

St Ignatius of Antioch the God-Bearer



“I am the wheat of God and let me be ground by the teeth of wild beasts, that I may be found the pure bread of Christ.” These powerful words were written by St. Ignatius of Antioch in his epistle to the Romans as he was escorted over 1,500 miles from Antioch to Rome, where he was martyred.

St. Ignatius is traditionally considered the second bishop of Antioch after St. Peter, as Origen suggests, but more likely, he was the third bishop, following St. Evodius, who succeeded St. Peter. The Coptic tradition holds that Ignatius was a disciple of St. John the Evangelist, learning under him alongside St. Polycarp. Other sources suggest he was disciplined by St. Paul. What is certain is that St. Ignatius was closely associated with the apostles, and perhaps even with Christ Himself.

In fact, the first mention of St. Ignatius may be found in the Gospel of Matthew, where Christ says: “Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever humbles himself as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Whoever receives one little child like this in My name receives Me” ([Mt 18:3-5](#)). Though the child’s name is not given, tradition holds that this child was none other than Ignatius.

During the ninth year of Emperor Trajan’s reign, Trajan began persecuting Christians, demanding that they either offer sacrifices to the Roman gods or face death. Ignatius’s response was extremely bold. He continued to preach the Gospel with even greater fervor, encouraging pagans to convert and strengthening Christians to remain steadfast in their faith. His refusal to obey the edict soon reached the emperor’s ears, and Ignatius was arrested and brought before Trajan while the emperor wintered in Antioch. According to “The Martyrdom of Ignatius”, Ignatius even offered himself to Trajan in order to shield the Christians of Antioch from persecution. After standing firm against Trajan, who offered to make him the high priest of Zeus,

Ignatius was ordered to be taken in chains to Rome, where he would be torn apart by wild beasts as a public spectacle.

While the story of Ignatius's life and martyrdom is extraordinary, let us reflect on his words, "I am the wheat of God, and let me be ground by the teeth of the wild beasts, that I may be found the pure bread of Christ". In these words, Ignatius alludes to the Eucharist. In a sense, his martyrdom transforms him into the Eucharist. He fulfills the admonition of St. Paul in his letter to the Romans: "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service" ([Rm 12:1](#)). This is the ultimate calling of every Christian—to offer ourselves to God, just as Christ offered Himself for us. Through his martyrdom and suffering, Ignatius was united with the sufferings of Christ, becoming the flour that would become the "pure bread of Christ."

But what, then, is the purpose of Ignatius' suffering and voluntary death? And why is it important that we emulate him? The purpose of a Christian's suffering and death is union with Christ and ultimately resurrection.

May we, like St. Ignatius, joyfully embrace suffering with Christ, offering ourselves as living sacrifices to God. And as St. Peter exhorts, may we rejoice to the extent that we partake of Christ's sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, we may also be glad with exceeding joy (cf. [1 Pt 4:13](#)).

Click the link below to watch a film about his life.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0JiIgpjmnQg>

Sources

- Bearing God: The Life and Works of St. Ignatius of Antioch, the God-Bearer by Andrew Stephen Damick
- Bible, NKJV
- Ante-Nicene Fathers: The Epistle of Ignatius to the Romans