arose anon hastily and went to Milan and gave to him the holy sacrament, the precious body of our Lord. And anon St. Ambrose laid his arms in form of a cross and made his prayers, and so departed and gave up his ghost among the words of his prayers, about the year of our Lord three hundred and eighty, the vigil of Easter.

And when his body in the night was borne in to the church many children that were baptized, saw him, as they said, sitting in a chair honorably, and others showed him with their fingers to their father and others, and some said that they saw a star upon his body. There was a priest, that sat at meat with others, which said not well of him, but mislaid, but anon God so chastised him that he was borne from the table and died anon after.

In the city of Carthage were three bishops together at dinner, and one of them spake evil by detraction of St. Ambrose, and there was a man that told what was befallen for such language to this aforesaid priest, but he mocked and japed so much that he felt a stroke mortal; that that same day he died and was buried.

### **ST. AMBROSE'S DISPUTE WITH THE EMPEROR VALENTINIAN**

**I**t is found written in a chronicle that the emperor Valentinian was wroth because that in the city of Thessalonica the people had stoned to death his judges that were sent thither in his name, and for to avenge the same the emperor did do slay five thousand persons, great and little, good and evil, and as well them that had not trespassed as them that had deserved it.

And when after this occision he came to Milan and would enter into the church, St. Ambrose came against him and defended him the entry, and said to him that after so great

woodness thou oughtest not to do so great presumption, but peradventure thy power suffereth not thee to acknowledge thy trespass. It appertaineth that reason surmount power. Thou art emperor, but that is for to punish the evil people. How art thou so hardy to enter so boldly into the house of God whom thou hast horribly angered? How darest thou with thy feet touch his pavement? How darest thou stretch thy hands which be all bloody, and of whom the blood of innocents run and drop off. By what presumption darest thou put forth thy mouth to receive the precious body and blood of our Lord, of which mouth thou hast done the commandment of the devil? Go hence! go hence! and put not sin upon sin. Take the bond that our Lord hath bounden thee with, for it is given to thee in the way of medicine.

When the emperor heard these words, he was obedient and began to wail and weep, and returned into his palace and abode there long weeping.

Then Ruffin the master of his knights demanded wherefore he so sorrowed and wept, and he answered Ruffin, thou knowest not my sorrows, for I see that servants and poor beggars may enter into the church that I may not enter, for Ambrose hath excommunicated me. And he saying this, at every word he sighed.

Then said Ruffin to him, if thou wilt I shall make him anon to assoil thee.

He answered: Thou mayst not, for Ambrose doubteth not the force ne the power of the emperor, to the end that he hold firmly the law of God.

And when Ruffin said more and more that he should make him incline to assoil him, then he sent him to Ambrose, and the emperor followed soon after much humbly. When St. Ambrose saw Ruffin come, he said to him: Thou hast no more shame than an hound for to do such occision, and now comest boldly to me.

When Ruffin had prayed him long for to assoil the emperor, which came following him, St. Ambrose said to him: Certainly I defend to him the entry into the church, and if he will be a tyrant I will much gladly receive the death.

Then returned Ruffin to the emperor, and recounted to him how he had done, and the emperor said: Certainly I shall go to him that I may receive of him villainy enough, for it is well right.

When he was come to him he demanded of him absolution much devoutly. St. Ambrose demanded of him what penance hast thou done for so great wickedness? The emperor alleged to him that David had sinned and after had mercy.

St. Ambrose said: Thou that hast followed him that sinned, follow also him repentant.

Then said the emperor: It appertaineth to thee to give and enjoin penance, and I shall do it.

Then he bade him do open penance and common tofore all the people, and the emperor received it gladly and refused it not. When the emperor was reconciled to the church he stood in the chancel. Then said to him St. Ambrose: What seekest thou here? He answered: I am here for to receive the sacred mysteries; and Ambrose said: This place appertaineth to no man but to priests. Go out, for ye ought to be without the chancel and abide there with other.

Then obeyed the emperor humbly and went out. And after, when the emperor came to Constantinople, and he stood without with the lay people, the bishop came and said to him that he should come into the chancel with the clerks, he answered that he would not, for he had learned of St. Ambrose what difference there was between an emperor and a priest. I have found a man of truth, my master Ambrose, and such a man ought to be a bishop.

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The [iconography of St. Ambrose](#) is available at the [Christian iconography website](#).

For other saints, see the [index to this Golden Legend website](#).

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