



"Saints adoring Jesus Resurrected", by Fra Angelico – Detail of the Fiesole Panel, San Marco Museum, Florence (Italy)

## **Bl. Ambrose of Siena**

**1220 - 1287**

**October 8**

Although Blessed Ambrose of Siena's birth was attended by the prodigies also associated with Blessed James of Bevagna (of Mevania)—that of three brilliant stars bearing the image of a friar preacher—Ambrose Sansedoni got off to a very bad start by the world's account. He was so badly deformed and so ugly that his own mother could hardly bear to look at him. He was given into the care of a nurse, who daily took him with her to the Dominican church where she attended Mass. Here it was remarked that the baby, who fretted most of the time, was quiet and content when the nurse would hold him near the altar of relics, and that he cried violently when taken away.

One day, as the nurse was kneeling there with the baby's face covered with a scarf, a pilgrim approached and said to her, "Do not cover that child's face. He will one day be the glory of this city." A few days later, at this same altar, a miracle occurred. The unfortunate child suddenly reached out his twisted limbs and quite distinctly pronounced the sacred name of Jesus. At once, all deformity left him, and he became a normal child.

So early marked with the favor of God, it was only natural that Ambrose would be pious. As a child of seven he would rise at night to pray and meditate, and he daily recited the Little Office of the Blessed Virgin. While still a child, he was charitable to a heroic degree, and busied himself with the poor, the abandoned, and the sick. When he was only two or three years old, his father, who was an illuminator of books, made two little books for him. One was on secular subjects, the other on the saints. Ambrose made no hesitation about choosing the latter as his favorite, and throughout his life he was to exhibit this same choice of the things of God. Being a handsome and talented young man, Ambrose was beset with difficulties when he expressed his intention of becoming a member of the preaching friars. Parents and friends tried to change his mind, and the devil appeared in several different forms to counsel him against such a step. Ambrose courageously overcame all the obstacles in his path and joined the friars on his 17th birthday.

After his profession in 1237, Ambrose was sent to Paris to study under Saint Albert the Great. With his fellow pupil, Saint Thomas Aquinas, he returned to Cologne with Saint Albert, and thus was associated for some years with the two finest minds of the century. It is said that the humility of Ambrose, and his recognition of the true greatness of Saint Thomas's writings, led him to devote his time to preaching rather than writing. He was sent on many peace-making missions during his 30 years of preaching, and was highly regarded by both popes and Dominicans. Despite a very active apostolate of preaching in Germany, France, and Italy, Ambrose lived a life of almost uninterrupted prayer. He was often in ecstasy, and, shortly before his death, he was favored with several visions of great beauty. It is said that his death was hastened by the vehemence of his preaching. Sometimes when he preached, he levitated and a circle of glory, in which birds of brilliant plumage flitted, surrounded him. Many miracles were reported at his tomb, and he has been popularly called "Saint Ambrose of Siena" since the time of his death.