St. Ambrose

Feastday: December 7
Patron: of Beekeepers, beggars, learners, Milan
Birth: 340
Death: 397

Saint Ambrose, also known as Aurelius Ambrosius, is one of the four original doctors of the Church. He was the Bishop of Milan and became one of the most important theological figure of the 4th century.
Ambrose was born around 340 AD to a Roman Christian family. He grew up with his siblings, Satyrus and Marcellina, in Trier, Belgic Gaul (present-day Germany). It is believed by many that when Ambrose was just an infant, a swarm of bees landed on his face and left behind a drop of honey. To his father, this was a sign that Ambrose would become someone great with a wonderful sense for speaking.
After Ambrose's father passed away, he was educated in Rome, where he studied law, literature and rhetoric. Ambrose received a place on the council, like his father, and was made consular prefect, or the Governor, of Liguria and Emilia around 372. Ambrose's headquarters were in Milan, the then second capital of Italy.
Ambrose remained Governor until 374 when he became the Bishop of Milan. After the former Bishop of Milan died, Ambrose attended the election to prevent any uproars between the Nicene Church and the Arians. While giving an address, the assembly began calling for him to become the next bishop.
Ambrose was known for his Nicene beliefs, but Arians also favoured him because he had previously shown charity in theological matters. However, being neither baptized or trained in theology, Ambrose refused to become the next bishop.
He ran and attempted to hide, but his colleague gave him up. Within a week's time, Ambrose was baptized, ordained and duly consecrated bishop of Milan on December 7, 374.
As bishop, he donated all of his land and gave his money to the poor. This made him widely popular and often times more politically powerful than even the emperor.
He studied theology with Simplician, a presbyter of Rome. Using his new education, along with his knowledge of Greek, he took the time to study the Old Testament and Greek authors. He used all of this while preaching; his abilities impressed Augustine of Hippo, who previously thought poorly of Christian preachers.
After meeting Ambrose, Augustine re-evaluated himself and was forever changed. In 387, Ambrose baptized Augustine, who he had a great influence on. St. Monica, Augustine's mother, loved Ambrose "as an angel of God who uprooted her son from his former ways and led him to his convictions of Christ."

According to legend, Ambrose tried to put an end to Arianism in Milan. He often attempted to theologically dispute their propositions. The Arians appealed to many high position leaders, but Ambrose was able to stay one step ahead. The Arians increasing strength proved troublesome for Ambrose. Around 386, the Emperor Valentinian II and his mother, Justine, along with many other people, including clergy, laypersons, and military, professed Arianism.

They demanded some of the churches in Milan be dedicated to them, one in the city and one in the suburbs. Ambrose refused and was ordered to appear in front of the council, where he then spoke eloquently in defence of the Church. He is quoted with stating: If you demand my person, I am ready to submit: carry me to prison or to death, I will not resist; but I will never betray the church of Christ. I will not call upon the people to succour me; I will die at the foot of the altar rather than desert it. The tumult of the people I will not encourage: but God alone can appease it.

The imperial court did not like Ambrose's religious principles, but he was sought out to help and speak to Magnus Maximus to prevent him from descending upon Italy. Ambrose was successful.

During a second attempt, the embassy was not successful and Milan was taken. Justine and Valentinian II fled, but Ambrose stayed. He is credited with doing a great service to the sufferers during this time.

In 385, Ambrose once again refused handing over the Portian basilica to Valentinian II, this time to be used by Arian troops. A year later, Ambrose was again ordered to hand over the church for Arian use. Ambrose and his congregation barricaded themselves within the church walls until the imperial order rescinded.

After Theodosius I, emperor of the East, married Justine, Ambrose had him excommunicated for the massacre of 7,000 people. The emperor did several months? worth of public penance.

In his later years, Ambrose retired in Bologna and assisted in the transferring of saints Vitalis and Agricola's relics.

Two years after Theodosius died, after he acquired the possession of the Roman empire, Ambrose passed away on April 4, 397. He was succeeded as bishop of Milan by Simplician.

Ambrose's body remains in the church of St. Ambrogio in Milan, along with the bodies of Saints Gervase and Protase.

St. Ambrose was generous to the poor. He considered them not a group of outsiders, but rather those of the united people. To him, giving to the poor was just a repayment of God's resources, which were intended for everyone equally.

He introduced reforms in the order and manner of public worship. He was known for his "liturgical flexibility that kept in mind that liturgy was a tool to serve people in worshiping God and ought not to become a rigid entity that is invariable from place to place."

Ambrose is credited with advising Augustine of Hippo to follow local liturgical customs. "When I am at Rome, I fast on a Saturday; when I am at Milan, I do not. Follow the custom of the church where you are," he stated. This advice remains today, and is translated in English as the saying, "When in Rome, do as the Romans do."

Some believe Ambrose was a Christian Universalist, based on interpretations of his writing. The Theological treatises of Ambrose had great influences on Popes Damasus, Siricius and Leo XIII. Ambrose studied largely on the virginity of Mary and her role as Mother of God. He viewed celibacy as superior to marriage and saw Mary as virginity's model.

Ambrose authored many of the Church's important writings and hymns. He is credited with composing the repertory Ambrosian chant, also known as the Antiphonal Chant. He is also credited with composing the hymn "Te Deum," which is believed to have been written when he baptized Augustine of Hippo.

St. Ambrose is the Confessor and Doctor of the Church. He is the patron saint of beekeepers, beggars, learning and Milan, and his feast day is celebrated on December 7.