

December 20

THE CHURCHES REMEMBER...

LUTHERANS:

Katharina von Bora (d. 1552), Martin Luther's wife

MARONITES:

Ignatius the Enlightener, patriarch of Antioch, martyr

ORTHODOX CHRISTIANS AND GREEK CATHOLICS:

Forefeast of the Nativity of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ

Ignatius the Theophore, hieromartyr

Ignatius of Antioch (d. ca. 115) pastor and martyr

Today the Eastern churches commemorate Ignatius, called the Theophore (God-bearer). He was Peter's second successor as bishop of Antioch, and was martyred around the year 115.

All that we know about Ignatius' life is his final journey towards martyrdom. In his great faith he transformed this voyage into a journey of discipleship, following Christ who, although crucified, was victorious over evil and death.

Ignatius was sent to Rome to be thrown to the lions, and at each stop in his voyage he was greeted with affection and respect by Christians. Until the end, he continued to send them encouragement in letters that are among the most beautiful exhortations of faithfulness to the Gospel in all of Christian literature.

Profoundly convinced that Christ was fully human and divine, Ignatius strenuously defended the reality of the Word's Incarnation and bore witness to the Resurrection with his own martyrdom, which he accepted in total freedom and with vibrant love.

When he learned that the Christians of Rome were trying to save him from death, thus preventing him from answering the inner voice that urged him to return to the Father, Ignatius wrote them an ardent letter testifying his desire to imitate the passion of his God, and to be ground like grain by the beasts so as to become Christ's pure bread.

Ignatius was filled with loving concern for the unity of the Church. For him, this unity finds its sacrament in the Eucharist, Christ's true flesh, and is structured around the bishop, who is called to work together with his collaborators, the priests, so as to gather the flock of the faithful into the one Church of Christ.

The Western churches celebrate Ignatius' memorial on October 17.

PRAYER

Lord God, Father of the church,
you gave us Ignatius,
an imitator of your Son's passion,
who wanted to be ground like grain and
become Christ's pure bread:
allow us to find refuge in the Gospel
as in the body of Jesus,
and grant that that we may love enough to give our lives
and so be led to you, O Father,
who are blessed now and forever.

BIBLICAL READINGS

Phil 3:17-4:1; Jn 12:24-28