DAILY COMPASS
Managing Director Riccardo Cascioli
MADE FOR THE TRUTH

Saint Damasus I

SAINT OF THE DAY 11_12_2025

The pontificate of St. Damasus I (304-384) was quite eventful. He rose to the Petrine throne in 366 and led the Church during a phase in which the heresies on the Divine Trinity were raging. He fought vigorously against them with help from, among others, Saint Jerome, whom he had for some time as his secretary and commissioned to translate the Bible into Latin. The pontificate of his predecessor Liberius had already been marked by strong contrasts with the Arians, who although they had been declared heretics by the Council of Nicaea in 325, still enjoyed great influence thanks to the

support of Emperor Constantius II (†361). He was among the main culprits of the persecution of Saint Athanasius, the most steadfast opponent of the Arian heresy, a denial of the divinity of Christ.

From the moment of his election, Damasus had to face the attempts of usurpation of the antipope Ursinus, who for years acted along with his followers in scheming against the legitimate pontiff. Among his most important supporters was Saint Ambrose, bishop of Milan from 374 and author of the famous maxim *Ubi Petrus, ibi Ecclesia* ("where Peter is, there is the Church"), who at the council of Aquileia in 381 had a decisive role in having Ursinus declared a usurper. For his part, to defend the unity of the Church and the closely related authority of the Roman See, Damasus recalled that the Petrine primacy is founded theologically on the very words of the Lord and in particular on those of the passage of Matthew 16:17-19; and that Rome had been the place where Peter and Paul had completed the course of their earthly life, suffering martyrdom on the same day during Nero's persecutions.

In his action to combat heresies, Damasus summoned two synods in Rome that condemned Apollinarianism, which heretically formulated the idea of an incomplete human nature in Jesus Christ, and Macedonianism, another heresy that asserted the subordination of the Holy Spirit with respect to the Father and the Son. As a result of the synod of Antioch in 378, he deposed all the bishops who were followers of Arianism, which weakened considerably under his pontificate both on account of his charisma and the help of personalities such as Ambrose, Basil the Great and Jerome, and on account of the favorable policies of the emperors Gratian and Theodosius I, who with the Thessalonian edict of 380 declared Christianity the official religion of the empire. The following year there was also an event of absolute importance in the history of the Church, namely the first Council of Constantinople (Damasus did not personally take part in it, but sent his legates to it), which integrated the Nicene Creed by explaining a few fundamentals of the Divine Trinity and confirmed the condemnation of the main heresies.

Damasus is also remembered for his attention to the liturgy (he promoted Latin as the official language), the restoration of various sacred buildings and devotion to the martyrs, to whom he dedicated various epigrams as their tombs in the catacombs were gradually identified. His decree *De explanatione fidei*, promulgated on the occasion of the Council of Rome in 382, is the first papal act known to us containing the entire canon of the Bible, in conformity with a letter of 367 by Saint Athanasius which in its turn had systematized into an organic way a work started by the Fathers of the preceding centuries. And also in 382 he urged Jerome to undertake the Latin translation of the

Holy Scriptures, universally known as the Vulgate.