

Memorial of St. Ambrose, Bishop and Doctor (339-397)

Homily of Bishop Barres

St. Agnes Cathedral

December 7, 2022

Today we celebrate the Memorial of St. Ambrose. St. Ambrose lived from 339 to 397. He was the Bishop of Milan and a great Doctor of the Church. As the Opening Prayer states, St. Ambrose was “a teacher of the Catholic faith and a model of apostolic courage.”

St. Ambrose was a friend of St. Monica and a key instrument intellectually and spiritually in the conversion of St. Augustine.

St. Augustine gives tribute to St. Ambrose in his *Confessions* – one of the true classics of literature and perhaps the greatest description of the process of conversion and repentance in history.

Pope Benedict describes the mentoring relationship between St. Ambrose and St. Augustine in Milan. He writes: “Augustine acquired the habit of listening – at first for the purpose of enriching his rhetorical baggage – to the eloquent preaching of Bishop Ambrose, who had been a representative of the Emperor for Northern Italy. The African rhetorician was fascinated by the words of the great Milanese Prelate; and not only by his rhetoric. It was above all the content that increasingly touched Augustine’s heart.”¹

Augustine and Ambrose shared that rigorous training in rhetoric and that mutual training helped open Augustine’s soul to grace and conversion.

We too have had experiences and training in life that help us to hear God speaking and that help us to evangelize.

We ourselves need to be able to listen to God with attention, docility and clarity and in the sphere of evangelization, good listening is as important as good catechesis.

In an excerpt from one of his letters which is in today’s *Office of Readings*, St. Ambrose writes: “There is also a stream which flows down on God’s saints like a torrent. There is also a rushing river giving joy to the heart that is at peace and makes

¹ Pope Benedict XVI, January 9, 2008 General Audience on Saint Augustine of Hippo (1).

for peace. Whoever has received from the fullness of this river, like John the Evangelist, like Peter and Paul, lifts up his voice. Just as the apostles lifted up their voices and preached the Gospel throughout the world, so those who drink these waters begin to preach the good news of the Lord Jesus.”

Let’s follow in the footsteps of John, Peter, Paul, Ambrose and Augustine. Let’s drink from the stream of God’s grace and preach the Good News.

St. Ambrose and St. Augustine together have had a lasting impact on world history and Salvation history.

Their intellects, thinking and writing have had a profound impact from the fourth century to the 21st century.

But perhaps the greatest reason their impact and influence have been so great is captured in their living of Matthew 11: “Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart; and you will find rest for yourselves. For my yoke is easy, and my burden light.”