



The Faith of the Martyr's Bible Study 2021

Week 2

Our Savior Lutheran Church and School

“The Christians were brought before the proconsul and given the option: idolatry or death. Offer this little pinch of incense or we will set you on fire. Say, “Caesar is lord,” or we will throw you to the lions. Idolatry or death, and the fear of death would push the Christians into idolatry. Not the martyrs. The fear of death had been crucified with Christ.”

– Pr. Bryan Wolfmueller

Bishop Polycarp of Smyrna

- Smyrna was just north of Ephesus in Turkey.
- Polycarp was born in 69 AD.
 - He was a disciple of the Apostle John. Yeah ... THE Apostle John.
 - Probably the recipient of the letter addressed to Smyrna in Revelation 2:8-11.
- Only one piece of writing remains from him, though we do know more about his life.
- Polycarp was active and very importance as the Bishop of Smyrna for a long time.
 - In 155, under Marcus Aurelius who was Roman consul, persecution arose in Smyrna, leading to the martyrdom of Polycarp.

Section 1 (Introduction): “We write to you, brethren, the story of the martyrs and of the blessed Polycarp, who put an end to the persecution by his martyrdom as though adding the seal. **For one might almost say that all that had gone before happened in order that the Lord might show to us from above a martyrdom in accordance with the Gospel.** For he waited to be betrayed as also the Lord had done, **that we too might become his imitators.** . . .”

- We need these heroes. We need the stories of our brothers and sisters who have gone before us and suffered all for the sake of the name of Christ.
- We are encouraged and strengthened to be similar imitators; for this is the pattern of the Christian life. 1 Peter 2:21

Section 2 (The Sufferings of the Martyrs): “Blessed then and noble are all the martyrdoms which took place **according to the will of God**, for we must be very careful to **assign the power over all to God.** . . .”

- These things to place according to God’s will.
- He remains in control over all things.

“ . . . And in the same way also those who were condemned to the beasts endured terrible torment, being stretched on sharp shells and buffeted with other kinds of various torments, that if it were

possible the tyrant might bring them to a denial by continuous torture. **For the devil used many wiles against them.**”

- 1. The goal that God has for us is to die in the faith.
- 2. The goal the devil has in mind for us is to put our faith to death.

Section 3 (Germanicus): “. . . For when the Pro-Consul wished to persuade him [**Germanicus**] and bade him have pity on his youth, he violently dragged the beast towards himself, wishing to be released more quickly from their unrighteous and lawless life. So after this all the crowd, wondering at the nobility of the God-loving and God-fearing people of the Christians, cried out: "Away with the **Atheists**; let Polycarp be searched for."

- Not much known about Germanicus. He was a youth from Smyrna.
- Held up as an excellent model of martyrdom. (Wrong understanding of Matthew 16:24)

Section 4 (Quintus): “. . . Now it was he [**Quintus**] who had **forced himself and some others to come forward of their own accord**. Him the Pro-Consul persuaded with many entreaties to take the oath and offer sacrifice. For this reason, therefore, brethren, **we do not commend those who give themselves up, since the Gospel does not give this teaching**.

- A poor and unworthy model of martyrdom.
- We do not run towards martyrdom or seek it out ourselves.

Section 5 (Polycarp's Retreat to the Country): “. . . And while he was praying he fell into a trance three days before he was arrested, and **saw the pillow under his head burning with fire**, and he turned and said to those who were with him: 'I must be burnt alive.'”

- How do we deal with the visions and voices that many of the martyrs are reported to have seen and heard?

Section 7 (Arrival of Police, Polycarp's Reaction, His Prayer): “. . . Therefore **he ordered food and drink to be set before** them at that hour, whatever they should wish, and he asked them to give him an hour to pray without hindrance. To this they assented, and he stood and prayed - thus filled with the grace of God - so that for two hours he could not be silent, and those who listened were astounded, and many repented that they had come against such a venerable old man.”

- A true servant of the Lord Jesus Christ – Polycarp does this for those who have come to bring him to his death!

Section 9 (Polycarp's Examination): “. . . 'Swear by the genius of Caesar, repent, say: 'Away with the Atheists''; but Polycarp, with a stern countenance looked on all the crowd of lawless heathen in the arena, and **waving his hand at them, he groaned and looked up to heaven and said: 'Away with the Atheists.'** But when the Pro-Consul pressed him and said: 'Take the oath and I let you go, revile Christ,' Polycarp said: '**For eighty and six years have I been His servant, and He has done me no wrong, and how can I blaspheme my King who saved me?**'”

- Turns the first sentence they required him to say and turned it around on them. But he refused to deny Christ.
- May the Lord grant all of us such faith and courage!

Section 10 (Examination Continued): “. . . If you vainly suppose that I will swear by the genius of Caesar, as you say, and pretend that you are ignorant who I am, listen plainly: **I am a Christian. And if you wish to learn the doctrine of Christianity fix a day and listen.**”

Section 11 (The Pro-Consul's Threats): "And the Pro-Consul said: "I have wild beasts. I will deliver you to them, unless you repent." And he said: 'Call for them, **for repentance from better to worse is not allowed us; but it is good to change from evil to righteousness.**' And he said again to him: 'I will cause you to be consumed by fire, if you despise the beasts, unless you repent.' But Polycarp said: 'You threaten with the fire that burns for a time, and is quickly quenched, for you do not know the fire which awaits the wicked in the judgment to come and in everlasting punishment. But why are you waiting? Come, do what you will.'

- What Polycarp is saying in the bold is: "It is unthinkable for me to repent from what is good and turn to what is evil. I will be glad to be changed from evil to righteousness."

Section 14 (His Last Prayers): "O Lord God Almighty, Father of thy beloved and blessed Child, Jesus Christ, through Whom we have received full knowledge of thee, the God of Angels and powers, and of all creation, and of the whole family of the righteous, who live before thee! I bless thee, that Thou hast granted me this day and hour, that I may share, among the number of the martyrs, in the cup of thy Christ, for the Resurrection to everlasting life, both of soul and body in the immortality of the Holy Spirit. And may I, to-day, be received among them before Thee, as a rich and acceptable sacrifice, as Thou, the God who lies not and is truth, hast prepared beforehand, and shown forth, and fulfilled. For this reason I also praise Thee for all things, I bless Thee, I glorify Thee through the everlasting and heavenly high Priest, Jesus Christ, thy beloved Child, through whom be glory to Thee with him and the Holy Spirit, both now and for the ages that are to come, Amen."

- The last words of St. Polycarp – rejoicing always.

Section 17 (The Treatment of the Corpse): ". . . Therefore he [Satan] put forward Niketas, the father of Herod, and the brother of Alce, to ask the Governor not to give his body, '**Lest,** he said, **they leave the crucified one and begin to worship this man.**' . . . **for they do not know that we shall not ever be able either to abandon Christ,** who suffered for the salvation of those who are being saved in the whole world, the innocent for sinners, or to worship any other. **For Him we worship as the Son of God, but the martyrs we love as disciples and imitators of the Lord;** and rightly, because of their unsurpassable affection toward their own King and Teacher. God grant that we too may be their companions and fellow-disciples.

- 2 Timothy 1:8
- Christ's death vs. the martyr's deaths.
- Office of Redeemer vs. Office of Martyr.

Section 18 (The Christians Take the Ashes): "There the Lord will permit us to come together according to our power in gladness and joy, and **celebrate the birthday of his martyrdom,** both in memory of those who have already contested, and **for the practice and training of those whose fate it shall be.**"

- The Festival of St. Polycarp's Martyrdom – February 23rd (died 155 AD).

Section 21 (The Date): "Now the blessed Polycarp was martyred on the second day of the first half of the month of Xanthicus, the seventh day before the kalends of March, a great sabbath, at the eighth hour. And he was arrested by Herod, when Philip of Tralles was High Priest, when Statius Quadratus was Pro-Consul, **but Jesus Christ was reigning for ever,** to whom be glory, honour, majesty and an eternal throne, from generation to generation, Amen."

- Christ continues to reign over all things.

And so Polycarp came to the end of his earthly life—clinging in faith to the Lord Jesus Christ.
Polycarp, our brother, received the crown of life.

Polycarp: Martyr. Hero.

We'll meet in the resurrection.

