

**Blase, Bishop and Martyr, c. 316, and  
Anskar, Archbishop of Hamburg, Missionary to Denmark  
and Sweden, 865: Mass**

**February 3, 2021**

**By the Reverend Stephen Gerth**

*Acts 1:1–9; Psalm 96:1–7; John 21:15–17*

I wasn't happy with myself this morning when I read in my copy of *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, "According to a late and historically worthless, but widely distributed legend, St. Blasius was Bishop of Sebaste in Armenia and martyred under Licinius in the early 4th century."<sup>1</sup> I never blessed throats until I came to Saint Mary's—although Trinity Church, Michigan City, Indiana, had an Anglo-Catholic rector from the late 1940s until 1963, if I recall correctly. The parish had the right equipment.

I guess that the Blessing of Throats on February 3 at Saint Mary's probably dates to the 1930s, an established custom when I became rector here on February 1, 1999. I learned to bless throats two days later. A new rector makes a lot of changes simply because he or she is new. I was aware that I would be making changes and mistakes without any agenda just

---

<sup>1</sup> *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, (ODCC) 2ed. (New York: Oxford University Press 1978), s.v. "Blasius, St.," 179.

by being new. I'd gone through that in Indiana. And I tried to minimize my exposure as I settled in.

One of the things I most treasure about the Anglican tradition is its striving for spiritual and intellectual honesty. I have dropped some great theologians from Saint Mary's parish calendar because of their harsh anti-Judaism, Ambrose, and John Chrysostom, to name two. We commemorate the unnamed parents of the Virgin Mary as the 1979 Prayer Book does, "The Parents of the Virgin Mary." Though there is a second-century text known as the *[Proto-Gospel] of James* that names them, it is not considered a historical witness to their names but instead to Mary's veneration by the early Church.<sup>2</sup>

Now, Anskar. He was initially bishop of Hamburg. But after that town was raided and destroyed in 845, he became bishop of Bremen. He died there on February 3, 865. One of his missions, again from *The Oxford Dictionary*, was to "mitigate the horrors of the [Baltic] slave trade."<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup> Paul F. Bradshaw and Maxwell E. Johnson, *The Origins of Feasts, Fasts and Seasons in Early Christianity* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2011), 196.

<sup>3</sup> ODCC, s.v. "Anskar, St." 62.

There's a parish near Nashotah House Seminary dedicated to [Saint Anskar](#), in Hartland, Wisconsin—a suburb of Milwaukee, on the way to Madison. It's a lovely church. Its dedication and architecture reflect the Scandinavian heritage of that part of southeast Wisconsin. Next year, this commemoration will be about the missionary work of Anskar and others. I wonder when this slave trade actually came to an end.

✠ In the Name of the Father, and of the Son,  
and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Copyright © 2021 The Society of the Free Church of St. Mary the Virgin, New York, New York.

All rights reserved.