

## **December 11: St. Damasus I (305?-384)**

To his secretary St. Jerome, Damasus was “an incomparable person, learned in the Scriptures, a virgin doctor of the virgin Church, who loved chastity and heard its praises with pleasure.”

Damasus seldom heard such unrestrained praise. Internal political struggles, doctrinal heresies, uneasy relations with his fellow bishops and those of the Eastern Church marred the peace of his pontificate.

The son of a Roman priest, Damasus started as a deacon in his father's church, and served as a priest in what later became the basilica of San Lorenzo in Rome. He served Pope Liberius (352-366) and followed him into exile.

When Liberius died, Damasus was elected bishop of Rome; but a minority elected and consecrated another deacon, Ursinus, as pope. The controversy between Damasus and the antipope resulted in violent battles in two basilicas, scandalizing the bishops of Italy. At the synod Damasus called on the occasion of his birthday, he asked them to approve his actions. The bishops' reply was curt: “We assembled for a birthday, not to condemn a man unheard.” Supporters of the antipope even managed to get Damasus accused of a grave crime as late as A.D. 378. He had to clear himself before both a civil court and a Church synod.

As pope his lifestyle was simple in contrast to other ecclesiastics of Rome, and he was fierce in his denunciation of Arianism and other heresies. A misunderstanding of the Trinitarian terminology used by Rome threatened amicable relations with the Eastern Church, and Damasus was only moderately successful in dealing with that challenge.

During his pontificate Christianity was declared the official religion of the Roman state (380), and Latin became the principal liturgical language as part of the pope's reforms. His encouragement of St. Jerome's biblical studies led to the Vulgate, the Latin translation of Scripture which twelve centuries later the Council of Trent declared to be “authentic in public readings, disputations, preachings.”

DECEMBER 2021

## **A prayer from Taizé**

Holy Spirit, enable us to be the poor of Christ, who, like the widow in the Gospel, live above all from humble trust in God, and who take the risks of faith..

## **Prayers of Intercession for our parish**

- As we enter the season of remembrance for our loved ones, let us pray that all the saints in heaven will be filled with compassion for us, intercede for us, bring us comfort as we mourn and offer us hope for a better future.
- As we focus on our prayers this month for our loved ones who have died, let us pray for all those who mourn, that they may find comfort and peace at this difficult time.
- Let us pray that the Closer to Christ campaign bears fruit, enabling us to fund the mission of the church to bring people to Jesus Christ in hope and joy.

## **Some tweets by Pope Francis**

- Only a heart that is not overtaken by hastiness is capable of being moved, that is, of not allowing itself to be caught up in itself and by things to do, and is aware of others, of their wounds, their needs.
- God does not come in extraordinary events, but works amid the apparent monotony of our daily life, in the frequently dull rhythm of our activities, in the little things that, working with tenacity and humility, we achieve in our efforts to do his will .
- Today we need prophecy, but real prophecy. Miraculous demonstrations are not needed, but lives that demonstrate the miracle of God's love.

## December 22: Blessed Jacopone da Todi (d. 1306)

Jacomo, or James, was born a noble member of the Benedetti family in the northern Italian city of Todi. He became a successful lawyer and married a pious, generous lady named Vanna, who took it upon herself to do penance for the worldly excesses of her husband. One day Vanna, at the insistence of Jacomo, attended a public tournament. She was sitting in the stands when they collapsed, and she was killed. Her husband was even more disturbed when he realized that the penitential girdle she wore was for his sinfulness, so he vowed to radically change his life.

He divided his possessions among the poor and entered the Secular Franciscan Order (once known as the Third Order). Often dressed in penitential rags, he was mocked as a fool and called Jacopone, or "Crazy Jim," by his former associates. The name became dear to him.

After 10 years of such humiliation, Jacopone asked to be a member of the Order of Friars Minor (First Order). Because of his reputation, his request was initially refused. He composed a beautiful poem on the vanities of the world, an act that eventually led to his admission into the Order in 1278. He continued to lead a life of strict penance, declining to be ordained a priest. Meanwhile he was writing popular hymns in the vernacular.

Jacopone suddenly found himself a leader in a disturbing religious movement among the Franciscans. The Spirituals, as they were called, wanted a return to the strict poverty of Francis. At the age of 68, Jacopone was excommunicated and imprisoned. Although he acknowledged his mistake, Jacopone was not absolved and released until Benedict XI became pope. He had accepted his imprisonment as penance. He spent the final three years of his life more spiritual than ever, and during this time he wrote the famous Latin hymn, *Stabat Mater*.

On Christmas Eve in 1306 Jacopone felt that his end was near. He was in a convent of the Poor Clares with his friend, Blessed John of La Verna. Like Francis, Jacopone welcomed "Sister Death" with one of his favourite songs. It is said that he finished the song and died as the priest intoned the Gloria from the midnight Mass at Christmas. From the time of his death, Brother Jacopone has been venerated as a saint.

## Mary's Burden –

My Baby, my Burden,  
Tomorrow the morn  
I shall go lighter  
And you will be born.

I shall go lighter,  
But heavier too,  
For seeing the burden,  
That falls upon you.

The burden of love,  
The burden of pain,  
I'll see you bear both  
Among men once again.

Tomorrow you'll bear it  
Your burden alone,  
Tonight you've no burden  
That is not my own.

My Baby, my Burden,  
Tomorrow the morn  
I shall go lighter  
And you will be born.  
*Eleanor Farjeon*

**Dear God,**  
you made the donkey  
that bore your Son from Bethlehem  
safe in His Mother's arms.  
Take from our hearts  
all stubbornness  
and teach us how to carry Christ  
along the roads of life. Amen.  
*Father R.V. Bogan*