

A recent news report about the 2020 election stated that the president and his allies are putting forward yet another challenge in an “audacious and legally dubious gambit to keep the lawsuits flowing in order to prolong baseless claims that President-elect Joe Biden’s victory was somehow illegitimate” (CNN). This contemporary effort to overturn an election is very tame compared to the church election of Damasus I as Pope in 366.

Ursinus coveted the Throne of Peter and used every trick in the book to declare himself the legitimate pope. He had his followers proclaim him the pope and incited a revolt to kick Pope Damasus I out of Rome. Violence and bloodshed resulted in the death of 137 people. Siding with Damasus, Emperor Valentinian sent his forces to defend the pope and drive Ursinus into exile. This worked for a short time.

Ursinus and his followers waited for a while and then returned with a vengeance. This time, they tried to destroy the reputation of Damasus by spreading gossip. They accused him of adultery. Ursinus took the low road, Damasus took the high road. “He assembled a synod of forty-four bishops, in which he justified himself so well that [Ursinus and his followers] were excommunicated and banished.”ⁱ

Damasus proved his true legitimacy through the exceptional way in which he helped the still young church to grow. “He presided over the Council of Rome of 382 that determined the canon or official list of Sacred Scripture” and enlisted the help of the premier biblical scholar of the day, Saint Jerome, to produce a new translation of the bible in Latin.ⁱⁱ Likewise, he initiated reform in the liturgy by changing from Greek to the more universal Latin language. When modern day visitors go to Rome, they can thank Pope Damasus for his 4th century efforts to preserve and restore the catacombs, the graves of the martyrs, and relics. “He spoke out against major heresies in the church and ... helped reconcile the relations between the Church of Rome and the Church of Antioch.”ⁱⁱⁱ

Having reigned for eighteen years and two months, he died on December 10, 384. Although “internal political struggles, doctrinal heresies, uneasy relations with his fellow bishops and those of the Eastern Church marred the peace of his pontificate,” he nevertheless served with distinction as a zealous defender of the faith.^{iv} Amidst the turbulence of his time, he took comfort from our Lord recalling his words, “It was not you who chose me, but I who chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit that will remain, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name he may give you” (Jn 5:16).

Damasus liked to write epigrams: short sayings that capture the essence of a subject. The Decree of Damasus^v explains the various names attributed to Jesus:

- We refer to Jesus as the Son of God, because He is the only-begotten Son of the Father;
- Jesus is the Son of Man, because He was born of the Virgin;
- Jesus is known as a Priest, because He offered Himself as a sacrifice;
- Jesus is the Good Shepherd, because He is a guardian;
- Jesus is Worm, because He rose again;
- Jesus is Mountain, because He is strong;
- Jesus is the Way, because there is a straight path through Him to life eternal;
- Jesus is the Lamb, because He suffered;
- Jesus is the Corner-Stone, because instruction is His;
- Jesus is Teacher, because He demonstrates how to live;
- Jesus is Sun, because He is the illuminator;
- Jesus is the Truth, because He is from the Father;
- Jesus is Life, because He is the creator;

- Jesus is Bread, because He is flesh;
- Jesus is the Good Samaritan, because He is the merciful protector;
- Jesus is the Christ, because He is the Anointed One.
- Jesus is the Vine, because we are redeemed by His blood;
- Jesus is a Prophet, because He has revealed what is to come;
- Jesus is the Word of God, because when he spoke the world came to be;
- Jesus is the New Adam, because he atoned for the original sin of Adam.

ⁱ catholicnewsagency.com/saint/st-damasus-pope-81

ⁱⁱ Ibid.

ⁱⁱⁱ Ibid.

^{iv} franciscanmedia.org/saint-of-the-day/saint-damasus-i

^v Adapted from the original, modified and added to for understanding.