January 28

Ephrem of Nisibis (ca. 306-373) deacon and hymnographer

Ephrem, a deacon of the church of Nisibis and one of the best-loved hymnographers in the churches of Syriac tradition, died on June 9, 373 in Edessa.

He was born around the year 306 to Christian parents, and grew up in the city of Nisibis under the spiritual guidance of the bishop James, who made him an interpreter of Scripture at the local theological school.

Ephrem became a "son of the covenant," as solitaries who gave up marriage and devoted themselves to asceticism, prayer and charitable works were called in the churches of Persia. He continued to study, often visiting his city's flourishing Jewish exegetical schools.

He expressed his fascination with spiritual beauty by composing hymns, because he considered the hymnic genre better suited to telling God's mysteries, without falling into indiscretion or blasphemy, than the speculative genre. His main sources were what he called God's "three harps": the Hebrew Scriptures, the New Testament, and the book of nature.

A man firmly dedicated to communion in the church, Ephrem freely placed his spiritual gifts at the service of the bishops of Nisibi, whom he served as deacon. He was also very attentive to the presence and role of women in the Church.

When Nisibis fell into Persian hands in 363, Ephrem was forced to flee to Edessa, where he founded a successful theological academy that continued to thrive long after his death. His authority was so great that both the Eastern and the Western churches proclaimed him a doctor and teacher of the faith.

BIBLICAL READINGS
Col 3:12-17; Jn 19:25-27

Thomas Aquinas (1224/1225-1274) priest

Thomas Aquinas, a Dominican friar, died near the abbey of Fossanova in 1274, as he was travelling to the Council of Lyons.

He was born near the town of Aquino, near Naples, and was about eighteen years old when he entered the Order of Preachers. A disciple of Albertus Magnus in Cologne and then in Paris, he taught in these cities and in Rome, Bologna, and Naples. He became the author of a massive work of theology, which he left unfinished, and was, together with Bonaventure, the greatest Western Christian thinker of the thirteenth century.

His originality lies above all in the way he expressed the faith of the Church, especially with regard to the theology of creation and human freedom, in the cultural context of his time. Basing his reflections on Scripture and the Church fathers, he also welcomed the rediscovery, then recent, of Aristotelian thought.

He was a humble and wise man who learned to balance speculation with practice, and who controlled his violent temper through tender devotion for Christ crucified and through unceasing diologue with God.

Thomas Aquinas was proclaimed a Doctor of the Church by Pope Pius V in 1567, and in the centuries following this proclamation, his theology became extremely influential. At the Council of Trent, his *Summa Theologiae* was accorded an unprecedented degree of honor in the history of the Eastern and Western churches.

BIBLICAL READINGS
Wis 7:7-10.15-16; 1 Cor 2:9-16; Jn 16:12-15

Amalie (Augustine) von Lasaulx (1815-1872) religious

In 1872 Amalie von Lasaulx, better known as Sr. Augustine, died in Vallendar, Germany.

Amalie was born on October 19, 1815 in Coblenza (?). At the age of twenty-five she joined the congregation of the Borromean Sisters of Charity in Nancy, France, and distinguished herself through her total dedication as a nurse during the German-Danish War in 1864 and the Austro-German War in 1866.

Known and loved throughout Germany because of what she had done in tragic circumstances for so many, Amalie went on to found and direct St. John's Hospital in Bonn as local superior of the Borromean Sisters.

Her life as a religious changed dramatically when the new dogma of papal infallibility was proclaimed by the Catholic Church in 1870, generating much painful debate. For Amalie an inner torment began, and she eventually confessed that she was unable to find anything in Scripture or Tradition to justify the new dogmatic pronouncement, in the form in which it was expressed by the First Vatican Council.

She was suspended from every responsibility, but refused to retract her position publicly. When she died, alone, poor and abandoned, she was still convinced in her own conscience that she had remained faithful to the Gospel.

In the Old Catholic Church she is commemorated as a confessor of the faith.

A READING

Many people say, "How can I be saved?" How? I will tell you. "Forgive and it will be forgiven you": this is a way that leads to salvation. I will now show you another way - which one? "Do not judge," Scripture says, "and you will not be judged." Here is a way that does not consist in fasting, vigils, and labors. So do not judge your brother, even if you see him sin with your own eyes. There is only One who is judge and Lord, and "he will repay each person according to his works."

There is only one day of judgement, and on that day we will bow to the ground before the judge, exposed to judgement according to our works, longing to receive God's mercy. For "the Father judges no one but has given all judgement to the Son." Therefore, the one who judges before the parousia is an antichrist, because he usurps the right of Christ.

Anastasius the Sinaite, from the *Discourse on the Holy Synaxis*

THE CHURCHES REMEMBER....

ANGLICANS:
Thomas Aquinas, priest, philosopher, teacher of the faith

WESTERN CATHOLICS:
Thomas Aquinas, priest and doctor of the church (Roman and Ambrosian calendars)
Tirso (3rd cent.), martyr (Spanish-Mozarabic calendar)

COPTS AND ETHIOPIANS (19 tubah/terr):
Discovery of the relics of abba Or, Pisura and of their mother Ambira (Coptic Church)
Yafqeranna Egzi' (d. 1372), monk (Ethiopian Church)

LUTHERANS:
Charlemagne (d. 814), king and supporter of Christianity

MARONITES:
Ephrem the Syrian, confessor

ORTHODOX CHRISTIANS AND GREEK CATHOLICS:
Ephrem the Syrian, deacon and monk
Gabriel of Lesnovo and Prochorus of Pcinja (10th-11th cent.), anchorites
Romilus of Ravanica (d. 1376), monk (Serbian Church)
Salome Ugiarmeli and Perozhavar Sivnieli (4th cent.; Georgian Church)

WEST SYRIAN ORTHODOX:
Ephrem the Syrian

OLD CATHOLICS:
Agnes (3rd cent.), virgin and martyr