



October 17

Commemoration: Ignatius, Bishop of Antioch, martyr, c. 115

Ignatius of Antioch, martyred in 115, had a profound sense of two ends—his own, and the consummation of history in Jesus Christ. In ecstasy, he saw his impending martyrdom as the fitting conclusion to a long episcopate. He was accounted the second Bishop of Antioch in Syria.

Seven authentic letters which Ignatius wrote to Churches while he journeyed across Asia Minor in the custody of ten soldiers (“my leopards,” he called them), give valuable insights into the life of the early Church. Of certain Gnostic teachings that exalted the divinity of Jesus at the expense of his humanity, Ignatius wrote: “Be deaf ... to any talk that ignores Jesus Christ, of David’s lineage, of Mary; who was really

born, ate, and drank; was really persecuted under Pontius Pilate; was really crucified and died in the sight of heaven and earth and the underworld. He was really raised from the dead.”

In another, he condemned a form of biblicism espoused by some as the method of historical interpretation and the only rule of Church practice. He wrote: “When I heard some people saying, ‘If I don’t find it in the ancient documents, I don’t believe it in the Gospel,’ I answered them, ‘But it is written there.’ They retorted, ‘That has got to be proved.’ But to my mind it is Jesus Christ who is the ancient documents.”

Ignatius maintained that the Church’s unity would always spring from that liturgy by which all are initiated into Christ through Baptism. He exhorted: “Try to gather more frequently to celebrate God’s Eucharist and to praise him ... At these meetings you should heed the bishop and presbytery attentively and break one loaf, which is the medicine of immortality ... ”

Ignatius regarded the Church as God’s holy order in the world. He was, therefore, concerned for the proper ordering of the Church’s teaching and worship. He wrote: “Flee from schism as the source of mischief. You should all follow the bishop as Jesus Christ did the Father. Follow, too, the presbytery as you would the apostles; and respect the deacons as you would God’s law ... Where the bishop is present, there let the congregation gather, just as where Jesus Christ is, there is the Catholic Church.”