

February 3: St. Ansgar (801-865)

The “apostle of the north” (Scandinavia) had enough frustrations to become a saint—and he did. He became a Benedictine at Corbie, France, where he had been educated. Three years later, when the king of Denmark became a convert, Ansgar went to that country for three years of missionary work, without noticeable success. Sweden asked for Christian missionaries, and he went there, suffering capture by pirates and other hardships on the way. Fewer than two years later, he was recalled, to become abbot of New Corbie (Corvey) and bishop of Hamburg. The pope made him legate for the Scandinavian missions. Funds for the northern apostolate stopped with Emperor Louis’s death. After 13 years’ work in Hamburg, Ansgar saw it burned to the ground by invading Northmen; Sweden and Denmark returned to paganism.

He directed new apostolic activities in the North, travelling to Denmark and being instrumental in the conversion of another king. By the strange device of casting lots, the king of Sweden allowed the Christian missionaries to return.

Ansgar’s biographers remark that he was an extraordinary preacher, a humble and ascetical priest. He was devoted to the poor and the sick, imitating the Lord in washing their feet and waiting on them at table. He died peacefully at Bremen, Germany, without achieving his wish to be a martyr.

Sweden became pagan again after his death, and remained so until the coming of missionaries two centuries later.

One of his followers was bragging about all the miracles the saint had wrought. Ansgar rebuked him by saying, "If I were worthy of such a favour from my God, I would ask that he grant me this one miracle: that by his grace he would make of me a good man."

FEBRUARY 2022

Prayer from Taizé

Christ Jesus, as we celebrate your coming into the world, we long for your presence to be manifested today. You help us to keep watch and to pray, so that our hope may become ever more intense: a hope of peace for all human beings. Wherever we live, may this peace make of us creators of unity.

Prayers of Intercession for our parish

- Let us pray that we begin this New Year with God in our hearts, with new hope and a commitment to use our gifts in the service of the Lord, bringing people closer to Christ in hope and joy.
- We pray for the Alpha course as it starts. We pray for God’s protection and blessing upon guests and team as they embark on this journey. We continue to pray for those still to say yes; may God reveal Himself to them and open their hearts to this invitation.

Some tweets by Pope Francis

- Let us Pray Together today for all the people who suffer from sadness, because they are alone or because they do not know what the future holds for them, or because they cannot support their family, because they have no job. Many people suffer from sadness. Let us pray for them.
- From our gift the life and health of others, sick and suffering, may spring forth, helping to reinforce a culture of help, giving, hope and life. Society needs these concrete gestures of solidarity and generous love, to ensure the understanding that life is something sacred.
- Witnesses do not lose themselves in words, but rather they bear fruit. They do not complain about others and the world, but start with themselves. They remind us that God is not to be proven, but shown; not announced with proclamations but witnessed by example.

February 21: St. Peter Damian (1007-1072)

Maybe because he was orphaned and had been treated shabbily by his family, Peter Damian was very good to the poor. It was the ordinary thing for him to have a poor person or two with him at table and he liked to minister personally to their needs. Peter escaped poverty when his brother, who was archpriest of Ravenna, took him under his wing, and sent him to good schools. Already in those days Peter was very strict with himself. He wore a hair shirt under his clothes, fasted rigorously and spent many hours in prayer. Soon, he decided to leave his teaching and give himself completely to prayer with the Benedictines of the reform of St. Romuald at Fonte Avellana. They lived two monks to a hermitage. Peter was so eager to pray that he soon suffered from insomnia. He found he had to use some prudence in taking care of himself. When he was not praying, he studied the Bible.

The abbot commanded that when he died Peter should succeed him; Abbot Peter founded five other hermitages. He encouraged his brothers in a life of prayer and solitude and wanted nothing more for himself.

Finally, Pope Stephen IX made Peter the cardinal-bishop of Ostia. He worked hard to wipe out the sale of church offices, and encouraged his priests to observe celibacy, urging even the diocesan clergy to live together and maintain religious observance. He wished to restore primitive discipline among religious and priests, warning against needless travel, violations of poverty and too comfortable living. He even wrote to the bishop of Besançon, complaining that the canons there sat down when they were singing the psalms in the Divine Office.

He wrote many letters. Some 170 are extant. We also have 53 of his sermons and seven lives, or biographies, that he wrote. He preferred examples and stories rather than theory in his writings. He often asked to be allowed to retire as cardinal-bishop of Ostia, and finally Alexander II consented. Peter was happy to become just a monk again, but he was still called to serve as a papal legate. Returning from such an assignment in Ravenna, he was overcome by a fever. With the monks gathered around him saying the Divine Office, he died on February 22, 1072.

In 1828 he was declared a Doctor of the Church.

Candlemas Prayer - Ann Lewin

I left my candle burning. Lit from light
Borrowed from another, it stood there
Witness to Christ, Light of the world;
Prayer that light would overcome darkness.
As I left, another lit a candle from my light,
Dispelling gloom with added strength.
Who knows how many joined their light to those,
Or drew fresh courage from their company;
Who knows how many took a step, drawn by the
Light of Christ from darkness to new light?

Lord Christ, set me on fire.
Burn from me all that dims your light,
Kindle an answering flame in lives around;
That darkness may be driven back,
And glory stream into the world,
transforming it with love.

A Prayer for all of us to shine with the Light of the Lord by Cardinal Newman (1801-1890):

Stay with me, and then I shall begin to shine as thou shinest; so to shine as to be a light to others. The light, O Jesus, will be all from thee. None of it will be mine. No merit to me. It will be thou who shinest through me upon others. O let me praise thee, in the way which thou dost love best, by shining on all those around me. Give light to them as well as to me; light them with me, through me. Teach me to show forth thy praise, thy truth, thy will. Make me preach thee without preaching - not by words, but by my example and by the catching force, the sympathetic influence, of what I do - be my visible resemblance to thy saints, and the evident fullness of the love which my heart bears to thee.