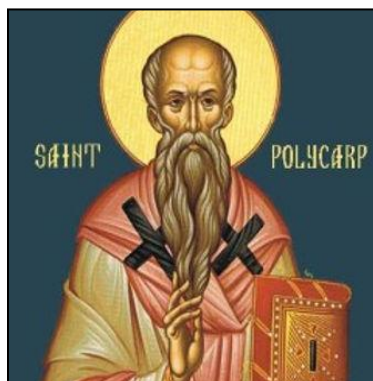


Saint Polycarp



Date of birth: 69 AD

Birthplace: Smyrna

Date of death: 155 AD, *martyred*

Canonization: pre-congregation

Feast Day: February 23

Patron Saint of: Earaches, Dysentery, and Intestinal disorders

About Polycarp:

Though little is known about his early life, Polycarp would come into contact with many prominent early Christians in his lifetime. A student of the apostle John, personal friend of Bishop Ignatius of Antioch, and teacher of the Bishop Irenaeus of Lyon, Polycarp was known to all as a holy man before his hair even turned gray. Polycarp, his name meaning “fruitful”, appears to have been born into a Christian family and baptized as an infant. He was ordained the Bishop of Smyrna (in modern day Turkey) by the Apostle John prior to John’s death in the year 99 AD.

The only surviving text authored by Polycarp, an early church father, is a letter to the Phillipians. His letter is one of the oldest Christian texts outside of the New Testament, and references several New Testament books, giving witness to their early circulation and authority prior to canonization. In his letter, Polycarp warns against the heresy of docetism, which denies the humanity of Christ.

Leading up to Polycarp’s martyrdom, Rome began hunting Polycarp on the demand of bloodthirsty pagan crowds. However, Polycarp, not wanting to leave his Christian flock without being sure God had truly called him to martyrdom, initially fled to a farm. While hiding out in the countryside, he had a vision where his pillow burst into flames. Taking this as a sign that God had called him to martyrdom at the stake, he was eventually captured.

Before being burned at the stake, Polycarp was given the opportunity to save himself by worshipping the Emperor. He refused, and said he had served Christ for 86 years who was always loyal to him. Upon being put to death, Polycarp rejoiced and praised God who judged him worthy of martyrdom. Rome attempted to hide the body of the saint from the early Christians, but eventually the body fell into the Church’s hands where his remains were properly venerated.

A word from St. Polycarp:

“I bless you, Father, for judging me worthy of this hour, so that in the company of the martyrs I may share the cup of Christ.”

Find out more:

Books: *Four Witnesses: The Early Church in Her Own Words* by Rod Bennett

Formed.org: St. Polycarp - Catholic Saints