

Paulinus (Deacon): “On the Life of St. Ambrose,
Bishop of Milan



St. Ambrose, Archbishop of Milan (c. AD 330 - 4 Apr 397)

Possibly a contemporary mosaic icon in the Basilica di' Sant'Ambrogio, Milan, Italy (mentioned in Chapter 5 below of Paulinus' Life of St. Ambrose).

Photo Source: <http://www29.homepage.villanova.edu/christopher.baas/Life%20of%20Ambrose.html>

THE LIFE OF ST. AMBROSE OF MILAN

(337 - 397)

by Paulinus of Milan, Deacon

Ambrose; possible contemporary mosaic portrait from the
Sant' Ambrogio, Milan

Chapter I

You exhort, venerable father Augustine, that, as the blessed men Athanasius the bishop and Jerome the priest have adorned by their pen

the lives of the saints, Paul and Anthony, who lived in the desert, as, also, Severus the servant of God eulogized the life of the venerable Martin, Bishop of the Church at Tours, that I in like manner adorn by my pen the life of blessed Ambrose, Bishop of the Church at Milan. But, as I realize that I am not the equal in worth of such great men, so also I know that I am inferior to them in speech. However, since I regard it as unreasonable to decline your request, those things which I have learned from the most trustworthy men who were with him before me, and especially from his own venerable sister, Marcellina, or what things I myself saw when I was with him, or what I have learned from those who have related that they had seen him in widely separated provinces after his death, or what things were written to him when his death was still unknown, I, aided by your prayers and by the worth of so great a man, shall write down, even though in simple language, briefly and to the point, so that, even if my writing offend the mind of the reader, its brevity may provoke a reading. Nor shall I envelop the truth with word pictures, for, although a writer may seek pomp and elegance, a reader may miss the awareness of great virtues, since the child had been placed in a cradle in his father's courtyard naturally does not consider the trappings and processions of words more than the virtue of deeds and the grace of the Holy Spirit. For we recognize that wayfarers, when they are thirsty, consider water more pleasing, though it trickles in a tiny brook, than the streams of a gushing fountain whose abundant supply they cannot find at the time of their thirst. So, too, barley bread is sometimes sweet even to those who are accustomed to vomit up the abundance of daily banquets with their hundred-fold succession of, dishes. Again, to those who admire the charms of cultivated gardens wild flowers are occasionally attractive.

Therefore, I beseech all of you in whose hands this book will be turned to accept as true the things which we tell. Nor should anyone think that, out of eager devotion, I have related anything which lacks support. How much better it is to say nothing at all than to bring forward something false, since we know that 'we shall render an account of all

our words." I should not doubt that, even if all things are not known by all men, different facts are known by different people, and those things are well known to some which I myself, to a lesser degree, also have been able to hear and see. Therefore, I shall begin my story with the day of his birth, in order that the divine grace which was characteristic of the man from his infancy may be well known.

Chapter 2

Therefore, it came to pass that our Ambrose was born while his father, Ambrose, was administering the prefecture ship of the Gallic provinces. On one occasion, when the child had been placed in a cradle in his father's courtyard and was asleep with his mouth open, a swarm of bees suddenly approached. and covered his face, so that they were continually flying in and out of his mouth. His father, who was strolling nearby with his wife and daughter, watched with fatherly affection to see in what way this miracle would terminate. Meanwhile he restrained the maid from driving away the bees, for she had accepted the responsibility of feeding the child and was anxious lest they harm him. But, after a while, the bees flew away and rose so high in the air that they could in no way be seen by human eyes. The father, terrified by this event, said: If this child lives, he will be something great. For, even then, the Lord was acting during the infancy of his servant in order that what was written might be fulfilled: Well-ordered words are as a honey-comb. For that swarm of bees was implanting the honey-combs of his later works, which would proclaim the heavenly gifts and direct the minds of men from earthly to heavenly things. Later, indeed, when he had become a young man and had established himself in the city of Rome with his widowed mother and his sister who had made a vow of virginity together with another girl companion, whose sister Candida is likewise of the same profession and is now an old woman living in Carthage, upon seeing the hands of bishops being kissed by someone of the household, his sister or his mother, he jokingly used to offer his right hand, saying that she ought to do this for him, also, since he probably

would become a bishop. For there was speaking, in him the Holy Spirit who was nurturing him for the episcopacy, but she used to spurn the proposal, saying he was but a youth and did not know what he was saying. After he had been taught in the liberal disciplines, he left the city and began his public career in the court of the praetorian prefect. So well did he plead his cases here that he was chosen by the illustrious Probus, then the praetorian prefect, to be his adviser. After this, he received consular rank so as to govern the province of Liguria and Aemilia. And then he came to Milan.

Chapter 3

About the same time, after the death of Auxentius, a bishop of the Arian heresy who retained possession of the church after Dionysius the Confessor, of blessed memory, was sent into exile, when the people were about to revolt in seeking a bishop, Ambrose had the task of putting down the revolt. So he went to the church. And when he was addressing the people, the voice of a child among the people is said to have called out suddenly: 'Ambrose bishop.' At the sound of this voice, the mouths of all the people joined in the cry: 'Ambrose bishop.' Thus, those who a while before were disagreeing most violently, because both the Arians and the Catholics wished the other side to be defeated and their own candidate to be consecrated bishop, suddenly agreed on this one with miraculous and unbelievable harmony.

And when he realized this, he left the church and had a tribunal prepared for himself indeed, he mounted higher steps because he would soon become a bishop. Then, contrary to his usual behavior, he ordered tortures to be inflicted on people. Although he did this, the people none the less kept shouting: Your sin be upon us. But these people did not then shout as did the people of the Jews for the Jews by their words shed the Lord's blood, saying: His blood be upon us, but these, knowing that he was a catechumen, were assuring him with a confident voice the remission of all his sins through the divine grace of baptism. Then, in a

disturbed state of mind, he returned home and wanted to declare himself a philosopher, but he was about to become a true philosopher of Christ, since, in despising the pomp of this world, he was about to follow the footsteps of the fisherman who brought people to Christ not by a show of words but by simple language and by the reasonableness of the true doctrine. For they, having been sent without wallet, without staff, converted even philosophers. But, when he was restrained from making this profession, he had public women come to him openly for this one purpose, that, when the people saw this, they would recall their intention. The fact was, however, the people kept crying out more and more: 'Your sin be upon us.'

When he saw that nothing could accomplish his intention, he prepared his flight and left the city at midnight. Since he intended to make his way to Ticinum, he was discovered the next morning at the gate of the city of Milan which is called Roman. For God, who was preparing a strong support for His Catholic Church against His enemies and a tower of David against the face of Damascus, that is, the perfidy of the heretics, checked his flight. And when he had been found and was held in custody by the people, a report was sent to the most kind emperor, then Valentinian, who with very great joy realized the fact that the judges he sent out were being sought for the episcopacy. Probus the prefect rejoiced similarly, because his word was fulfilled in Ambrose, for he had said to him as he set out, when his orders were given to him as is the custom: 'Go, act not as judge, but as a bishop.'

And so, while the result of the report was pending, he again attempted flight and for some time concealed himself on the estate of a certain honorable Leontinus. But, when the answer to the report came, he was handed over by this same Leontinus. For the order had been given to the deputy to insist on carrying out the matter, and, since he wished to fulfill the injunctions, he warned all by a published edict that, if they wished to take counsel for themselves and their property, they should hand over the man. Therefore, when he was handed over and had

been taken to Milan and was aware of the will of God concerning himself and that he could no longer resist, he demanded that he should be baptized only by a Catholic bishop. For he was carefully guarding against the heresy of the Arians. Thus, when he was baptized, he is said to have fulfilled all the ecclesiastical offices, so that he was consecrated bishop on the eighth day with the greatest favor and joy on the part of all. Some years after his consecration he went to Rome, to his own estate, and there found the holy maiden mentioned above, to whom he used to offer his hand, in the home with his sister, just as he had left, for now his mother was dead. And when she kissed his hand, he smilingly said to her: "See, as I used to say to you, you are kissing the hand of a bishop!"

About this same time, when he was invited to the home of a very noble lady across the Tiber that he might offer the Holy Sacrifice in her home, a certain woman caretaker of a bath, who was confined to her couch as a paralytic, on learning that a bishop of the Lord was in the neighborhood, had herself carried in a little seat to the very home to which he had been invited and there touched his garments as he prayed and placed his hands upon her. And when she fondly kissed them, her health was restored and she began to walk, so that there was fulfilled that saying of the Lord to the Apostle: 'For you shall do greater things than these believing in my name.' Yet, just as this miraculous cure was wonderful, so, also, it was not hidden; for I learned of it in this very district many years later on the authority of holy men when I was in the city.

When he came to Sirmium to consecrate Anemius bishop, there by the power of Justina, empress at the time, and by an assembled multitude he was about to be driven from the church, so that an Arian bishop might be consecrated in that very church not by him, but by the heretics. But, when he had seated himself on the tribunal, caring nothing for a woman's disturbances, one of the girls of the Arian sect, more impudent than the rest, mounting the tribunal and taking hold of the bishop's

vestment, since she wished to drag him to the group of women so that they might beat him and drive him from the church, heard him say, as the bishop himself used to relate: 'Even if I am unworthy of so great a bishopric, it is not fitting that you or your kind lay hands on any bishop of whatever sort. Thus you ought to fear God's judgment, lest something happen to you.' What happened confirmed this warning, for, on another day, he conducted her dead to her grave, repaying insult with kindness. And this deed instilled no light fear in his adversaries and gave great peace to the Catholic Church at the bishop's consecration.

Chapter 4

And so, when he had consecrated a Catholic bishop, he returned to Milan and there sustained many plots of a woman, the above-mentioned Justina. For, by offering offices and honors, she was stirring up the people against the holy man. The weak were taken in by these promises, for the promised tribuneships and diverse other positions of rank to those who would snatch him from his church and take him into exile. Although many tried to do this, but were not able, since God was his protector, one more wretched than the rest, Euthymius; by name, was aroused to such fury that he arranged a house for himself next to the church and placed a wagon in the same building in order that he might more easily seize the man, put him in the cart, and carry him into exile. 'But his iniquity came down upon his own head,' after a year to the very day on which he planned to snatch away Ambrose, he himself was placed on the same cart and sent away into exile from that same house, doubtless reflecting that this had been turned upon him by the just judgment of God, namely, that he was being sent into exile on the very cart which he himself had prepared for the bishop. And to him the bishop rendered not a very little consolation, for he gave him expenses and other things which were necessary.

But this public admission of the man's worth checked neither the woman's fury nor the madness of the insane Arians, for, inflamed with

greater madness, they tried to break into the Portian Basilica. Even an army under arms was ordered to guard the doors of the building, that no one might dare to enter the Catholic church. But the Lord, who usually gives triumphs to His Church over its adversaries, turned the hearts of the soldiers to the defense of His Church, so that, having turned their shields, they kept watch over the doors of the church and did not allow the Catholic people to leave, but in no way kept them from entering the church. More than this, the soldiers who had been sent were not satisfied with this, but also acclaimed the Catholic faith equally with the congregation. On this occasion, antiphons, hymns, and vigils first began to be practiced in the church at Milan, And the devotion to this custom remains even to this very day, not only in the church, but through almost all the provinces of the West.

Chapter 5

About the same time, the holy martyrs Protase and Gervase revealed themselves to the bishop. For they had been placed in the basilica in which there are today the bodies of the martyrs Nabor and Felix. The holy martyrs Nabor and Felix were visited very often, while the names as well as the sepulchres of Gervase and Protase were unknown, and to such an extent that all walked over their sepulchres who wished to approach the grates by which the sepulchres of the holy martyrs Nabor and Felix were protected from harm. But, when the bodies of the holy martyrs were raised and placed on biers, the diseases of many were shown to have been healed. Even a blind man, Severus by name, who even now piously serves in the same basilica which is called the Ambrosian, into which the bodies of the martyrs were taken, when he touched their garments, received his sight immediately., Likewise, bodies possessed by unclean spirits returned to their homes with the greatest gratitude after they had been healed. And as by these beneficent works of the martyrs the faith of the Catholic Church increased, so did the heresy or the Arians decrease.

Finally, after this event, the persecution which was incited by the fury of Justina, to the end that the bishop be driven from his church, began to abate. Yet, within the palace a great number of Arians who sided with Justina ridiculed such grace of God as the Lord Jesus deigned to confer upon His Catholic Church by the merits of its martyrs. And they claimed that the venerable man Ambrose had by means of money prepared men to state falsely that they were troubled by unclean spirits and to say that they were tortured by him just as by the martyrs. But the Arians said this with a Jewish expression -- being, indeed, like them -- for the Jews used to say of the Lord that: 'By Beelzebub, the prince of devils, He casts out devils.' But the Arians were speaking of the martyrs and of the bishop of the Lord to the effect that not by the grace of God which was manifested in them were the unclean spirits driven out, but that they received money to declare falsely that they were tortured. For the devils used to say: 'We know that you are martyrs,' but the Arians: 'We do not know that you are martyrs.' For we read this also in the Gospel, where the devils said to the Lord: 'We know you, since you are the Son of God,' and the Jews said: 'But as for this man, we do not know where He is from.' This is not to be taken as the testimony of the devils, but as their confession; and so it is that the Arians and the Jews are more wretched in that they deny what the devils confess.

But God, who usually increases grace for His Church, did not long suffer His saints to be insulted. Thus, one of the number, suddenly possessed by an unclean spirit, began to cry out that those were tortured as he himself was tortured who denied the martyrs or who did not believe the unity of the Trinity as Ambrose was teaching. But they, confused by this statement, although they ought to have been converted and to have done penance worthy of such confession, killed the man by immersing him in a pond, thus adding murder to heresy; for a fitting urgency led them to this end. Indeed, the holy bishop Ambrose, having become a man of greater humility, preserved the grace given him by the Lord and increased daily in faith and in love before God and man.

About the same time, there was a certain man of the Arian heresy, violent beyond measure as a disputant and harsh and immovable as regards the Catholic faith. This man was in the church one day during a sermon by the bishop. Later, he himself related that he saw an angel there, speaking into the ears of the bishop as he preached, so that the bishop seemed to be proclaiming to the people the words of the angel. By this sight he was converted, and the faith which he formerly attacked he himself now began to defend.

There were also at that time two chamberlains of Gratian, the emperor, who were of the Arian heresy. These two proposed to the bishop a question to be discussed, promising that they would be present the next day at the Portian Basilica to hear it. The question was one concerning the Incarnation of the Lord. But, on the next day, the two miserable men, filled with swollen haughtiness, unmindful of their promises, despising God in the person of His bishop, without any consideration for the injury done [to] the waiting people, and unmindful also of the words of the Lord: 'But whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it were better for him to have a great millstone hung around his neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea,' [went riding] and left the city and the waiting bishop and the people in their places in the church. I shudder at this insolence as I relate its end, for they suddenly were thrown headlong from [their horses and plunging down the slope, the men spat out their wicked souls] and lost their lives. Their bodies were handed over for burial. But the holy Ambrose, since he did not know what had happened and since he was not able to hold the people any longer, ascended the tribunal and began to deliver a sermon on the very question which had been proposed, saying: 'Brethren, I wish that my debt be paid, but I do not find my creditors of yesterday,' and the other things which are written in the book entitled, **On the [Mystery of the] Incarnation of the Lord.**



Gratian (emperor 367-83 A.D.)



Magnus Maximus (usurper 383-388 A.D.)

Chapter 6

Thus, when the Emperor Gratian had been killed, he undertook a second embassy to Maximus to recover the body. And whoever wishes to learn how firmly he dealt with him will discover this by reading the letter of this legation which was handed to Valentinian the younger. But I have decided that the insertion of the letter here would constitute a departure from our promise, lest the prolixity of the letter, if inserted, bother the reader. Indeed, he restrained Maximus from receiving Communion, admonishing him to do penance, worthy of the blood of his master which he had shed, and, what is more serious', of an innocent man, if he wished to receive any consideration before God. But, when he

refused with a haughty spirit to do penance, he lost not only future but present safety as well, and the kingdom which he had seized after the fashion of a woman he put aside in fear, and then admitted that he had been the procurator, not the emperor, of the state.

After the death of Justina, when a certain soothsayer, Innocent by name, but not in deed, was being tormented by the judge during a trial for his offenses, he began to make confession of something other than [what] was being sought. He exclaimed that he was suffering greater torments from the angel who was protecting Ambrose, because, in the time of Justina, to arouse the hatred of the people against the bishop, he had gone to the very top of the church and had performed sacrifices at midnight. But, the more insistently and unceasingly he carried on his evil practices, the more did the love of the people for the Catholic faith and for the bishop of the Lord increase. He admitted that he had also sent demons to kill him, but that the demons had reported that they not only could in no way approach him; further, they could not even get to the doors of the house in which the bishop was staying, because a fierce fire protected the entire building, so that, although they were a distance away, they were burned. He then terminated the wiles by which he thought he could effect something against the bishop of the Lord. Another had come even to his bedchamber with a sword to slay the bishop, but, having raised his hand with drawn sword, he stood fixed, with his right hand stiffened. And when he acknowledged that he had been sent by Justina, the right arm which had been stiffened when it was raised for the evil deed was restored by the confession.

About the same time, when the illustrious man, Probus, had sent to the bishop his servant, a secretary, who was being troubled by an unclean spirit, the demon went out of the servant as he left the city, for he feared to be brought into the holy man's presence. And it happened that, as long as the boy was in Milan at the bishop's house, no influence of the demon appeared in him, but, when he had set out from Milan and come again toward the city, the same evil spirit which formerly

possessed him began to vex him again. And when the evil spirit was asked by the exorcists why he had not appeared in the servant while he remained at Milan, he said that he had feared Ambrose and had thus withdrawn for a time, and had waited in that place where he had withdrawn from the servant until he should come back and that upon his return he had re-entered the vessel which he had left.



Theodosius I (379-395 A.D.)

Chapter 7

When Maximus was executed and Emperor Theodosius was at Milan, and Bishop Ambrose was at Aquileia, in a certain fortified city in a section of the East, a Jewish synagogue and a grove of the Valentinians were destroyed by fire, because the Jews, or certainly the Valentinians, kept scoffing at the Christian monks for, indeed, the, Valentinian heresy worships thirty gods. Now, an Eastern count sent a report of the action to the emperor, who, when he had received the report, straightway ordered that the synagogue be rebuilt by the bishop of the region and that fitting punishment be meted out to the monks. When the tone of this order reached the ears of the holy man, Bishop Ambrose, he directed a letter to the emperor, since he could not at the time go in person. In this letter he requested him to recall this order which he had issued, and to grant him an audience. And he added that, if he were not worthy to be heard by

him, neither would he be worthy to be heard by the Lord in his behalf, nor would any one to whom he might entrust his prayers and promises; also, that he was prepared to undergo death for such a cause, lest by his failure in duty he make the emperor an apostate. For the emperor had given such unjust orders against the Church.

Moreover, after he had returned to Milan, he preached on this very topic in the presence of the people, and the emperor was present in the church at the time. In this sermon he introduced the person of the Lord as speaking to the emperor: "I made you emperor from the lowest; I handed over to you the army of your enemy; I gave to you the supplies which he had prepared for his own army against you; I reduced your enemy into our power; I established one of your sons on the throne of the empire; I caused you to triumph without difficulty, and do you give triumphs over me to my enemies?" And the emperor said to him as he was descending the pulpit: "You spoke against us today, Bishop." But the bishop replied that he had not spoken against him, but for him. Then the emperor, "Indeed, I issued a stern order against the bishop concerning the rebuilding of the synagogue. Moreover, the monks must be punished." A like report was given by the counts who were present. But to these the bishop replied: "I am dealing with the emperor now; with you I must deal later." And so he secured the recall of those orders which had been issued, but not until he declared that he was unwilling to approach the altar unless the emperor gave assurance that he ought to go on. The bishop said to him: "Do I act, then, with your promise of compliance?" "Go on," said the emperor, "with my promise." When this promise had been repeated, the bishop then freely performed the divine mysteries. These facts, moreover, are written in the letter which he wrote to his sister, in which he inserted the sermon which he delivered that same day about the staff of the nut tree which is reported to have been seen by the Prophet Jeremias.

About the same time, because of the city of Thessalonica, much distress came upon the bishop when he had discovered that the city had

almost been destroyed. The emperor had promised him that he would grant pardon to the citizens of the above-mentioned city, but, because of the secret negotiations of the officers with the emperor and without the knowledge of the bishop, the city was put to the sword for more than an hour and very many innocent persons were slain. When the bishop learned that this had been done, he denied the emperor the privilege of entering the church, and he deemed him unworthy of the fellowship of the Church and of partaking of the sacraments, until he should do public penance. But the emperor made the assertion to him that David had committed adultery and homicide as well. To which the bishop replied: 'Since you have followed him in sinning, follow him in making correction.' When the most recipient emperor heard these words, he so took it to heart that he did not shudder at public penance, and the progress of this correction prepared him for a favorable victory.

About the same time, two most powerful and most wise men of the Persians came to Milan to the famous bishop, bringing with them very many questions with which to probe his wisdom. And they discoursed with him from the first hour of the day to the third hour of the night, and then, amazed, took their departure. And to prove that they had not come for any other reason than to gain a better knowledge of the man whom they had known only by report, the next day, bidding farewell to the emperor, they set out for the city of Rome, wishing there to become acquainted with the power of the illustrious man, Probus. And when they had gained this knowledge, they returned to their native land.

Chapter 8

When Theodosius had departed from Italy and was established in Constantinople, a delegation in the name of the Senate was dispatched to Emperor Valentinian in Gaul by Symmachus, at that time prefect of the city, about the restoration of the altar of Victory and the maintenance of the sacred rites. When the bishop learned of this, sending a complaint to the emperor, he demanded that copies of the report be sent to him,

adding that he himself would reply to these in behalf of his own position. And when this report was received, he wrote a most remarkable refutation, so that Symmachus, although a very eloquent man, never ventured a reply. After Valentinian, of honored memory, had died in the city of Vienna, which is a city of the Gauls, Eugenius acceded to the imperial power. Not long after the beginning of his rule, at the requests of Flavian, the prefect, and of Count Abrogast, he conceded the restoration of the altar of Victory and the maintenance of its ceremonies, forgetful of his own faith and of the fact that Valentinian, of honored memory, while yet a young man, had denied similar requests.



The goddess Victory holding a shield with an effigy of Basiliscus, consul in 480 A.D.

Now, when the bishop had learned this, he left the city of Milan to which Eugenius was coming in haste and moved on to Bologna, and from there he journeyed on as far as Faventia. When he had spent some days there, at the invitation of the Florentines, he continued his journey to Tuscia, avoiding the sight of the impious man, for he had no fear of the emperor. On the contrary, he sent a letter to him in which he

prompted his conscience, and I think that a few of the many remarks from it ought to be inserted here: 'Even though the imperial power is great, consider, Emperor, how great God is: He sees the hearts of all; He seeks into the inner conscience; He knows all things before they occur; He knows the hidden thoughts of your heart. You do not suffer yourself to be deceived, and do you wish to hide from God? Did nothing suggest itself to your mind? If they were acting so persistently, was it not your duty, Emperor, to resist more persistently for the veneration of the most high, the true, and the living God, and to deny what was harmful to the holy law? And again: Therefore, since I am bound by my words before God and men, I thought that I had no other course of action, that no other was fitting, except that I take thought for myself, since I was not able to do so for you.

And so, while he was in the above-mentioned city of the Florentines, he stayed in the home of the formerly, illustrious Decens, for he also was a Christian man. Now, this man's son, Pansopius by name, though still a mere lad, was troubled with an unclean spirit. Although he had been healed by frequent prayers and by the laying-on of the hands of the bishop himself, yet, some days later, the lad was seized by a sudden attack and died. As his mother was very devout and full of faith and the fear of God, she took the child from the upper to the lower part of the house and placed him on the bishop's couch-he was absent at the time. When the bishop returned and found the body on his couch, he had compassion on the mother. And when he thought upon her faith, like Elisha of old he placed himself upon the child's body and prayed so that him whom he found dead he returned alive to his mother. He also wrote a booklet for this lad, so that later he might by reading become acquainted with what he could not know by reason of his tender years. However, he did not mention this good deed in his writings, but why he declined to do so is not ours to judge.

In the same city he also established a church, in which he placed the relics of the martyrs Vitalis and Agricola, whose bodies he had raised

in the city of Bologna. There, the bodies of the martyrs had been buried among the bodies of the Jews, and this would not have become known had not the holy martyrs revealed themselves to the bishop of that church. And when they were placed under the altar which was in the same basilica, there was great joy and exultation in the hearts of the entire flock, but punishment for the demons as they confessed the merits of the martyrs.

About the same time, Count Abrogast prepared war against his people, the Franks, and in an engagement he routed a considerable force. With the remainder he made peace. But when, at a banquet, he was asked by the princes of his nation whether he knew Ambrose, he replied that he did know him and was loved by him and had frequently dined with him. Then they said to him: 'Thus do you conquer, O Count, because you are loved by that man who says to the sun: Stand, and it stands.' This fact I have recorded here that those who read may know of what fame the holy man was even among unlettered tribes. For we also know this from the report of a certain youth of Abrogast, who was a devout young man and was present at the time. At the time when these things were spoken, he was also cupbearer.

Then he set out from the district of Tuscia and returned to Milan. For Eugenius already had set out against Theodosius. There he waited the arrival of the Christian emperor, secure in the power of God, knowing that He would not hand over to unjust men the one who believes in Him, nor would He let fall the rod of sinners on the lot of the just, lest the just stretch forth their hands to iniquity.'



Flavius Eugenius (usurper, 392-394)

For Count Abrogast and Flavian the prefect had promised at the time, as they were leaving Milan, that, when they had returned, they would make a stable of the basilica of the church at Milan and would examine the clerics for military service. But men, when they become unduly confident of their demons and 'open their mouths in blasphemy against God," are to be pitied, for they have deprived themselves of hope of victory. The cause of the disturbance was this. The gifts of the emperor who had taken part in the sacrilege were spurned by the Church and the fellowship of praying with the Church had not been granted him. But the Lord who protects His Church cast His judgment from heaven, and delivered complete victory to the devout emperor, Theodosius. Thus, when Eugenius and his followers were crushed and he received the emperor's letters, Ambrose had no greater care than to intercede for those whom he discovered to be accused. But, first, he made his request to the emperor in writing and sent by a deacon. Then, after John, at that time a tribune and a secretary but now a prefect, had been sent to protect those who fled to the church, he himself went to Aquileia to speak in their behalf. And for them pardon was easily gained, since the Christian emperor testified that he had been saved through his merits and intercessions.

Therefore, he returned from the city of Aquileia, arriving one day before the emperor. And Theodosius, emperor of most gracious memory,

did not live long after his sons were received into the Church and entrusted to the bishop. Ambrose survived the emperor almost three years. In this time he raised and transferred to the Basilica of the Apostles, which is at the Roman Gate, the body of St. Nazarius the martyr which had been buried in a garden outside the city. Indeed, we saw in the grave in which the body of the martyr was lying (but when he suffered we cannot learn to the present day) the blood of the martyr as fresh as if it had been poured forth the same day. His head also had been severed by impious men, yet it was so complete and intact with its hairs and beard that it seemed to us that at the very time in which it was being raised it had been washed and placed there in the sepulchre. But, why is this to be marveled at, when the Lord formerly promised -- this in the Gospel: 'Not a hair of their head shall perish'?' Moreover, we were filled with so striking an odor as surpassed the sweetness of all perfumes.

When the body of the martyr was raised and placed on a litter, we straightway went with the holy bishop to pray at the grave of the holy martyr Celsus, who was buried in the same garden. However, we discovered that he had never prayed in that place before. And this was the sign of a newly discovered martyr: if the holy bishop had gone to pray at a place to which he had not been before. We know, however, from the guardians of the place that it had been handed down from generation to generation of their people not to depart from there because great treasures had been buried in that very place-and truly great treasures, which neither rust nor moth consume nor do thieves dig through to and steal, because their guardian is Christ and their dwelling is the court of heaven, for whom to live was Christ and to die was gain. Thereupon, the body of the martyr was taken to the Basilica of the Apostles, where a short time before the relics of the holy Apostles had been deposited with very great devotion on the part of all. And on this occasion, when the bishop was preaching, one of the crowd, who was filled with an unclean spirit, began to cry out that he was being tortured by Ambrose. But Ambrose, turning to him said: 'Be silent, demon. Ambrose is not torturing you, but the faith of the saints and your own

envy, since you see men ascending to the place whence you were cast down, for Ambrose does not know how to be puffed up.' And when he had said this, the one who was crying out became silent and, prostrate on the ground, no longer made disturbing noise.



Honorius, son of Theodosius (emperor, 395-423 A.D.)

About the same time, when the emperor Honorius during his consulship was making a public display of Libyan wild animals in the city of Milan, and while the people were assembling for the show, permission was given the soldiers who had then been sent Count Stilicho at the request of Eusebius the prefect to carry a certain Cresconius from the church by force. But, when he took refuge at the altar of the Lord,

the holy bishop with the clerics who were present at the time gathered around to defend him: But the multitude of soldiers, whose leaders were of the Arian heresy, prevailed over the the few and, after snatching Cresconius away, they returned to the amphitheatre in an exultant mood, giving great sorrow to the Church. The bishop, prostrate before the altar of the Lord, long lamented the action. But, just when the soldiers had returned and reported to those who had sent them, the leopards were loosed and sprang with one movement to the very place where those who were celebrating a triumph over the Church were seated, and they left them seriously wounded. When Count Stilicho saw this he was so moved with repentance that for many days he made amends to the bishop and even loosed unharmed the one who had been snatched away. But, because he was guilty of the most serious crimes and could not be corrected otherwise, he sent him into exile, but soon thereafter he was granted pardon.

On one occasion, when he was going to the palace and we were following him out of official duty, it happened that a certain man lost his footing and fell sprawling to the ground. Theodulus, who was then a secretary, though afterwards he governed the church at Mutina in a most praiseworthy manner, was laughing at the mishap, whereupon the bishop turned and said to him: 'And you who stand, see to it that you do not fall.' When he said this, he who laughed at the fall of another at once lamented his own.

About this time, Frigetil, a certain queen of the Marcomanni, when she heard of the fame of the man from a certain Christian who by chance had come to her from Italy and was conversing with her, believed in Christ. For she recognized him as Christ's servant, and, sending gifts to the Church through her envoys, she asked that she be informed in his own writing as to what she ought to believe. And to her he wrote a most noteworthy letter in the form of a catechism, in which, also, he urged her to persuade her husband to keep peace with the Romans. When she had received the letter, she persuaded her husband to entrust himself, along

with his people, to the Romans. When she came to Milan, she grieved very much for the holy bishop whom she had hastened to meet but did not find, for he had already departed this life.

In the time of Gratian, to go back a little, when Ambrose came to the palace of Macedonius, master of the offices at the time, to intercede for a certain man, and had found the doors shut by order of the above-mentioned official and did not succeed in entering, he said: 'And you indeed shall come to the church, and finding the doors closed, you will not find an entrance.' And this happened. For, upon the death of Gratian, Macedonius, fleeing to the church, was unable to find an entrance, although the doors were open.

Chapter 9

Moreover, the venerable bishop himself was a man of much fasting, of many vigils, and of deeds, also, chastising his body by daily denials. It was his habit never to take breakfast except on the day of Sabbath and the Lord's Day, or when the feast days of the most celebrated saints occurred. His zeal in, prayer was great night and day, nor did he shun the task of writing books with his own hand, except when his body was afflicted with some infirmity. He also had solicitude for all the Churches, as well as great zeal and constancy in intervening among them. He was equally courageous in discharging Church affairs, to such an extent that the duties which he alone had been accustomed to perform with respect to the catechumens, these same duties five bishops after the time of his death were scarcely able to perform. In like manner he was very solicitous for the poor and for prisoners. At the time when he was consecrated bishop, all the gold and silver which he might have had for himself he gave to the Church and to the poor. Further, the estates which he had, after retaining the portion for his sister, he gave to the Church, having retained for himself nothing which here he might call his own, so that as a lightly clad and unencumbered soldier he might follow Jesus Christ, 'who, being rich became poor for our sakes, that through His

poverty we might be rich."

'He rejoiced also with those that rejoiced and wept with those that wept." For, as often as anyone confessed his sins to him to receive a penance, he so wept that he forced the penitent to weep. Thus did he seem to himself to be in a similar state with the penitent. But, cases of crime which used to be confessed to him he spoke of to no one save to the Lord alone, with whom he interceded, leaving a good example for future bishops to be intercessors with God rather than accusers with men. For, also according to the Apostle, with respect to a man of this sort, 'charity is to be confirmed," because he is his own accuser who, instead of waiting, anticipates his accuser, so as to lighten his own sin by confession, lest he have something which his adversary may accuse. And for this reason, Scripture says: 'The just is first accuser of himself." For he snatches away the voice of his adversary and, by the confession of his own sins, breaks to pieces, as it were, the teeth prepared for the prey of hostile accusation. In so doing he gives honor to God, to whom all things are naked, and who wishes the life rather than the death of the sinner.' Indeed, to the penitent himself confession alone does not suffice, unless correction of the deed follows, with the result that the penitent does not continue to do deeds which demand repentance, He should even humble his soul just as holy David, who, when he heard from the Prophet: 'Your sin is pardoned," became more humble in the correction of his sin, so that 'he did eat ashes like bread and mingled his drink with weeping."

He used to weep most bitterly whenever, by chance, announcement was made to him of the death of a holy bishop, and to such an extent that we tried to console him, ignorant though we were of the deep devotion of the man and also ignorant as to why he was so weeping. And to us he used to make such reply, that he was not weeping because the one who had been announced as dead had departed, but because it was difficult to find a man who was deemed worthy of the highest dignity of the episcopacy. Moreover, he himself foretold his own death, saying that he would be with us until Easter. And this he surely merited by reason of

his praying to the Lord that he might be free to depart hence earlier.

For he used to lament vehemently when he saw that avarice, the root of all evils, which cannot be decreased by abundance or lack, was increasing more and more in men. Especially was this so in those who had been placed in positions of authority. And to such an extent was this true that for him the task of putting a stop to it was most trying, for all things were being upset for gain. At first, this condition brought upon Italy every kind of evil. Thereafter, there was a trend to a worse state of affairs. And what shall I add, if it so works its fury in persons of the sort who usually simulate the cases of sons of relatives, to make excuses in sins, since it actually has taken hold of very many, even of celibates, both priests and deacons, whose portion is God, to such an extent that even they practice it. And woe to us wretched ones, for not even at the end of the world are we so aroused that we wish to be set free from so heavy a yoke of slavery which descends even to the depths of hell, 'that we may make for ourselves friends of the mammon of iniquity, that they may receive us into everlasting dwellings.' Yet, blessed is he who, when he is once converted and has broken his chains and put off the yoke of such domination, shall take and dash his little ones against the rock," that is, he shall dash all his thoughts against Christ, who, according to the Apostle, is 'the rock'" which destroys all who are dashed against it, while it remains intact and does not make him guilty, but rather innocent, who has dashed against it the less desirable intentions of a wicked mind. For, only thus can one say confidently: 'The Lord is my portion.' For, to whom there is nothing in this world, to him in truth is Christ the portion, and, despising these paltry things, he will receive much, and in particular shall possess life everlasting."

A few days before he was confined to his couch, when he was dictating the forty-third psalm, with me carefully taking it down, a fire like a small shield suddenly covered his head, and little by little entered his mouth, just as a person enters his home. After this, his face turned white as snow, but soon regained its usual appearance. When this

happened, I was exceedingly scared and was unable to write down what he was saying until the vision itself had passed. At the time, he was speaking of the testimony of the sacred Scriptures which I remembered very well. For he left off writing and dictating that day, since, indeed, he was unable to finish that psalm. I, you may be sure, straightway reported what I had seen to the honorable deacon Castus, under whose care I was then living. But he, filled with the grace of God, pointed out to me from the passage of the Acts of the Apostles that I had seen in the bishop the coming of the Holy Spirit.

Some days before, when Count Stilicho's servant had been troubled with a demon, but, now cured, was staying in the Ambrosian Basilica upon the recommendation of his master, he was reported to be forging letters of the tribunate to such an extent that men who were going to their assignments were detained. And this report was freely believed. But, when Count Stilicho discovered the character of his servant, he did not wish to punish him. At the bishop's intervention, he even dismissed the men who had been deceived, but he made complaint to the bishop concerning him. Then the holy man, when he was leaving the Ambrosian Basilica, caused the servant to be sought out and brought to him. And when he had questioned him and had found him to be the author of so great a crime, he said: 'It is fitting that he be handed over to Satan for the destruction of his flesh, in order that no one hereafter may dare become guilty of such deed.' And at the very moment before the bishop completed the statement, the unclean spirit seized upon the man and began to tear him to pieces, so that we were filled with fear and wonderment at the sight, and in no small measure. Indeed, we saw that many in those days were cleansed of the unclean spirits by laying on of his hands and at his word.

About the same time, when Nicentius, one of the tribune and notary class, who was so crippled by pain in his feet that he was rarely seen in public, had approached the altar to receive the sacraments and had cried out when the bishop accidentally stepped on his foot, he heard the bishop

say: 'Go, and be well henceforth.' And at the time of the bishop's departure from this world, he testified with tears that his feet had pained him no more.

Chapter 10

But after these days, when he had ordained a bishop of the Church at Ticinum, he was taken ill, and, because of this, since he was being kept in bed for very many days, Count Stilicho is reported to have said that, if so great a man should depart this life, ruin would threaten Italy. Accordingly, having summoned to himself the nobles of the city, whom he knew were loved by the bishop, he threatened them to some extent and then with flattering words persuaded them to go to the holy bishop and induce him to beg of the Lord an extension of life for himself. But, when he heard this from them, he replied: 'I have not so lived among you that I am ashamed to live, nor do I fear to die, because we have a good Lord.'

During this time, when Castus, Polemius, Venerius, and Felix, who were then deacons, were together in the farthest part of the portico in which he was lying and were conversing with one another in a voice so suppressed that they scarcely could hear one another as to who should be ordained bishop after his death, and when they spoke the name of holy Simplicianus, Bishop Ambrose, as if he were taking part in the discussion, although he was lying far from them, exclaimed three times approvingly: 'Old, but good! For Simplicianus was of mature age. And when they heard this noise they fled, thoroughly frightened. Yet, when he had died, none other succeeded him in the episcopacy except him whom the bishop designated by a triple expression as a good old man. And to this Simplicianus, Venerius, whom I have just mentioned, was successor. Felix, indeed, even to this time governs the church at Bologna. Castus, moreover, and Polemius, having been nourished by Ambrose, good fruits of a good tree, are performing the office of deacon in the church at Milan.

In the same place in which he was lying, as we have learned from a report of St. Bassianus, bishop of the church at Lodi, for he himself had heard it from St. Ambrose, when he was praying with this St. Bassianus, he observed that the Lord Jesus had approached him and was smiling upon him. And not many days later he was taken away from us. On the very day of his departure to the Lord he prayed with arms stretched out in the form of a cross, from about eleventh hour of day until the hour in which he breathed the forth his spirit. We truly saw that his lips were moving, but we did not hear his voice. Honoratius, also, bishop of the church at Vercelli, having composed himself for rest in the upper part of the house, heard the voice of one calling him a third time, saying to him: 'Arise, hasten, for now he is about to depart.' And he went down and offered the holy man the Body of the Lord, which he. received, and, as soon as he had swallowed it, he breathed forth his spirit, bearing with him a good Viaticum so that his soul, more refreshed by this Food, now rejoices in the company of angels according to whose life he lived on earth, and the company of Elias; for as Elias never feared to speak to kings or to any potentates, so neither did he fear to speak for fear of God.

Thereafter, his body was carried to the greater church the hour before the dawn in which he died and was there the same night on which we kept the vigil of Easter. And a great many baptized infants saw him when they were coming from the font, so that some said they saw him sitting on the throne in the sanctuary, while others indicated with their fingers to their parents that they saw him walking, but they, although they looked, were not able to see him, because they did not have pure eyes. There also were very many who related that they had seen a star over his body. But, as it began to dawn on the Lord's Day, after the divine rites had been performed, when his body was being lifted up to be carried from the church to the Ambrosian Basilica in which it was placed, a crowd of demons there cried out that they were being tortured by him, and so loudly that their wailings could not be endured. And this

grace of the bishop remains not only in that place but even in a great many provinces even to this day. Crowds of men and women also threw their handkerchiefs and sashes so that the body of the holy man might be touched by them in some way. For those taking part in the obsequies formed an innumerable crowd; men, women, and children of every rank and of all ages, not only Christians, but also Jews and pagans. However, the group of those who had been baptized led the procession, because of their greater grace.

On the very day on which he died, as is indicated by the text of the letter which was received by the venerable Simplicianus, his successor, and which was sent from the East to Ambrose himself--the letter being kept even till now in the monastery at Milan he appeared to certain holy men, praying with them and laying hands on them. And the letter which was sent carries a date, and when we read it, we discovered that it was the day on which he died.

In Tuscia, too, in the district of Florence where the holy man Zenobius is now bishop, Ambrose, because he had promised that he would visit more frequently those seeking him, was seen praying at the altar which is in the Ambrosian Basilica he built. This we learned from the report of the holy Bishop Zenobius himself. In the same house in which he stayed while refusing to see Eugenius, at the time when Rodagaisus was besieging the above-mentioned city, when the citizens had despaired of their safety, he also appeared to a certain man and promised that safety would come to them the following day. When this report was received, the spirits of the citizens were revived. And the next day, upon the arrival of Count Stilicho with an army, victory was gained over the enemy. These facts we know from the report of Pansophia, a devout woman, the mother of the boy, Pansophius.

Holding his staff in his right hand, he also appeared in a night vision to Mascezel, who was despairing of his own safety as well as the safety of his army which he was leading against Gildo. And when

Mascezel threw himself at the holy man's feet, the old man, for in this guise Ambrose appeared to him, striking the ground three times, said: 'Here, here, here,' signifying the place, and he gave understanding to Mascezel, for he had adjudged him worthy of the visitation, that he might know that in the very place in which he had seen the holy bishop of the Lord he would gain a victory the third day. Therefore, he opened battle with assurance and completed it. We, however, stationed in Milan, learned this from the report of Mascezel himself. For, in this province in which we are now stationed and are writing, he told this very happening to many bishops. But even to these reports we have thought it safer to add in this book the things known also to us.

Also at Milan we received with deepest devotion the remains of the martyrs, Sisinius and Alexander, who in our time, that is, after the death of Ambrose, gained the crown of martyrdom in the pagan persecutions in the regions of Anauni. At this time, there came a certain blind man, who, by touching the coffin in which the remains of the saints were being carried, that same day received sight. From his report we learned that in a vision he had seen a ship approaching the shore, in which were a great number of men clothed in white, when, as they were disembarking he asked one of the crowd to learn who the men were, he found that they were Ambrose and his companions. And upon hearing the name Ambrose, when he was praying that he might receive his sight, he heard from Ambrose: 'Proceed to Milan and contact my brothers who are about to go there' (indicating the day), 'and you will receive sight.' The man was, as he himself said, from the Dalmatian coast. And he further declared that, he had not come to the city before he met with the remains of the saints on the highway, at which time he still lacked sight, but upon touching the bier he began to see.

Chapter 11

Thus, having noted these facts, I do not regard it a serious matter if we exceed a little the bounds of our promise, in order that we may point out that the word of the Lord which He has spoken through the mouth of the holy prophets has been fulfilled: 'The man that sitteth against his

brother and detracteth him in private will I persecute." And again: "Love not to detract, lest you be destroyed," so that whosoever by chance has been a victim of this habit, when he has read in what manner vengeance has been taken against those who dared detract from the holy man, he himself in company with others may be corrected.

Now, a certain Donatus, an African by race, yet a presbyter of the church at Milan, was suddenly inflicted with a serious wound. At the time, he was attending a banquet at which were some military men of devout nature, who spurred his scurrilous speech and turned from him when he disparaged the memory of Ambrose. From the very spot in which the wound struck him down he was raised by unfriendly hands and placed on a couch, and from there was carried straight to his grave. Again, in the city of Carthage I went for a meal to the house of the deacon Fortunatus, a brother of the venerable Bishop Aurelius. Vincentius, Bishop of Colositanum, Muranus, Bishop of Bolita, as well as other bishops and deacons were also present. When, on this occasion Bishop Muranus was disparaging Ambrose, I mentioned to him the fate of the above-mentioned presbyter, and this story concerning another he confirmed by his own early departure. For, from the very place in which he was lying, when he suddenly had been struck by a huge wound, he was carried to bed by unfriendly hands. And thence, being taken back to the house. in which he had been entertained, he brought his last day to a close. Such was the end of those defaming Ambrose, so that those who were present and saw it were struck with awe.

I therefore exhort and implore every man who reads this book to imitate the life of Ambrose, to praise the grace of God and to shun the voices of detractors, if, indeed, he wishes to have fellowship with Ambrose in the resurrection of life rather than to undergo with those detractors a punishment which a wise man avoids.

I ask also your Blessedness, father Augustine, with all the saints who invoke the name of our Lord Jesus Christ in truth, to deign to pray

for me, the most lowly and sinful Paulinus, so that, although in gaining grace I am not worthy to have fellowship with so great a man, having gained pardon for my sins, I may have the reward of escaping punishment.

Source:

[http://www29.homepage.villanova.edu/christopher.haas/
Life%20of%20Ambrose.html](http://www29.homepage.villanova.edu/christopher.haas/Life%20of%20Ambrose.html)