

the young prince's position. In the East, Emperor Theodosius I likewise professed the Nicene creed; but there were many adherents of Arianism throughout his dominion, especially among the higher clergy. Two Arian leaders called for a general council, Ambrose fearing the result, prevailed upon the emperor to have the matter decided by a council of Western bishops. A synod composed of thirty-two bishops was held at Aquileia in the year 381 and the Arians declined to defend their position. The Arians increasing influence, extending even to the military, led in 385 or 386, to the emperor and his mother Justina, to demand two churches in Milan be turned over to the Arians. Ambrose refused and was required to answer for his conduct. His defense of the Church overawed the ministers of Emperor Valentinian so that he was permitted not to surrender the churches. The next day while saying Mass, the prefect of the city came to persuade him to give up at least one of suburban churches to the Arians, which Ambrose refused. In spite of Imperial opposition, Bishop Ambrose refused to betray Christ.

Ambrose proved to be a fierce opponent of heresy, paganism and hypocrisy. He battled to preserve the independence of the Church from the state and courageously excommunicated the powerful Catholic Emperor Theodosius I for a massacre of innocent civilians in Thessalonica. He also had a significant impact on sacred music through the composition of hymns and psalm tones that are known to this day as Ambrosian chant. Besides numerous sermons and treatises on the spiritual life, Ambrose is responsible for two of the first theological works written in Latin (*De Sacramentis* in the Sacraments and *De Spiritu Sancto* on the Holy Spirit). Around 385, a professor of public speaking named Augustine came to hear Ambrose preach in order to study his technique, and in the process, was attracted to the Catholic faith. In 386 Augustine was baptized by Ambrose and went on to become bishop of Hippo in North Africa. Together with Saints Jerome and Gregory the Great, make up the four original Doctors of the Church. Saint Ambrose died on Holy Saturday (April 4) in the year 397 A.D. His feast day is December 7, the day he was ordained bishop.

\* (excerpted from: [www.catholic.org](http://www.catholic.org); [www.crossroadsinitiative.com](http://www.crossroadsinitiative.com))

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## ***Saint Ambrose***

**Feast Day: December 7**



**Early Church Father  
and  
Doctor of the Church**

## Saint Ambrose

\*Ambrose was born into a Roman Christian family between about 337 and 340 and was raised in Trier. His father was Ambrosius Aurelius, the praetorian prefect of Gaul; his mother was a woman of intellect and piety. Ambrose's siblings, Satyrus (who is the subject of Ambrose's *De excessu fratris Satyri*) and Marcellina, are also venerated as saints. There is a legend that as an infant, a swarm of bees settled on Ambrose's face while he lay in his cradle, leaving behind a drop of honey. His father considered this a sign of his future eloquence and honeyed tongue. For this reason, bees and beehives often appear in the saint's symbology.

After the early death of his father, Ambrose followed his father's career. He was educated in Rome, studying literature, law and rhetoric. Praetor Anicius Probus first gave him a place in the council and then in about 372 made him consular prefect or "Governor" of Liguria and Emilia, with headquarters at Milan, which was then (beside Rome) the second capital in Italy.

At thirty-three, Ambrose had it all; a successful career as a lawyer, an important position as governor of Milan, the approval and friendship of the emperor, and a large estate. Then the bishop of Milan, Auxentius, died. At this time, about 374, heresies threatened to destroy the Church. The bishop had supported the Arian heresy that argued against the divinity of Christ. Who would take his place -- an Arian or a Catholic? Both sides met in the cathedral and a riot broke out.

Public order was Ambrose's responsibility as governor so he hurried to the church and made a passionate speech not in favor of either side, but in favor of peace. He begged the people to make their choice without fighting, using restraint and moderation. Suddenly, while he was speaking, a voice called out, "Ambrose for bishop!" Soon everyone was shouting, "Ambrose for bishop!"

The other bishops of the province were only too glad to have this controversial decision taken out of their hands. But Ambrose was not about to give up a successful career for the dangerous position of

bishop- a life-threatening occupation in these heretical times. So Ambrose ran away. When he appealed to the emperor to overturn the decision on the basis that he had not even been baptized yet, the emperor answered that he was happy that he chose governors fit for the episcopal office. Ambrose hid in a senator's house but the senator surrendered Ambrose when he heard about the emperor's decision. With nowhere to run, Ambrose gave in.

So the catechumen Ambrose, decided not to keep on living the way that he had before his ordination, he gave away his property to the poor; was baptized and ordained deacon, then priest, then bishop, all in a single week. This politician turned churchman was profoundly aware of his lack of preparation for this great responsibility and so he set himself immediately to prayer and to the study of Scripture and theology under the instruction of Saint Simplician. His deep spirituality and love of God's Word married together with the oratorical skill acquired in law and politics made Ambrose one of the greatest preachers of the early church.

The Arians thought Ambrose would be "their" bishop because Ambrose had been a member of court and many in government were Arians. Ambrose, however, held Catholic beliefs, even though he had shown charity in theological matters that were acceptable to the Arians. However, Ambrose used his skills as a lawyer and orator to fight the Arians in church, court, senate, and even the emperor's own family. The same stubbornness that had made him refuse the position in the first place was now his weapon in fighting heresy and pursuing sanctity.

In the confrontation with Arians, Ambrose sought to theologially refute their propositions, which were heretical. The Arians appealed to many high level leaders and clergy in both the Western and Eastern empires. Although the western Emperor Gratian held orthodox belief in the Nicene creed, the younger Valentinian II, who became his colleague in the Empire, adhered to the Arian creed. Ambrose did not sway