

February 23rd: St. Polycarp, bishop and martyr

Gospel text (Jn 15,18-21): Jesus said to his disciples, «If the world hates you, remember that the world hated me before you. This would not be so if you belonged to the world, because the world loves its own. But you are not of the world since I have chosen you from the world; because of this the world hates you. Remember what I told you: the servant is not greater than his master; if they persecuted me, they will persecute you, too. Have they kept my teaching? Will they then keep yours? All this they will do to you for the sake of my name because they do not know the One who sent me».

«All this they will do to you for the sake of my name»

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Today, when remembering St. Polycarp, a great Father of the Church, Jesus Himself shows us what a great contrast there is between belonging to Christ or to the World. Just as they persecuted Jesus, His disciples will also be chased: 'If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also' (Jn 15:20). The disciple must fully identify himself with his Master and, to participate with Jesus Christ in His resurrection, he will have to share before his Passion with Him. History shows us that Christ and His Gospel are always, a contradiction sign for the world.

So did St. Polycarp understand it and lived by it. He was born in Smyrna, in the actual Turkey, and then a Roman province in Asia Minor, and he died a martyr in this city, having been a Bishop of the local Church. Polycarp, whose name means "abundant fruit", had met the apostle John and had been his disciple; He wrote a letter to the Christians in Philippi (Greece) to encourage them to live by following Jesus Christ. Thus he wrote to the first Christians: "Wherefore, girding up your loins serve the Lord in fear and truth, as those who have forsaken the vain, empty

talk and error of the multitude, and believed in Him who raised our Lord Jesus Christ from the dead and gave him glory and a throne at His right hand".

Persecutions certainly were one of the biggest dangers for Christians in times of Polycarp, but doctrinal deviations that threatened to shake off believers from the true faith and internally destroy the Church, were also current dangers. There are people who call themselves believers, but, as Jesus says, «they do not know Him who sent me"(Jn 15:21). Today and always, we are invited to truly know God and to follow Jesus Christ, and to help us in this purpose let us ask the intercession of St. Polycarp of Smyrna.