

POLYCARP

Biographical Sketch

Polycarp, the Bishop of Smyrna in the second century, was born in 70 A.D and died in 156 A.D as a Christian martyr. He was one of the most documented and probably the most beloved of all the Church father's that were martyred for their faith in Jesus Christ.

Polycarp became a Christian at an early age. Tradition states that a wealthy Christian woman, having received a dream from the Lord, purchased Polycarp's freedom out of slavery, raising him as her own son in the Christian faith. As he grew into adulthood, Polycarp served as a deacon, ministering to the poor and needy of Smyrna. Polycarp eventually became the pastor of the church of Smyrna and then the Bishop. It is said that the Apostle John elevated Polycarp to his position as Bishop.

Polycarp's writings are some of the earliest Christian writings to survive antiquity. He wrote his Epistle to the Philippians, encouraging them to keep the faith, warning them against false doctrines, and urging them to maintain Church order, among other things. Polycarp was also a highly influential decision-maker in the Christian Church. He met with Pope Anicetus to help decide when Easter should be celebrated in the Christian Churches.

Polycarp is most famously known for his martyrdom. When the Roman soldiers came to arrest him, it is said that Polycarp prepared a meal for them and served them. This was a demonstration of the love of Christ in him, even for his enemies, that would put him to death. When brought to the stadium to be executed, he was given one last chance to renounce his faith. When the time came, he made the following statement, "fourscore and six years have I been his servant, and he (Jesus) hath done me no wrong. How can I blaspheme my King who saved me?) For his bold stance, Polycarp was condemned to die on the stake. When the fire was lit, a flashing flame went forth, appearing as a protective covering around his body and giving off a sweet odor of Frankincense and other spices. When the officials in charge saw that his body would not burn, they sent the executioner to stab him in the chest. With the stab wound came gushing blood, which extinguished the flame. Although Polycarp was dead, his martyrdom was a powerful testimony. For Christian believers, it strengthened their resolve to remain faithful despite persecution. To some of the unbelievers, it is said that many were weeping and were astonished by what they had seen.

References,

(Renner Rick) (A Light In Darkness) (Tulsa, OK): Harrison House Publishers, 2010,2018.

