Reflection Thursday 1st Week Advent St Ambrose 2023

St Ambrose was born in Trier (now Germany) between 337 and 340, to a Roman family: his father was praetorian prefect of Gaul. Ambrose was educated in Rome and studied the standard *cursus honorum* of Roman advocates and administrators, at Sirmium, capital of Illyria. About 372 he became prefect of Liguria and Emilia, whose capital was Milan.

In 374 the bishopric of Milan fell vacant and when Ambrose tried pacifying the conflict between Catholics and Arians over the appointment of a new bishop; the people demanded that he become their bishop. Despite being a layman and non-baptized, coerced by the people and the emperor, he was baptized, ordained, and installed as bishop within a week, on 7th December 374.

He immediately gave his money to the poor and his land to the Church, and studied theology. Knowing Greek, which few people did at that time, he was able to read the Eastern theologians and philosophers as well as those of the West.

Assiduous in carrying out his office, he acted with charity to all: a true shepherd and teacher of the faithful. He was unimpressed by status and when Emperor Theodosius ordered the massacre of 7,000 people in Thessalonica, Ambrose forced him to do public penance. He defended the rights of the Church and attacked the Arian heresy with learning, firmness and gentleness. He also wrote a number of hymns which are still in use.

Ambrose was a key figure in the conversion of St Augustine to Catholicism, impressing Augustine by his intelligence and scholarship. He died on Holy Saturday, 4th April 397.

The psalmist expresses the spirit of St Ambrose writing that God says to him: *My truth and my love shall be with him; by my name his might shall be exalted.* And that the soul of Ambrose *"sang for ever of his love for God!*