February 23rd: Memorial of Saint Polycarp, Bishop and Martyr

Gospel text (*Jn* 15:18-21): Jesus said to his disciples; “If the world hates you, realize that it hated me first. If you belonged to the world, the world would love its own; but because you do not belong to the world, and I have chosen you out of the world, the world hates you. Remember the word I spoke to you, ‘No slave is greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they kept my word, they will also keep yours. And they will do all these things to you on account 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»

Fr. Joaquim MESEGUER García
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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 pursued: “If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you” (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 present-day Turkey, which became 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 the one 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 Saint Polycarp of Smyrna.

Thoughts on Today's Gospel

- “Stand fast and follow the example of the Lord, being firm and unchangeable in the faith, loving the brotherhood, and being attached to one another, joined together in the truth, exhibiting the meekness of the Lord in your intercourse with one another, and despising no one.” (Saint Polycarp)

- “Whoever is moved by love begins to perceive what ‘life’ really is. He begins to perceive the meaning of the word of hope.” (Benedict XVI)

- “Communion with the saints. ‘It is not merely by the title of example that we cherish the memory of those in heaven; we seek, rather, that by this devotion to the exercise of fraternal charity the union of the whole Church in the Spirit may be strengthened’ (...) (Vatican II).” (Catechism of the Catholic Church, nº 957)