

Study Guide for
APOSTOLIC FATHERS:
HANDING ON THE FAITH

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Based on the Ignatius Bible, RSV Catholic edition,
Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2nd edition,
Eerdmans' 38-volume Ante-Nicene Fathers (ANF) and
Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers (NPNF) series 1 and 2

[Pages are formatted at 8" x 5" with a type font size of 9 points]

Chapter 1: Make Disciples of All Nations

The word *apostle* means “sent one.” God the Father sent Jesus into the world; Jesus sent the Apostles and they in turn appointed bishops as their successors. The Apostolic Fathers lived in the age of the apostles or in close proximity. They blazed a new trail through a world of 1) pagan Greek culture, 2) Roman Imperialism and 3) monotheistic Judaism. The Apostles deposited the fullness of the faith—Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition—into the Church to be preserved, interpreted, proclaimed and handed on by the Magisterium. The Apostolic Fathers were authentic witnesses to the Apostolic Tradition and faithfully handed it down to future generations.

Questions for further discussion and study:

1. What did St. John Chrysostom say about the trailblazing of St. Ignatius and the early Fathers of the Church?

For it is not the same thing to administer the Church now as then, just as it is not the same thing to travel along a road well trodden, and prepared, after many wayfarers; and along one about to be cut for the first time, and containing ruts, and stones, and full of wild beasts, and which has never yet, received any traveler. For now, by the grace of God, there is no danger for bishops, but deep peace on all sides, and we all enjoy a calm, since the Word of piety has been extended to the ends of the world, and our rulers keep the faith with strictness. But [during the days of Ignatius] there was nothing of this, but wherever any one might look, precipices and pitfalls, and wars, and fightings, and dangers; both rulers, and kings, and people and cities and nations, and men at home and abroad, laid snares for the faithful” (*Homilies on S. Ignatius and S. Babylas* 3 in NPNF 1st, 9:137).

2. What did Jesus promise his apostles (Jn 14:26; 16:13)? The word *apostle* means “sent one.” Who sent Jesus and what is Jesus called (Jn 20:21; Hebrews 3:1)? Who did Jesus “send” (Jn 20:20-23; Acts 1:8; CCC 1087)? Who are two men that the Holy Spirit called and send (Acts 13:1-4)? How did the Apostles spread the word (2 Thess 2:15, 3:6; 1 Cor 11:2; CCC 75-76, 96-98)? How did God plan for the truth to be preserved and handed on after the death of the Apostles (Acts 14:23; 20:28; Tit 1:5-7; CCC 77-78, 858)? How did Paul pass on the truth of the faith—count the five “generations” (2 Tim 2:2)?

3. The Apostolic Fathers were born into a **Hellenistic world influenced by Greek gods and philosophy**. Where does the New Testament mention Greek gods and philosophy (Acts 14:11-13; 17:18)?

4. What are idols and what does polytheism mean (Jer 1:16, 10:3-5; CCC 2112)? What did God command Israel regarding idols and false gods (Ex 20:3-5)? Were all images condemned (Ex 25:18-20; Num 21:8-9; Jn 3:14)? Why are images permitted for Christians (CCC 476, 2130-2132)? What was condemned (Ex 20:5)? What are some examples of pagan idol worship in New Testament times (Acts 14:11-13; 17:16; 28:6)? Why do some people think created things are gods (Wis 13:1-4)? How do people worship idols even in modern times (CCC 2113)?

5. The Apostolic Fathers were also born into the **superstructure of the Roman Empire**. Where does the New Testament mention the Latin language of the Romans (Jn 19:20)?
6. Who was in control of “all the world” (Lk 2:1)? Who was ruling the Empire during the life of Jesus (Lk 3:1)? The Jewish leaders claimed who was their king (Jn 19:15)? What did Rome have the power to do (Jn 11:48; 19:10)? How would worshipping Caesar as lord conflict with the Christian Creed which states “We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ”? How did this firm belief get Christians into trouble?
7. Under Roman rule human life was cheap. What did the Christians of the first centuries teach about abortion and infanticide (CCC 2271)? What must we believe about human life today (CCC 2270; 2322-2324)?
8. The Apostolic Fathers were also born into a world influenced by **Jewish monotheism (belief in one God)**. Where does the New Testament mention the Jews spread throughout the Roman Empire (Diaspora) (Acts 2:5-11; 18:2)?
9. What did the Jews believe about God (Deut 4:35-39; 6:4; CCC 201)? What was their attitude toward pagan gods and idols (Ps 115:3-8; CCC 2112)? How were the early Christians influenced by Jews and the Mosaic Law (Acts 15:1-2)? Who were the first to persecute the Christians (Acts 7:54—8:1-3; 9:1-2; 13:50)?
10. At what time did Jesus come into the world (Gal 4:4)? How did the “Pax Romana” (Roman peace), Roman roads and Imperial law, along with the universal Greek language and culture help Christianity spread rapidly across the Empire?
11. What is Tradition (CCC 77-78; 83)? Tradition simply means “something handed down” and can be either good or bad. What did both Jesus and Paul say about traditions of men that were opposed to truth (Mk 7:8; Col 2:8)? How did Paul refer to good tradition, as handed down from the Apostles (1 Cor 11:2; 2 Thess 2:15; 3:6)? What is the source of Scripture and Sacred Tradition and how are they related (CCC 80-82)?
12. How did the apostles hand on the faith long before the New Testament was written and collected into a book (Acts 2:14; 20:7; Rom 10:14-15; 2 Tim 2:2; CCC 75)? To whom was the fullness of the faith handed down (Jude 3; CCC 93)? What had Paul declared to the bishops of Ephesus (Acts 20:27-29)? What was Scripture able to do (2 Tim 3:15-17)? How is the Church with her teaching office appointed to do the same thing as Scripture (Eph 4:11-14; CCC 794)?

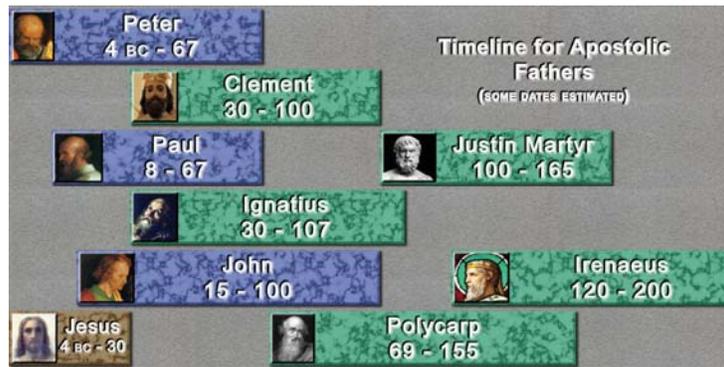
13. In what two ways was the apostolic teaching transmitted (2 Thess 2:15; CCC 76)? What is *inspired* (“God-breathed”) (2 Tim 3:16)? During the life of Jesus and the Apostles—long before the New Testament books were written or compiled—what did the term “scripture” refer to (Rom 15:4)? Later in the first century, what are Paul’s writings beginning to be equated with (2 Pet 3:15-16)? How do Christians derive certainty about all revealed truth (CCC 82)? How can the Christian be assured of the fullness of truth in the Catholic Church (Mt 16:18-19; CCC 77-79)? How did the apostles insure their teaching and authority would continue in the Church after their deaths (CCC 860-862)?

14. Are Scriptures a matter for personal or private interpretation (2 Pet 1:20)? Catholics should study and apply Holy Scripture to their own lives, but who is entrusted with the task of authentically interpreting Scripture and Tradition (CCC 85-87)? When did Jesus appoint Peter to fill the office of steward (vicar) of his kingdom (Mt 16:18-19; CCC 553, 881)? How is Peter’s office based on the office of Royal Steward in the Old Testament (Is 22:20-22)? When did Jesus grant a similar authority to all of the Apostles (Mt 18:15-20; CCC 892; 1444-1445)?

15. How did the early Christians understand the Church as the repository of the fullness of the faith?

St. Irenaeus (c. 130–c. 200) wrote “Since therefore we have such proofs, it is not necessary to seek the truth among others which it is easy to obtain from the Church; since the apostles, like a rich man [depositing his money] in a bank, lodged in her hands most copiously all things pertaining to the truth: so that every man, whosoever will, can draw from her the water of life. For she [the Church] is the entrance to life; all others are thieves and robbers. On this account are we bound to avoid *them*, but to make choice of the thing pertaining to the Church with the utmost diligence, and to lay hold of the tradition of the truth. (Irenaeus, *Heresies* 3, 4 in ANF 1:416-417).

16. What is the pillar and bulwark of the truth (1 Tim 3:15; CCC 171; 2032)? How many faiths or truths are there and how is the truth transmitted to the whole world (CCC 172-174)? Who is responsible to preserve, interpret, expound, and the spread the treasure and deposit of the faith (Mt 28:16-20; Acts 1:8; CCC 175; 888, 891)? Where can the fullness of the faith and the fullness of the means of salvation be found (CCC 830)?



Chapter 2: Entrust to Faithful Men

Ignatius of Antioch and Clement of Rome were first century Christians who knew the Apostles personally. They had the words of the Apostles still ringing in their ears and their tradition and practices still fresh in their mind. These champions of the faith passed the deposit of the faith on to the next generation. As bishops in the Catholic Church, these men were not innovators but tenaciously preserved what the Apostles had handed on to them. Both Ignatius and Clement were ordained by the apostles. Ignatius was bishop of Antioch while Clement sat on the chair of St. Peter in Rome.

Questions for further discussion and study:

Ignatius of Antioch (c. 35–c. 107) also called Theophorus (*Godbearer*), was bishop of Antioch for 37 years. Antioch was the capital of the Roman province of Syria and was the 3rd largest city in the Empire with half a million people. St. John Chrysostom, also from Antioch and a Doctor of the Church wrote that Ignatius was ordained by the saints themselves when “the hands of the blessed apostles touched his sacred head.” As bishop, Ignatius followed his predecessors Peter and Evodius. After serving as bishop for 37 years, he was arrested and transported to Rome where he was eaten by lions. His bones are under the high altar in San Clemente’s Church in Rome. We still possess his seven letters written during his journey to Rome along with an ancient document entitled *The Martyrdom of Ignatius*. His feast day is October 17.

1. Much had taken place in Ignatius’ home city of Antioch during New Testament times before he was bishop. Where was one of the first deacons from (Acts 6:5)? What took place in the earliest days of the Church (Acts 11:19-26)? Where were believers first called *Christians* (Acts 11:26)? From what city was Saul (St. Paul) called and sent out as an apostle (Acts 13:1-4)? What monumental controversy took place in Antioch (Acts 15:1-2)? According to reliable history and tradition recorded by Eusebius (c. 260–c. 340), who were the first three bishops of Antioch?

At this time Ignatius was known as the second bishop of Antioch, Evodius having been the first. . . . Ignatius, who was chosen bishop of Antioch, second in succession to Peter, and whose fame is still celebrated by a great many (Eusebius, *Church History* 3, 22, 36 in NPNF 2nd series, 1:149, 166).

2. According to St. John Chrysostom, Doctor of the Church from Antioch, who ordained Ignatius?

For I do not wonder at the man alone that he seemed to be worthy of so great an office, but that he obtained this office from those saints, and that the hands of the blessed apostles touched his sacred head (*Homilies on S. Ignatius and S. Babylas* in F 2nd series, 9:136).

3. Seven of Ignatius' letters still exist for us to read to day. Based on these letters, let's look at what Ignatius believed and taught.

4. In the writings of Ignatius we have the first recorded use of the word *catholic*, though it may have been used earlier. What does the word "catholic" mean and how did Ignatius use the word (CCC 830)? What was required before one could "speak of the Church" (CCC 1593)?

See that ye all follow the bishop, even as Jesus Christ does the Father, and the presbytery as ye would the apostles; and reverence the deacons, as being the institution of God. Let no man do anything connected with the Church without the bishop. Let that be deemed a proper Eucharist, which is [administered] either by the bishop, or by one to whom he has entrusted it. Wherever the bishop shall appear, there let the multitude [of the people] also be; even as, wherever Jesus Christ is, there is the Catholic Church (*Epistle of Ignatius to the Smyrnaeans* 8 in ANF 1:89-90).

5. How did Ignatius refer to the Church with her holy orders of bishop, priest (presbyter), and deacon (CCC 1554)? In the first century, during the life of Ignatius, how were the three orders of leadership in the Church to be respected (CCC 896)? According to Ignatius, what authority does the Church of Rome have—how does she preside over Christendom (CCC 834)?

6. What did Ignatius say about the priesthood (CCC 1549)? What is the origin of the "laying on of hands" to confer gifts and authority (Num 27:18-20; Deut 34:9; 2 Tim 1:6; CCC 1590)? How did Paul address the ordained in Philippi (Phil 1:1)? Who did Paul address outside Ephesus (remembering the word "overseer" in Greek is *episkopos* from which we get *episcopate* and *bishop*) (Acts 20:28)?

7. How does Ignatius refer to the Eucharist (CCC 1405; 1331, 2837)? Upon what Scripture would he base this description of the Eucharist (Jn 6:47-58)? To whom is the celebration of the Eucharist entrusted and what which is the *only* Eucharist which is legitimate (CCC 1369)?

[C]onsider those who are of a different opinion [literally: “heretical opinions”] with respect to the grace of Christ which has come unto us, how opposed they are to the will of God. ... They abstain from the Eucharist and from prayer, because they confess not the Eucharist to be the flesh of our Savior Jesus Christ, which suffered for our sins, and which the Father, of His goodness, raised up again. Those, therefore, who speak against this gift of God, incur death in the midst of their disputes. But it were better for them to treat [the Eucharist] with respect, that they also might rise again (*Epistle of Ignatius to the Smyrnaeans* 6, 7 in ANF 1: 89).

Take ye heed, then, to have but one Eucharist. For there is one flesh of our Lord Jesus Christ, and one cup to [show forth] the unity of His blood; one altar; as there is one bishop, along with the presbytery and deacons, my fellow-servants: that so, whatsoever ye do, ye may do it according to [the will of] God (*Epistle of Ignatius to the Philadelphians* 7 in ANF 1:81).

From Syria even unto Rome I fight with beasts, both by land and sea, both by night and day, being bound to ten leopards, I mean a band of soldiers, who, even when they receive benefits, show themselves all the worse. ... May I enjoy the wild beasts that are prepared for me; and I pray they may be found eager to rush upon me, which also I will entice to devour me speedily, and not deal with me as with some, whom, out of fear, they have not touched. But if they be unwilling to assail me, I will compel them to do so (*Epistle of Ignatius to the Romans* 5 in ANF 1:75).

8. The *Martyrdom of Ignatius* is an ancient document which describes the travels of Ignatius to his death in Rome. Who did Ignatius meet along his forced journey to Rome?

Through his desire to suffer, [Ignatius] came down from Antioch to Seleucia, from which place he set sail. And after a great deal of suffering he came to Smyrna, where he disembarked with great joy, and hastened to see the holy Polycarp, [formerly] his fellow-disciple, and [now] bishop of Smyrna. For they had both, in old times, been disciples of St. John the Apostle. Being then brought to him, and having communicated to him some spiritual gifts, and glorying in his bonds, he entreated of him to labor along with him for the fulfillment of his desire; earnestly indeed asking this of the whole Church (for the cities and Churches of Asia had welcomed the holy man through their bishops, and presbyters, and deacons, all hastening to meet him, if by any means they might receive from him some spiritual gift), but above all, the holy Polycarp, that, by means of the wild beasts, he soon disappearing from this world, might be manifested before the face of Christ (*Martyrdom of Ignatius* 3 in ANF 1:130).

Clement of Rome (c. 30–c. 100), probably a pagan Roman converted by the preaching of the Apostles, was ordained by St. Peter and succeeded him in the Chair of St. Peter following Linus and Cletus. Early writers considered him the Clement Paul mentions as a fellowworker in Philippians 4:3. In AD 96, as Bishop of Rome, Clement wrote an authoritative letter to correct problems in Corinth over 1,000 miles away. The letter was received with great reverence and read as Scripture for hundreds of years, as well as being included in some early manuscripts of the Bible. The cause of Cle-

ment's death is not entirely certain though Sts. Cyril and Methodius believe they discovered his remains after he was attached to an anchor and drowned in the Black Sea. They returned his bodily remains to Rome where they are now entombed under the high altar in San Clemente along with the bones of Ignatius of Antioch. There is only one authentic writing of Clement that remains, his *First Epistle of Clement to the Corinthians*. His feast day is November 23.

9. According to Clement, how was the apostolic mission to be continued after the death of the apostles (CCC 861)? What office and authority was granted to Peter and how was it passed on the subsequent generations (Mt 16:17-19; CCC 862)? Clement (quoted in this paragraph) was an example of what kind of successor to the Apostles (CCC 1577)?

And thus preaching through countries and cities, they appointed the first-fruits [of their labors], having first proved them by the Spirit, to be bishops and deacons of those who should afterwards believe. Nor was this any new thing, since indeed many ages before it was written concerning bishops and deacons. . . . Our apostles also knew, through our Lord Jesus Christ, and there would be strife on account of the office of the episcopate. For this reason, therefore, inasmuch as they had obtained a perfect fore-knowledge of this, they appointed those already mentioned, and afterwards gave instructions, that when these should fall asleep, other approved men should succeed them in their ministry (*First Epistle of Clement to the Corinthians* 42, 44 in ANF 1:16, 17).

10. Even though the early Church was often persecuted by Rome and the local government, how did Clement say we should treat the civil authorities (CCC 1900)?

11. What did Clement write about the blood of Christ and its effect (CCC 1432)? If Clement was a pagan Roman converted by Peter in Rome, where was he likely baptized?

[I]t makes no difference whether a man be washed in a sea or a pool, a stream or a fount, a lake or a trough; nor is there any distinction between those whom John baptized in the Jordan and those whom Peter baptized in the Tiber (Tertullian, *On Baptism* 4 in ANF 3:671).

12. Who had taught Clement the truth of the Catholic faith? How was apostolic authority passed from one generation to the next and how was the truth guaranteed through the ages?

This man [Clement], as he had seen the blessed apostles, and had been conversant with them, might be said to have the preaching of the apostles still echoing [in his ears], and their traditions before his eyes. Nor was he alone [in this], for there were many still remaining who had received instructions from the apostles (Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 3, 3 in ANF 1:416).

13. Why do you think Clement assumed responsibility for the church in Corinth, even though the Apostle John was probably still alive and living much closer? Whom did Clement succeed in his office?

For this is the manner in which the apostolic churches transmit their registers: as the church of Smyrna, which records that Polycarp was placed therein by John; as also the church of Rome, which makes Clement to have been ordained in like manner by Peter. In exactly the same way the other churches likewise exhibit (their several worthies), whom, as having been appointed to their episcopal places by apostles, they regard as transmitters of the apostolic seed (*Prescription Against the Heretics* 32 in ANF 3:258).

The blessed apostles, then, having founded and built up the Church [of Rome], committed into the hands of Linus the office of the episcopate. Of this Linus, Paul makes mention in the Epistles to Timothy. To him succeeded Anacletus; and after him, in the third place from the apostles, Clement was allotted the bishopric. This man, as he had seen the blessed apostles, and had been conversant with them, might be said to have the preaching of the apostles still echoing [in his ears], and their traditions before his eyes. Nor was he alone [in this], for there were many still remaining who had received instructions from the apostles. In the time of this Clement, no small dissension having occurred among the brethren at Corinth, the Church in Rome dispatched a most powerful letter to the Corinthians, exhorting them to peace, renewing their faith, and declaring the tradition which it had lately received from the apostles, proclaiming the one God, omnipotent, the Maker of heaven and earth (Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 3, 3 in ANF 1:416).

14. Writing in the name of the Church of Rome in AD 96, how does Clement's letter express the authority of Peter's office and the authority of the Holy Spirit?

The Church of God which sojourns at Rome, to the Church of God sojourning at Corinth. ... Owing, dear brethren, to the sudden and successive calamitous events which have happened to ourselves, we feel that we have been somewhat tardy in turning our attention to the points respecting which you consulted us (*First Epistle of Clement to the Corinthians* 1 in ANF 1:5).

Receive our counsel, and ye shall have no occasion of regret. For as God liveth, and the Lord Jesus Christ liveth, and the Holy Spirit . . . But if certain persons should be disobedient unto the words spoken by Him [Jesus Christ] through us, let them understand that they will entangle themselves in no slight transgression and danger; but we shall be guiltless of this sin (*1st Epistle of Clement to the Corinthians* 58, 59 in Lightfoot, *The Apostolic Fathers*, 82).

For ye will give us great joy and gladness, if ye render obedience unto the things written by us through the Holy Spirit, and root out the unrighteous anger of your jealousy, according to the entreaty which we have made for peace and concord in this letter (*1st Epistle of Clement to the Corinthians* 63 in Lightfoot, *The Apostolic Fathers*, 84).

15. As head of the Church, was the authority of Clement challenged? How was the letter received by the Corinthians and by other Christians in general?¹

There is extant an epistle of this Clement which is acknowledged to be genuine and is of considerable length and of remarkable merit. He wrote it in the name of the church of Rome to the church of Corinth, when a sedition had arisen in the latter church. We know that this epistle also has been publicly used in a great many churches both in former times and in our own (Eusebius, *History of the Church* 3, 16 in *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, 1st series, 1:147).

16. How did Clement understand the roles of clergy and laity, especially regarding the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass? Was the Mass considered a sacrifice by this student of the Apostles?

[The Lord] has enjoined offerings (to be presented) and service to be performed (to Him), and that not thoughtlessly or irregularly, but at the appointed times and hours. Where and by whom He desires these things to be done, He Himself has fixed by His own supreme will, in order that all things being piously done according to His good pleasure, may be acceptable unto Him. Those, therefore, who present their offerings at the appointed times, are accepted and blessed; for inasmuch as they follow the laws of the Lord, they sin not. For his own peculiar services are assigned to the high priest, and their own proper place is prescribed to the priests, and their own special ministrations devolve on the Levites. The layman is bound by the laws that pertain to laymen. Let every one of you, brethren, give thanks to God in his own order, living in all good conscience, with becoming gravity, and not going beyond the rule of the ministry prescribed to him (*First Epistle of Clement to the Corinthians* 40-41 in ANF 1:16).

For our sin will not be small, if we eject from the episcopate those who have blamelessly and holily fulfilled its duties [literally: "offered or presented the offerings or sacrifices"] (*First Epistle of Clement to the Corinthians* 44 in ANF 1:17).

Chapter 3: Prepared to Make a Defense

Of the three fathers in Chapter 3, only **Polycarp** (c. 69–c. 155) was personally acquainted with the Apostles. He learned at the feet of St. John and others who had known the Lord. Born of Christian parents, he was named Polycarp (*much fruit*) with the hope that he would bear much fruit for God. St. John appointed him as bishop of Smyrna which he shepherded for around 55 years. He was the leading Christian figure in Roman Asia in the middle of the 2nd century. Polycarp was visited by Ignatius who was on his way to martyrdom in Rome. Around AD 155, after refusing to renounce Christ at the age of 86, Polycarp was stabbed with a dagger after fire failed

¹ “[Clement] is one of the earliest, perhaps the very earliest, post-biblical works which we have. It was held in very high repute in the early Church, and in the Alexandrian Codex it stands among the canonical books as part of the New Testament” (NPNF 1st, 1:147, n. 1). “The epistle, which was highly regarded, was being read in church at Corinth along with the Scriptures c.170 (Cross and Livingstone. *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* (3rd ed. rev.). Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

to kill him. The Christians gathered his bones (relics) as precious treasures. A piece of his skull still remains in Izmir Turkey. Existing documents are his *Epistle of Polycarp to the Philadelphians*, Ignatius' *Epistle of Ignatius to Polycarp*, and the eyewitnesses' *Encyclical Epistle of the Church of Smyrna Concerning the Martyrdom of the Holy Polycarp*. His Feast Day is February 23.

Questions for further discussion and study:

Polycarp of Smyrna (c. 69-c. 155)

1. What was Polycarp's attitude toward the world and eternity; what does this tell us of his perspective and priorities?

Knowing, therefore, that "as we brought nothing into the world, so we can carry nothing out," let us arm ourselves with the armor of righteousness; and let us teach, first of all, ourselves to walk in the commandments of the Lord (*Epistle of Polycarp to the Philippians* 4 in ANF 1:34).

2. Smyrna (modern day Izmir Turkey) was a large Roman city with a long Greek heritage and significant Jewish presence. What did St. John write to the church in Smyrna during Polycarp's lifetime (Rev 2:8-11)? Along with his Christian parents, how did Polycarp learn about the Catholic faith?

Irenaeus, disciple of Polycarp wrote, "I can even describe . . . the discourses which he delivered to the people; also how he would speak of his familiar [interaction] with John, and with the rest of those who had seen the Lord; and how he would call their words to remembrance. Whatsoever things he had heard from them respecting the Lord, both with regard to His miracles and His teaching, Polycarp having thus received [information] from the eye-witnesses of the Word of life, would recount them all in harmony with the Scriptures (*Fragments from the Lost Writings of Irenaeus* 2 in ANF 1:568).

3. Who appointed Polycarp as bishop of Smyrna—and whom did he succeed to the office?

For this is the manner in which the apostolic churches transmit their registers: as the church of Smyrna, which records that Polycarp was placed therein by John [the Apostle] (Tertullian, *Prescription against the Heretics* 32 in ANF 3:258).

But Polycarp also was not only instructed by apostles, and conversed with many who had seen Christ, but was also, by apostles in Asia, appointed bishop of the Church in Smyrna, whom I also saw in my early youth, for he tarried [on earth] a very long time, and, when a very old man, gloriously and most nobly suffering martyrdom, departed this life, having always taught the things which he had learned from the apostles, and which the Church has handed down, and which alone are true. To these things all the Asiatic Churches testify, as do also those men who have succeeded Polycarp down to the present time,—a man who was of much greater weight, and a more steadfast witness of truth, than Valentinus, and Marcion, and the rest of the heretics (Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 3, 3 in ANF 1:416).

4. Who lived in the home of the Apostle John (Jn 19:26-27)? Where did the Apostle John spend time (Rev 1:9—Patmos is off the eastern coast of Turkey)? Where did John spend the latter part of his life?

[T]he Church in Ephesus, founded by Paul, and having John remaining among them permanently until the times of Trajan [c. 98–c. 117], is a true witness of the tradition of the apostles (Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 3, 3 in ANF 1:416).

For in Asia also great lights have fallen asleep, which shall rise again on the day of the Lord's coming. . . . John, who was both a witness and a teacher, who reclined upon the bosom of the Lord, and, being a priest, wore the [high priestly] sacerdotal plate. He also sleeps at Ephesus (Eusebius, *History of the Church* 5, 24 in NPNF 2nd, 1:242).

5. What did Ignatius say about Polycarp? What did the pagans think of Polycarp? What did Polycarp think of heretics? How are all three opinions huge compliments to Polycarp?

Having obtained good proof that thy mind is fixed in God as upon an immovable rock, I loudly glorify [His name] that I have been thought worthy [to behold] thy blameless face, which may I ever enjoy in God! (*Epistle of Ignatius to Polycarp* 1 in ANF 1:93).

“Polycarp has confessed that he is a Christian.” This proclamation having been made by the herald, the whole multitude both of the heathen and Jews, who dwelt at Smyrna, cried out with uncontrollable fury, and in a loud voice, “This is the teacher of Asia, the father of the Christians, and the overthrower of our gods, he who has been teaching many not to sacrifice, or to worship the gods” (*Encyclical Epistle of the Church of Smyrna concerning the Martyrdom of Polycarp* 12 in ANF 1:41).

Polycarp himself replied to Marcion [the heretic], who met him on one occasion, and said, “Dost thou know me?” “I do know thee, the first-born of Satan.” Such was the horror which the apostles and their disciples had against holding even verbal communication with any corrupters of the truth (Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 3, 3 in ANF 1:416).

Irenaeus of Lyons (c. 130–c. 200)

Raised by Christian parents in Smyrna, Irenaeus was taught by Bishop Polycarp. Irenaeus also recalled the teaching of others who had known the Lord. A brilliant theologian trained in Rome, Irenaeus was ordained a priest and sent to missionary territory in Lyons France (Roman Gaul). In 177 Irenaeus was in Rome when a fierce persecution overtook Lyons. His bishop Pothinus died along with many of his parishioners. Upon his return from Rome, Irenaeus courageously stepped in as bishop and wrote much to defend the Church from heretics, especially the Gnostics. We are uncertain how he died though many have considered him a martyr. Calvinists threw his bones into the river but a few remains are still under the altar in the crypt of the Church of St. Irenaeus in Lyons France. Besides various fragments that still exist, his major work is *Against Heresies*. His feast day is June 28.

6. What did Irenaeus write about his memories of Polycarp and why was that so important to Irenaeus?

[W]hen I was a boy . . . I remember the events of that time more clearly than those of recent years. For what boys learn, growing with their mind, becomes joined with it; so that I am able to describe the very place in which the blessed Polycarp sat as he discoursed, and his goings out and his comings in, and the manner of his life, and his physical appearance, and his discourses to the people, and the accounts which he gave of his [interaction] with John and with the others who had seen the Lord. And as he remembered their words, and what he heard from them concerning the Lord, and concerning his miracles and his teaching, having received them from eyewitnesses of the 'Word of life,' Polycarp related all things in harmony with the Scriptures. These things being told me by the mercy of God, I listened to them attentively, noting them down, not on paper, but in my heart. And continually, through God's grace, I recall them faithfully (Irenaeus quoted in Eusebius, *History of the Church* 5, 20 in NPNF 2nd, 1:238-139).

7. Irenaeus' city suffered one of the worst persecutions in early Church history. You can read the moving story of the Martyrs of Lyons in Eusebius' *History of the Church* Book 5, Chapter 1 and following. Many believe that Irenaeus penned the account of his parishioners' and their brutal sufferings. Here is an excerpt about the courage of the Christian woman named Blandina:

After all these, on the last day of the contests, Blandina was again brought in, with Ponticus, a boy about fifteen years old. They had been brought every day to witness the sufferings of the others, and had been pressed to swear by the idols. But because they remained steadfast and despised them, the multitude became furious, so that they had no compassion for the youth of the boy nor respect for the sex of the woman.

Therefore they exposed them to all the terrible sufferings and took them through the entire round of torture, repeatedly urging them to swear [to the pagan gods], but being unable to effect this; for Ponticus, encouraged by his sister so that even the heathen could see that she was confirming and strengthening him, having nobly endured every torture, gave up the ghost.

But the blessed Blandina, last of all, having, as a noble mother, encouraged her children and sent them before her victorious to the King, endured herself all their conflicts and hastened after them, glad and rejoicing in her departure as if called to a marriage supper, rather than cast to wild beasts.

And, after the scourging, after the wild beasts, after the roasting seat [placed in a red hot iron chair under which raged a fire], she was finally enclosed in a net, and thrown before a bull. And having been tossed about by the animal, but feeling none of the things which were happening to her, on account of her hope and firm hold upon what had been entrusted to her, and her communion with Christ, she also was sacrificed. And the heathen themselves confessed that never among them had a woman endured so many and such terrible tortures (Eusebius, *History of the Church* 5, 1 in NPNF 2nd 1:216-217).

8. What did Irenaeus say about the bishop of Rome and the apostolic tradition? How did Irenaeus defend true Christian doctrine? Did he use *sola Scriptura* to prove the truth?

[We put to confusion those who assemble in unauthorized meetings] by indicating that tradition derived from the apostles, of the very great, the very ancient, and universally known Church founded and organized at Rome by the two most glorious apostles, Peter and Paul; as also [by pointing out] the faith preached to men, which comes down to our time by means of the successions of the bishops. [For to this Church, on account of more potent principalty, it is necessary that every Church (that is, those who are on every side faithful) resort; in which Church ever, by those who are on every side, has been preserved that tradition which is from the apostles.]

The blessed apostles, then, having founded and built up the Church, committed into the hands of Linus the office of the episcopate. Of this Linus, Paul makes mention in the Epistles to Timothy. To him succeeded Anacletus; and after him, in the third place from the apostles, Clement was allotted the bishopric. . . . To this Clement there succeeded Evaristus. Alexander followed Evaristus; then, sixth from the apostles, Sixtus was appointed; after him, Telephorus, who was gloriously martyred; then Hyginus; after him, Pius; then after him, Anicetus. Soter having succeeded Anicetus, Eleutherius does now, in the twelfth place from the apostles, hold the inheritance of the episcopate. In this order, and by this succession, the ecclesiastical tradition from the apostles, and the preaching of the truth, have come down to us. And this is most abundant proof that there is one and the same vivifying faith, which has been preserved in the Church from the apostles until now, and handed down in truth (Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 3, 3 in ANF 1:415-416).

9. What did Irenaeus say about the Baptism (CCC 683, 1274) and the Eucharist (CCC 1000)? What did Irenaeus say about all the local churches and their relationship to the Church of Rome (CCC 834)? What did he teach about the faith and tradition of the Church (CCC 173-175; 797)? How does this reflect Ephesians 4:4-6? What did Irenaeus teach about Mary's participation in redemption (CCC 494)? What did he say about the Law and the natural law (CCC 2070)?

10. What is heresy (CCC 2089; 817)? What is Gnosticism (CCC 464-465; 285)? Irenaeus fought the insidious threat of Gnosticism with the brilliance and tenacity of a surgeon in his work *Against Heresies*.

Justin Martyr (c. 100–c. 165) was born of pagan parents in the Roman city of Flavia Neapolis (modern day Nablus in the Palestinian West Bank) in ancient Shechem in Samaria. He moved to Ephesus and studied Greek philosophy.² While meditating by the sea an old man confronted him and introduced him to the prophets of Israel.³ Justin converted to Christianity

² For details of Justin's philosophical studies, see *Dialog of Justin*, chap. 2 in ANF 1:195.

³ *Dialog of Justin*, chap. 3-8 in ANF 1:195-198.

around AD 130 and continued to wear the philosopher's pallium⁴ since he said Christianity was the true philosophy. He was the most outstanding apologist of the era. As a layman he later started a Christian school in Rome. St. Methodius (died c. 311) referred to him as "Justin of Neapolis, a man who was not far separated from the apostles either in age or excellence."⁵ He refused to sacrifice to idols so along with his students he was scourged and beheaded in AD 165, thus the name Justin *Martyr*. His bodily remains are with those of St. Stephen and St. Lawrence in the Church of St. Lawrence in Rome. His writings include the *1st* and *2nd* *Apologies* and the *Dialog with Trypho the Jew*. His Feast Day is June 1.

11. Who passed through the land of Shechem in Samaria where Justin was born (Gen 12:6; 33:18; Josh 24:1, 32; 1 Kings 21:17-18; 2 Kings 2:22-25)? Where did Jesus meet the woman at the well (Jn 4:4-6)? Where would the gospel be preached (Acts 1:8; 8:14)? How did Justin start his *1st* *Apology*? How did he describe himself?

To the Emperor Titus Aelius Adrianus Antoninus Pius Augustus Caesar, and to his son Verissimus the Philosopher, and to Lucius the Philosopher, the natural son of Caesar, and the adopted son of Pius, a lover of learning, and to the sacred Senate, with the whole People of the Romans, I, Justin, the son of Priscus and grandson of Bacchius, natives of Flavia Neapolis in Palestine, present this address and petition in behalf of those of all nations who are unjustly hated and wantonly abused, myself being one of them (Justin, *First Apology* 1 in ANF 1:163).

12. Justin Martyr is the most outstanding of the early Christian apologists. Christians must be prepared to do what (1 Pet 3:15)? The Greek word Peter used for "defense" is *apologia* from which we get our English words *apologist* and *apologetics*. An apologist is one who defends the Catholic faith. To defend the belief and practice of Christians, to whom did Justin write (CCC 1345)?

13. When Christians were accused of crimes, how did their conduct affect Justin?

For I myself, too, when I was delighting in the doctrines of Plato, and heard the Christians slandered, and saw them fearless of death, and of all other things which are counted fearful, perceived that it was impossible that they could be living in wickedness and pleasure. For what sensual or intemperate man, or who that counts it good to feast on human flesh, could welcome death that he might be deprived of his enjoyments, and would not rather continue always the present life? (*2nd* *Apology* 12 in ANF 1:192).

⁴ Eusebius, *History of the Church* 4, 11 in NPNF 2nd 1:184. *Dialog of Justin* 1 in ANF 1:194. "He wore his philosopher's gown after his conversion, as a token that he had attained the only true philosophy" (ANF 1:160).

⁵ *Other Fragments from the Lost Writings of Justin* 5 in ANF 1:300.

14. Justin’s conversion from paganism to Christianity—the result of meeting an old man by the sea—can be read in its entirety in the *Dialog of Justin*, chap. 3-8 in ANF 1:195-199.

15. How did Justin teach that one receives forgiveness of sins and new birth (CCC 1355)? What did Justin call baptism (CCC 1216)? How does Justin explain being “born again?”

I will also relate the manner in which we dedicated ourselves to God when we had been made new through Christ. . . . As many as are persuaded and believe that what we teach and say is true, and undertake to be able to live accordingly, are instructed to pray and to entreat God with fasting, for the remission of their sins that are past, we praying and fasting with them. Then they are brought by us where there is water, and are regenerated in the same manner in which we were ourselves regenerated [reborn]. For, in the name of God, the Father and Lord of the Universe, and of our Savior Jesus Christ, and of the Holy Spirit, they then receive the washing with water. For Christ also said, “Except ye be born again, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. . . .” And for this [rite] we have learned from the apostles this reason . . . in order that we may not remain the children of necessity and of ignorance, but may become the children of choice and knowledge, and may obtain in the water the remission of sins formerly committed, there is pronounced over him who chooses to be born again, and has repented of his sins, the name of God, the Father . . . (Justin, *1st Apology* 61 in ANF 1:183.)

16. How did Justin explain the Eucharistic Liturgy of the first Christians (CCC 1345)? How has the fundamental structure of the Mass been preserved down to our own day (CCC 1346-1347)? According to Justin—an authentic witness of the Apostolic Tradition—what did the early Church think of the Eucharist and what was required before one could partake of the Eucharist (CCC 1355)?

And this food is called among us Εὐχαριστία [Eucharist], of which no one is allowed to partake but the man who believes that the things which we teach are true, and who has been washed with the washing that is for the remission of sins, and unto regeneration, and who is so living as Christ has enjoined. For not as common bread and common drink do we receive these; but in like manner as Jesus Christ our Savior, having been made flesh by the Word of God, had both flesh and blood for our salvation, so likewise have we been taught that the food which is blessed by the prayer of His word, and from which our blood and flesh by transmutation are nourished, is the flesh and blood of that Jesus who was made flesh. For the apostles, in the memoirs composed by them, which are called Gospels, have thus delivered unto us what was enjoined upon them; that Jesus took bread, and when He had given thanks, said, “This do ye in remembrance of Me, this is My body” (Justin, *1st Apology* 66 in ANF 1:185).

17. Reading Justin’s whole description of early worship and the liturgy is highly recommended.⁶ If a 2nd century Christian walked into the middle of a Catholic Mass today, do you think they would know where they were and

⁶ Justin, *1st Apology* 65-67 in ANF 1:185-186.

what was going on? What if they were to walk into a non-Catholic contemporary religious meeting?

18. What does Justin say the Church did for the poor and how does it resemble the actions of the Catholic Church today (CCC 1351)?

19. According to Justin, why do Christians gather on the first day of the week (CCC 2174)? How does Justin see the Christian God related to the God of Israel (CCC 2085)? Including Justin, what did many early Christians believe about the Church (CCC 760)?

Chapter 4: You Will Be My Witnesses

When Jesus told his apostles, “You shall be my witnesses,” he probably meant they would be more than just his mouthpieces. The Greek word for “witness” is *martus* from which we get our English word *martyr*. The Jews were the first to persecute Christians but toward the end of the first century it was Rome. Christians violated Roman law by refusing to worship Caesar or the pagan gods. Thousands died horrible deaths. Ignatius was devoured by lions, Polycarp stabbed and burned, Justin beheaded. Early Christians considered the martyrs as heroes and champions. Today sports heroes are enshrined in Halls of Fame. Fans treasure their memories and memorabilia—their “relics.” The Catholic Church has always done the same for her champions—the saints—honoring them by recalling their lives, treasuring their relics, asking for their intercession and celebrating their feast days.

Questions for further discussion and study:

1. What does Jesus tell his Apostles that they would be (Acts 1:8)? Remember that the English word “witness” is *martus* in the Greek. How does Jesus use the word elsewhere (Rev 12:11, *testimony* = Greek: *martus*)?

2. What is the duty of every Christian (CCC 2472)? According to the Church, what is the supreme witness given to the truth of the faith (CCC 2473)? What is the reward promised to those persecuted for righteousness’ sake (Mt 5:10-12)? What will happen to Jesus’ followers (Lk 21:12-13)? Why do Christians get persecuted (Jn 15:19-21; CCC 530)? What kind of person falls away during persecution (Mt 13:21)? What does Jesus promise (Mk 10:29-30)? How are we to imitate Our Lord’s response to persecution (CCC 520)?

3. From earliest times, what was Christian blood called—what is the result of Christian blood spilled for Jesus (CCC 852)? Why might persecution cause the numbers of Christians to increase?

4. After demanding the crucifixion of Jesus, how did the Jews begin the first persecutions against the Christians—who was killed and how was Saul (the future St. Paul) involved (Acts 7:54—8:3)? Portraying pagan Rome as

a woman drunk with blood, what is her relationship with the followers of Jesus (Rev 17:6)?

5. From the Bible and from the *Epistle by Diognetus* (2nd century), Christians are citizens of where (Eph 2:19; Phil 3:20; CCC 2796)? From the same document, how are Christians to live in the world (CCC 2240)? How does Hermas (c. AD 140) say Christians ought to conduct themselves (CCC 2517)?

Martyrdom of Ignatius:

6. What did Ignatius think of martyrdom and what did he say about it (CCC 2473-2474)? How did Ignatius think about death (CCC 1010)? How and why did Ignatius and other saints express a desire for death (CCC 1011)?

I shall willingly die for God, unless ye hinder me. I beseech of you not to show an unseasonable good-will towards me. Suffer me to become food for the wild beasts, through whose instrumentality it will be granted me to attain to God. 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. Rather entice the wild beasts, that they may become my tomb, and may leave nothing of my body; so that when I have fallen asleep [in death], I may be no trouble to any one. Then shall I truly be a disciple of Christ, when the world shall not see so much as my body (Ignatius, *Epistle to the Romans* 4 in ANF 1:75).

And let no one, of things visible or invisible, envy me that I should attain to Jesus Christ. Let fire and the cross; let the crowds of wild beasts; let tearings, breakings, and dislocations of bones; let cutting off of members; let shatterings of the whole body; and let all the dreadful torments of the devil come upon me: only let me attain to Jesus Christ. All the pleasures of the world, and all the kingdoms of this earth, shall profit me nothing. It is better for me to die in behalf of Jesus Christ, than to reign over all the ends of the earth. "For what shall a man be profited, if he gain the whole world, but lose his own soul? (Ignatius, *Epistle to the Romans* 5-6 in ANF 1:76).

For Trajan, in the ninth year of his reign . . . thinking that the religious body of the Christians were yet wanting to complete the subjugation of all things to himself, and [thereupon] threatening them with persecution unless they should agree to worship demons, as did all other nations, thus compelled all who were living godly lives either to sacrifice [to idols] or die. Wherefore the noble soldier of Christ [Ignatius], being in fear for the Church of the Antiochians, was, in accordance with his own desire, brought before Trajan, who was at that time staying at Antioch. . . . And when he was set before the emperor Trajan, [that prince] said unto him, "Who art thou, wicked wretch, who settest thyself to transgress our commands, and persuadest others to do the same, so that they should miserably perish?" Ignatius replied, "No one ought to call Theophorus wicked; for all evil spirits have departed from the servants of God. . . . I have Christ the King of heaven [within me], I destroy all the devices of these [evil spirits]." Trajan answered, "And who is Theophorus?" Ignatius replied, "He who has Christ within his breast." Trajan said . . . "Dost thou then carry within thee Him that was crucified?" Ignatius replied, "Truly so . . ." Then Trajan pronounced sentence as follows: "We command that Ignatius, who affirms that he carries about within him Him that was crucified, be bound by soldiers, and car-

ried to the great [city] Rome, there to be devoured by the beasts, for the gratification of the people”

When the holy martyr heard this sentence, he cried out with joy, “I thank thee, O Lord, that Thou hast vouchsafed to honor me with a perfect love towards Thee, and hast made me to be bound with iron chains, like Thy Apostle Paul.” Having spoken thus, he then, with delight, clasped the chains about him; and when he had first prayed for the Church, and commended it with tears to the Lord, he was hurried away by the savage cruelty of the soldiers, like a distinguished ram the leader of a goodly flock, that he might be carried to Rome, there to furnish food to the bloodthirsty beasts (*Martyrdom of Ignatius* 2 in ANF 1:129-130).

Being immediately thrown in [to the arena], according to the command of Caesar given some time ago . . . he was thus cast to the wild beasts . . . [O]nly the harder portions of his holy remains were left, which were conveyed to Antioch and wrapped in linen, as an inestimable treasure left to the holy Church by the grace which was in the martyr (*Martyrdom of Ignatius* 6 in ANF 1:131).

Martyrdom of Polycarp:

7. What did Polycarp think of martyrdom (CCC 2474)? How is the attitude of modern day Christians often different from that of our earlier brothers and sisters in Christ?

Eyewitnesses recall many martyrdoms in Smyrna before Polycarp: “[W]ho can fail to admire [the martyrs] nobleness of mind, and their patience, with that love towards their Lord which they displayed?—who, when they were so torn with scourges, that the frame of their bodies, even to the very inward veins and arteries, was laid open, still patiently endured, while even those that stood by pitied and bewailed them. But they reached such a pitch of magnanimity, that not one of them let a sigh or a groan escape them; thus proving to us all that those holy martyrs of Christ, at the very time when they suffered such torments, were absent from the body, or rather, that the Lord then stood by them, and communed with them. And, looking to the grace of Christ, they despised all the torments of this world, redeeming themselves from eternal punishment by [the suffering of] a single hour. For this reason the fire of their savage executioners appeared cool to them. For they kept before their view escape from that fire which is eternal and never shall be quenched (*Encyclical Epistle of the Church of Smyrna Concerning the Martyrdom of Polycarp* 2 in ANF 1:39).

[I]n deference to the wish of many, he was persuaded to leave [the city]. He departed, therefore, to a country house not far distant from the city. There he stayed with a few [friends], engaged in nothing else night and day than praying for all men, and for the Churches throughout the world, according to his usual custom (*Encyclical Epistle of the Church of Smyrna Concerning the Martyrdom of Polycarp* 5 in ANF 1:40).

His pursuers then, along with horsemen, and taking the youth with them, went forth at supper-time on the day of the preparation with their usual weapons, as if going out against a robber. . . . So when he heard that they were come, he went down and spake with them. And as those that were present marveled at his age and constancy, some of them said. “Was so much effort made to capture such a venerable man? . . . [H]e ordered that something to eat and drink should be set before them, as much indeed as they cared for, while he besought

them to allow him an hour to pray without disturbance. And on their giving him leave, he stood and prayed, being full of the grace of God, so that he could not cease for two full hours, to the astonishment of them that heard him, inasmuch that many began to repent that they had come forth against so godly and venerable an old man (*Encyclical Epistle of the Church of Smyrna Concerning the Martyrdom of Polycarp* 7 in ANF 1:40).

[They] endeavored to persuade him saying, "What harm is there in saying, Lord Caesar, and in sacrificing, with the other ceremonies observed on such occasions, and so make sure of safety?" But he at first gave them no answer; and when they continued to urge him, he said, "I shall not do as you advise me. . . ."

Now, as Polycarp was entering into the stadium, there came to him a voice from heaven, saying, "Be strong, and show thyself a man, O Polycarp!" No one saw who it was that spoke to him; but those of our brethren who were present heard the voice. And as he was brought forward, the tumult became great when they heard that Polycarp was taken. And when he came near, the proconsul asked him whether he was Polycarp. On his confessing that he was, [the proconsul] sought to persuade him to deny [Christ], saying, "Have respect to thy old age," and other similar things, according to their custom, [such as], "Swear by the fortune of Caesar; repent, and say, Away with the Atheists [meaning Christians who refused to worship the pagan gods]." But Polycarp, gazing with a stern countenance on all the multitude of the wicked heathen then in the stadium, and waving his hand towards them, while with groans he looked up to heaven, said, "Away with the Atheists." Then, the proconsul urging him, and saying, "Swear, and I will set thee at liberty, reproach Christ;" Polycarp declared, "Eighty and six years have I served Him, and He never did me any injury: how then can I blaspheme my King and my Savior?"

And when the proconsul yet again pressed him, and said, "Swear by the fortune of Caesar," he answered, "Since thou art vainly urgent that, as thou sayest, I should swear by the fortune of Caesar, and pretendest not to know who and what I am, hear me declare with boldness, I am a Christian. And if you wish to learn what the doctrines of Christianity are, appoint me a day, and thou shalt hear them. . . ."

But again the proconsul said to him, "I will cause thee to be consumed by fire, seeing thou despisest the wild beasts, if thou wilt not repent." But Polycarp said, "Thou threatenest me with fire which burneth for an hour, and after a little is extinguished, but art ignorant of the fire of the coming judgment and of eternal punishment, reserved for the ungodly. But why tarriest thou? Bring forth what thou wilt."

While he spoke these and many other like things, he was filled with confidence and joy, and his countenance was full of grace, so that not merely did it not fall as if troubled by the things said to him, but, on the contrary, the proconsul was astonished, and sent his herald to proclaim in the midst of the stadium thrice, "Polycarp has confessed that he is a Christian." This proclamation having been made by the herald, the whole multitude both of the heathen and Jews, who dwelt at Smyrna, cried out with uncontrollable fury, and in a loud voice, "This is the teacher of Asia, the father of the Christians, and the overthrower of our gods, he who has been teaching many not to sacrifice, or to worship the gods." . . . Then it seemed good to them to cry out with one consent, that Polycarp should be burnt alive. For thus it behooved the vision which was revealed to him in regard to his pillow to be fulfilled, when, seeing it on fire as he was praying, he turned about and said prophetically to the faithful that were with him, "I must be burnt alive."

. . . [T]he multitudes immediately gathering together wood and fagots out of the shops and baths; the Jews especially, according to custom, eagerly assisting them in it. And when the funeral pile was ready, Polycarp, laying aside all his garments, and loosing his girdle, sought also to take off his sandals,—a thing he was not accustomed to do, inasmuch as every one of the faithful was always eager who should first touch his skin. For, on account of his holy life, he was, even before his martyrdom, adorned with every kind of good. Immediately then they surrounded him with those substances which had been prepared for the funeral pile. But when they were about also to fix him with nails, he said, “Leave me as I am; for He that giveth me strength to endure the fire, will also enable me, without your securing me by nails, to remain without moving in the pile.”

They did not nail him then, but simply bound him. And he, placing his hands behind him, and being bound like a distinguished ram [taken] out of a great flock for sacrifice, and prepared to be an acceptable burnt-offering unto God, looked up to heaven, and said, “O Lord God Almighty, the Father of thy beloved and blessed Son Jesus Christ, by whom we have received the knowledge of Thee, the God of angels and powers, and of every creature, and of the whole race of the righteous who live before thee, I give Thee thanks that Thou hast counted me, worthy of this day and this hour, that I should have a part in the number of Thy martyrs, in the cup of thy Christ, to the resurrection of eternal life, both of soul and body, through the incorruption [imparted] by the Holy Ghost. Among whom may I be accepted this day before Thee as a fat and acceptable sacrifice, according as Thou, the ever-truthful God, hast fore-ordained, hast revealed beforehand to me, and now hast fulfilled. Wherefore also I praise Thee for all things, I bless Thee, I glorify Thee, along with the everlasting and heavenly Jesus Christ, Thy beloved Son, with whom, to Thee, and the Holy Ghost, be glory both now and to all coming ages. Amen.”

When he had pronounced this *amen*, and so finished his prayer, those who were appointed for the purpose kindled the fire. And as the flame blazed forth in great fury, we, to whom it was given to witness it, beheld a great miracle, and have been preserved that we might report to others what then took place. For the fire, shaping itself into the form of an arch, like the sail of a ship when filled with the wind, encompassed as by a circle the body of the martyr. And he appeared within not like flesh which is burnt, but as bread that is baked, or as gold and silver glowing in a furnace. Moreover, we perceived such a sweet odor [coming from the pile], as if frankincense or some such precious spices had been smoking there.

At length, when those wicked men perceived that his body could not be consumed by the fire, they commanded an executioner to go near and pierce him through with a dagger. And on his doing this, there came forth a dove, and a great quantity of blood, so that the fire was extinguished; and all the people wondered that there should be such a difference between the unbelievers and the elect, of whom this most admirable Polycarp was one, having in our own times been an apostolic and prophetic teacher, and bishop of the Catholic Church which is in Smyrna. For every word that went out of his mouth either has been or shall yet be accomplished (*Encyclical Epistle of the Church of Smyrna Concerning the Martyrdom of Polycarp* 8-16 in ANF 1:40-42).

[W]e afterwards took up his bones, as being more precious than the most exquisite jewels, and more purified than gold, and deposited them in a fitting place, whither, being gathered together, as opportunity is allowed us, with joy and rejoicing, the Lord shall grant us to celebrate the anniversary of his martyrdom, both in memory of those who have already finished their course, and for

the exercising and preparation of those yet to walk in their steps (*Encyclical Epistle of the Church of Smyrna Concerning the Martyrdom of Polycarp* 18 in ANF 1:43).

8. A portion of Polycarp's skull is still venerated today in the Church of St. Polycarp in Izmir Turkey where he was martyred.

Martyrdom of Justin:

9. After converting to Christianity in Ephesus, where did Justin move? The following excerpts are taken from official court records that are still in existence today.

Justin said, "I live above one Martinus, at the Timiotinian Bath; and during the whole time (and I am now living in Rome for the second time) I am unaware of any other meeting than his (*Martyrdom of the Holy Martyrs* 2 in ANF 1:305).

In the time of the lawless partisans of idolatry, wicked decrees were passed against the godly Christians in town and country, to force them to offer libations [sacrifices] to vain idols; and accordingly the holy men, having been apprehended, were brought before the prefect of Rome, Rusticus by name. And when they had been brought before his judgment-seat, said to Justin, "Obey the gods at once, and submit to the kings." Justin said, "To obey the commandments of our Savior Jesus Christ is worthy neither of blame nor of condemnation." Rusticus the prefect said, "What kind of doctrines do you profess?" Justin said, "I have endeavored to learn all doctrines; but I have acquiesced at last in the true doctrines, those namely of the Christians, even though they do not please those who hold false opinions." Rusticus the prefect said, "Are those the doctrines that please you, you utterly wretched man?" Justin said, "Yes, since I adhere to them with right dogma." Rusticus the prefect said, "What is the dogma?" Justin said, "That according to which we worship the God of the Christians . . . And if any one wished to come to me, I communicated to him the doctrines of truth." Rusticus said, "Are you not, then, a Christian?" Justin said, "Yes, I am a Christian."

The prefect says to Justin, "Hearken, you who are called learned, and think that you know true doctrines; if you are scourged and beheaded, do you believe you will ascend into heaven?" Justin said, "I hope that, if I endure these things, I shall have His gifts. For I know that, to all who have thus lived, there abides the divine favor until the completion of the whole world." Rusticus the prefect said, "Do you suppose, then, that you will ascend into heaven to receive some recompense?" Justin said, "I do not suppose it, but I know and am fully persuaded of it." Rusticus the prefect said, "Let us, then, now come to the matter in hand, and which presses. Having come together, offer sacrifice with one accord to the gods." Justin said, "No right-thinking person falls away from piety to impiety." Rusticus the prefect said, "Unless ye obey, ye shall be mercilessly punished." Justin said, "Through prayer we can be saved on account of our Lord Jesus Christ, even when we have been punished, because this shall become to us salvation and confidence at the more fearful and universal judgment-seat of our Lord and Savior." Thus also said the other martyrs: "Do what you will, for we are Christians, and do not sacrifice to idols."

Rusticus the prefect pronounced sentence, saying, "Let those who have refused to sacrifice to the gods and to yield to the command of the emperor be scourged, and led away to suffer the punishment of decapitation, according to the laws." The holy martyrs having glorified God, and having gone forth to the

accustomed place, were beheaded, and perfected their testimony in the confession of the Savior. And some of the faithful having secretly removed their bodies, laid them in a suitable place, the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ having wrought along with them, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen (*Martyrdom of the Holy Martyrs* 1-5 in ANF 1:305-306).

10. Suffering was not only endured by the Fathers and the clergy. Many thousands of Christians were tortured and killed including men and women, children, slave and free, Jew and Gentile, rich and poor. How did Peter exhort those who were going through trials and what was the basis of their hope (1 Pet 1:3-9)? What are those who love God assured of (CCC 313)? How did one mother prepare her sons for martyrdom (2 Mac 7:22-23, 28; CCC 297)? What meaning does suffering take on for the Christian (Col 1:24; CCC 1473; 1521)? How does our suffering take on positive value in the Sacrifice of the Mass (CCC 1368)? What happens to one who suffers martyrdom before baptism (CCC 1258-1259)?

11. How do Christians often refer to death (Jn 11:11-15; 1 Thess 4:14; CCC 955)? What does the Church teach about resurrection (CCC 990-991)? Pagan Romans buried their dead in a *necropolis* (city of the dead) whereas Christians deposited their dead in a *cemetery* (sleeping chamber)—what is the difference and how might it effect one's view of death? How does the Christian view death (2 Cor 5:6-8; CCC 1020)? What does the Christian believe about the resurrection (1 Cor 6:14; 15:20-22; CCC 998, 1016-1017)?

12. What is the Communion of Saints (CCC 961-962)? How do we view the saints that have gone before us (Heb 12:1-2; CCC 1161; 2683)? What effect does the Communion of the Saints have on us (CCC 957-958)? How do we understand prayer to, and the intercession of the saints (CCC 955-956)?

13. What does the Church believe about relics (CCC 1674)? Where did the bones of a prophet perform a miracle (2 Kings 13:21)? When were “things” associated with Peter and Paul able to perform miracles (Acts 5:15-16; 19:11-12)? How do we acknowledge the saints that have gone before us (CCC 957, 1173, 1195)?

14. What has the Church done in response to the martyrdoms of the faithful (CCC 2474)? What should our attitude be? What does the believer find in the Church (CCC 2030)?

The Catholic Challenge

We have viewed the *Apostolic Fathers: Handing on the Faith*. And now, having gone through the study guide, you should be better equipped to understand the Apostolic Fathers of the Church and their significance in the history of salvation—how they were witnesses for Christ and handed on the deposit of faith to future generations. You should also better understand

how Sacred Tradition and Sacred Scriptures make up the Word of God with the Magisterium as the official interpreter. You should also know how the Apostolic Fathers blazed a new trail, suffered and were witnesses to the truth, even to the shedding of their blood. Join us in *The Catholic Challenge*.

1. How is the pagan world of the first two centuries similar to our world today? How should we live as Christians in our world?
2. What kind of gods and idols do we have today that take our eyes off the one true and living God?
3. Why might it be important to listen to the men who knew the apostles personally or lived in close proximity to them?
4. What does the word *tradition* mean and how was tradition important in the early Church—and in our modern times?
5. How did the teachings of Jesus and the apostles get passed on through the early centuries and how does that effect us today?
6. What is the source of authority in the Church and how can Christians be certain about the truth of the faith?
7. Where did the Bible come from and what is *sola Scriptura*?
8. What is the relationship between Sacred Tradition, Sacred Scripture and the teaching authority of the Church?
9. By examining the writings and history of the early Church, what Christian group today has the closest continuity—teaching, practice, leadership and worship—with the early Church?
10. Why were Christians persecuted by the Jews? Why were they persecuted by the Romans?
11. Why were Christians willing to endure such suffering and death?
12. It was said that “the blood of martyrs is the seed of Christians.” Why do you think martyrdom caused the increase in the number of Christians?
13. Where does the word “martyr” come from and have you ever thought about what you would do if you or your family faced martyrdom?
14. What kind of tortures did Christians suffer in the first centuries under Rome? What kind of tortures do Christians suffer today in many countries of the world?
15. How were the ideas of death and burial among Christians different from the ideas of those of the Romans? What did Christians call death and what did they expect at the end of time? How would there understanding make death more bearable?
16. Why do Catholics keep bones and other relics associated with saints? When did this practice begin and how is it similar to Halls of Fame in sports?
17. Who are “the Saints” and why do Catholics pray for the intercession of the saints? How are the saints in heaven related to the Church on earth? What is the Communion of Saints?

For Further Reading

Bennett, Rod. *Four Witnesses: the Early Church in Her Own Words*. San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 2002. The thrilling stories of Ignatius, Clement, Irenaeus and Justin.

Ray, Stephen K. *Crossing the Tiber: Evangelical Protestants Discover the Historic Church*. San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 1997. Discover how the writings of the Fathers convinced Steve Ray of the truth of the Catholic Church.

Ray, Stephen K. *Upon this Rock: St. Peter and the Primacy of Rome in Scriptures and the Early Church*. San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 1999. Understand the primacy of Peter in the See of Rome directly from the writings of the Fathers of the Church.

Willis, John. *The Teachings of the Church Fathers*. San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 2002. Listen to the Fathers speak for themselves on over 250 topics.

Sommer, Carl J. *We Look for a Kingdom: The Everyday Lives of the Early Christians*. San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 2007. Detailed study of life and living in the first centuries of Christianity.

Staniforth, Maxwell, trans. *Early Christian Writings: the Apostolic Fathers*. New York, NY: Penguin Books, 1987. Actual writings of the Apostolic Fathers.

Eusebius. Williams, G. A. trans. *The History of the Church*. New York, NY: Penguin Books, 1989. First Church History completed around AD 325.

Roberts, Alexander, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe. *The Ante-Nicene Fathers Vol. I: Translations of the Writings of the Fathers Down to A.D. 325*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publ., 1988. Writings of the Fathers to the year AD 325.

Jurgens, William A. *Faith of the Early Fathers*, 3 vols. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1980. Select quotations categorized by multiple topics.