

imitation of Christ; hence the only true disciple of Christ is one who is ready to sacrifice his life for him, a glorious privilege, eagerly to be grasped.

He writes: "I am not yet perfected in Jesus Christ; indeed, I am now but being initiated into discipleship, and I address you as fellow-disciples (*Eph.* 3:1). — Pardon me — I know very well where my advantage lies. At least I am well on my way to being a disciple. May nothing seen or unseen fascinate me, so that I may happily make my way to Jesus Christ! Fire, cross, struggles with wild beasts, wrenching of bones, mangling of limbs, crunching of the whole body, cruel tortures inflicted by the devil — let them come upon me, provided only I make my way to Jesus Christ. Of no use to me will be the farthest reaches of the universe or the kingdoms of this world. I would rather die and come to Jesus Christ than be king over the entire earth. Him I seek who died for us; Him I love who rose again because of us. The birth pangs are upon me. Forgive me, brethren; do not obstruct my coming to life — do not wish me to die; do not make a gift to the world of one who wants to be God's Beware of seducing me with matter pure light. Once arrived there, I shall be a man (*Rom.* 5:3-6). — Why, moreover, did I surrender myself to death, to fire, to the sword, to wild beasts? Well, to be near the sword is to be near God; to be in the claws of wild beasts is to be in the hands of God. Only let it be done in the name of Jesus Christ! To suffer with Him I endure all things, if He, who became perfect man, gives me the strength "(*Smyrn.* 4:2-4

**From The Golden Legend:** "It is read that Saint Ignatius in all his torments and all the

pains of martyrdom that he suffered, that his tongue never ceased to name the name of Jesus, and when they that tormented him demanded him wherefore he named this name so oft, he answered: Know ye for certain that I have in my heart this name written, and therefore I may not leave to name this name oft. And because hereof, when he was dead, they that heard these words opened his body and drew out his heart and cut it open, and they found within the name of Jesus written with fair letters of gold, for which miracle many received the faith of Jesu Christ."

Notes:

1 Joseph Holzner, Paul of Tarsus (St. Louis: B. Herder Book CO, 1955) 99.

2 Holzner, Paul of Tarsus. 80.

3 John Henry Cardinal Newman, "The Theology of the Seven Epistles of St. Ignatius," Essays, Critical and Historical, Vol. I (London: Longmans, Green, and Co. 1907) 255. 4 Quasten, Johannes, "Patrology", Vol. 1, (Christian Classics) 71-72.

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Pamphlet 308

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## **St. Ignatius of Antioch**

Victor R. Claveau, MJ



**Martyrdom of St. Ignatius of Antioch**

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The Gospel of St. Luke (9:47) describes how Jesus took a little boy by the hand, stood him by his side and said to his apostles: "Whoever receives this child in my name receives me ..."

According to tradition, the little boy, converted by St. John, was St. Ignatius of Antioch. Joseph Holzner tells us that when Ignatius was 15 years old he listened to St. Paul preach in the synagogue of Tarsus, just prior to St. Paul departing on his first missionary journey to Cyprus.<sup>1</sup> According to St. John Chrysostom, an Apostle ordained Ignatius to the priesthood, and Theodoret, the Bishop of Cyrus (393-457), informs us St. Peter installed Ignatius as the third bishop of Antioch. He knew and worked with St. John, the "disciple that Jesus loved," for as many as 30 years.

St. Ignatius, also called Theophorus (God Bearer), wrote during the very beginning of the second century. And there was no individual in the early Church with a more comprehensive knowledge of Sacred Tradition.

Ignatius was sentenced during the Emperor Trajan's reign (98-117) to be devoured by wild beasts in the arena at Rome because he refused to burn incense before a statue of Trajan as divine emperor. On the way to the Eternal City, he composed seven letters. Of these, five were addressed to the Christian communities of Ephesus, Magnesia, Tralles, Philadelphia and Smyrna. A sixth letter was addressed to his brother bishop, Polycarp the Bishop of Smyrna. In each of these letters, we find Ignatius chastising as well encouraging the churches.

The most important letter was addressed to Pope St. Clement, in the city of his destination, Rome. Here we find Ignatius writing to the Roman Church a laudatory letter, which has no parallel in his letters to other churches: "Ignatius, to the Church that has found mercy ... a church worthy of God, worthy of honor, worthy of felicitation, worthy of praise, worthy of success, worthy of sanctification, and *presiding* in love, maintaining the law of Christ, and bearer of the Father's name: her do I therefore salute in the name of Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father"<sup>2</sup> (Emphasis mine).

The tenor of this letter is remarkably different; it is not only respectful, but also deferential. The general tone of St. Ignatius with regard to Rome strongly suggests he was well aware he was addressing the successor of Blessed Peter.

It is interesting to note the Ignatian letters outline much of the Catholic Church's basic theology during the first century. John Henry Cardinal Newman, a 19<sup>th</sup> century convert to Catholicism, summed up the theology of the seven letters of St. Ignatius as follows:

"It is hardly too much to say that almost the whole system of Catholic doctrine may be discovered, at least in outline, not to say in parts filled up, in the course of them. There are indeed one or two omissions, as if on purpose to prove to us the genuineness; for chief of which is the scanty notice they contain of the Catholic doctrine of the Trinity, and of baptismal regeneration, which in Ignatius' time were not subjects of controversy."<sup>3</sup>

1. The Church was divinely established as a visible society. (Philad. c. iii).
2. The salvation of souls is its end. (Philad. c. iii).
3. Those who separate themselves from it cut themselves off from God. (Philad. c. iii).
4. The hierarchy of the Church was instituted by Christ. (Intro. to Philad., Ephes. c. vi).
5. The threefold character of the hierarchy. (Magn. c. vi).
6. The order of the episcopacy is superior by Divine authority to that of the priesthood. (Magn. c. vi, c. viii; Smyrn. c. viii; Trall. c. iii).
7. The unity of the Church. (Trall. c. vi; Philad. c. iii; Magn. c. xiii).
8. The Holiness of the Church. (Smyrn., Ephes., Magn., Trall. and Rome).
9. The catholicity of the Church. (Smyrn. c. viii).

10. The infallibility of the Church. (Philad. c. iii; Ephes. cc. xvi, xvii).

11. The doctrine of the Eucharist. (Smyrn. c. viii). Which word we find for the first time applied to the Blessed Sacrament. Just as in Smyrn., viii, we meet for the first time the phrase, A Catholic Church, used to designate all Christians.

12. The Incarnation. (Ephes. c. xviii).

13. The supernatural virtue of virginity, already much esteemed and made subject of a vow. (Polyc. c. v.).

14. The religious character of matrimony. (Polyc. c. v.).

15. The value of united prayer. (Ephes. c. xiii.)

16. The primacy of the See of Rome. (Rom. intro.).

17. He denounces in principle the Protestant doctrine of private judgment in matters of religion. (Philad. c. iii.).

18. Condemns the heresy of Docetism, [the denial of the reality of Christ's human nature] and of direct Judaism [the denial of His divine nature]" (John Henry Cardinal Newman, *The Theology of the Seven Epistles of St. Ignatius*, 255-257).

Cardinal Newman added: "Either the Epistles of St. Ignatius have been the document from which the Church system has been historically developed, which no one maintains, or the Church system is the basis on which St. Ignatius wrote his Epistles."

## Martyrdom

At Rome, the Bishop of Antioch, suffered the death he had so earnestly longed for. He considered Christian martyrdom as the perfect