



February 22

Commemoration: Polycarp, Bishop of Smyrna, martyr, 156

Saint Polycarp (69 – 155) (Ancient Greek: Πολύκαρπος) was a 2nd century Christian bishop of Smyrna. According to the *Martyrdom of Polycarp*, he died a martyr, bound and burned at the stake, then stabbed when the fire failed to touch him. Polycarp is regarded as a saint in the Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, Oriental Orthodox, Anglican, and Lutheran Churches.

It is recorded by Irenaeus, who heard him speak in his youth, and by Tertullian, that he had been a disciple of John the Apostle.

The early tradition that expanded upon the *Martyrdom* to link Polycarp in competition and contrast with John the Apostle who, though many people had tried to kill him, was not martyred but died of old age after being exiled to the island of Patmos, is embodied in the Coptic language fragmentary papyri (the "Harris fragments"), now in the British Library, dating to the 3rd to 6th centuries. Frederick Weidmann, their editor, interprets the "Harris fragments" as Smyrnan hagiography addressing Smyrna-Ephesus church rivalries, which "develops the association of

Polycarp and John to a degree unwitnessed, so far as we know, either before or since." The fragments echo the *Martyrology*, and diverge from it.

With Clement of Rome and Ignatius of Antioch, Polycarp is regarded as one of three chief Apostolic Fathers. The sole surviving work attributed to his authorship is his *Letter to the Philipians*; it is first recorded by Irenaeus of Lyons.

Art: *S. Polycarpus*, engraving by Michael Burghers, ca 1685