

**Seventeenth Week of Ordinary Time**  
**July 28, 2024**  
**Year of the Most Holy Eucharist**  
**Reflection #31**

*“Assemble on the Lord’s Day, and break bread and offer the Eucharist; but first make confession of your faults, so that your sacrifice may be a pure one.” (The Didache 50-100 AD)*

*“Make certain, therefore, that you all observe one common Eucharist; for there is but one Body of our Lord Jesus Christ, and but one cup of union with His Blood, and one single altar of sacrifice - even as also there is but one bishop, with his clergy and my own fellow-servitors the deacons. This will insure that all your doings are in full accord with the will of God.” (Saint Ignatius of Antioch 35-107 AD)*

*“But look at those men who have those perverted notions about the grace of Jesus Christ which has come down to us, and see how contrary to the mind of God they are . . . They even abstain from the Eucharist and the public [liturgical] prayer, because they will not admit that the Eucharist is the self-same body of our Savior Jesus Christ, which [flesh] suffered for our sins, and which the Father in His goodness, raised up again.” (Saint Ignatius of Antioch 35-107 AD)*

*“I want the Bread of God, which is the Flesh of Jesus Christ, who is of the seed of David; and as drink I want his Blood, which is incorruptible love.” (Saint Ignatius of Antioch 35-107 AD)*

Last Sunday I concluded our reflection stating our need to reflect upon other source material not present in Sacred Scripture. These writings would have been composed parallel in time to those others which would eventually form the New Testament. Some may be tempted to dismiss them owing to the fact they are not part of the canon of Sacred Scripture. For our reflections, we should caution against minimizing their importance. These works are fundamental for they offer us an opportunity to read about the development of Christian thought and practice. Let us examine the writings of one of these great early Christian figures – Saint Ignatius of Antioch.

Saint Ignatius was the Bishop of Antioch, Syria (now located in Turkey). Our knowledge of Saint Ignatius, early Christian beliefs and these first Christian communities proceed from seven highly regarded letters that he wrote during a trip to Rome. Saint Ignatius had been condemned for his faith in Jesus Christ and His Church. He was writing as a prisoner being transported to his execution. Let us stop here and ponder this reality concerning Saint Ignatius. He is being led from present day Turkey to Rome, Italy. This journey would not be accomplished quickly. He knows the entire time that he is going to die. I ask you now: IF placed in that same situation, would you lie about what you believe? Saint Ignatius goes to his death, in fact, he encourages Christians in Rome to not try any form of mediation to prevent his death from happening. He is impelled by his faith in Jesus Christ. He wants to die for Jesus.

*“I am corresponding with all the churches and bidding them all realize that I am voluntarily dying for God — if, that is, you do not interfere. I plead with you, do not do me an unseasonable kindness. Let me be fodder for wild beasts — that is*

*how I can get to God. I am God's wheat and I am being ground by the teeth of wild beasts so that they may be my tomb and no scrap of my body be left. Thus, when I have fallen asleep, I shall be a burden to no one. Then I shall be a real disciple of Jesus Christ when the world sees my body no more. Pray Christ for me that by these means I may become God's sacrifice. I do not give you orders like Peter and Paul. They were apostles: I am a convict. They were at liberty: I am still a slave. But if I suffer, I shall be emancipated by Jesus Christ; and united to him, I shall rise to freedom." (Saint Ignatius of Antioch, Letter to the Romans).*

My dear family, Saint Ignatius' desire was to imitate Our Lord Jesus in offering his life as a sacrifice. His use of the imagery of grain ground to become a pure bread offers us insight into how Saint Ignatius viewed the ancient Christian understanding of the Eucharist. It was real to him and those who instructed him in the Christian faith. He longs to unite his body with the Body of Jesus found in the blessed bread offered upon the sacred altars. When one reads his full letter to the Romans, you begin to understand, coupled with the Scripture we have previously explored, this is not a new teaching Saint Ignatius has crafted for himself or the church in Antioch. His teaching is consistent with what Christians are professing in the beginning. The Christian community truly believes Jesus Christ's Body is present in the Eucharist.

Next Sunday, I would like to offer you something different. I will not present a reflection of my own making. Instead, I will present to you the teaching of Saint Justin Martyr who wrote his Apology (explanation of the Christian Faith) in 150 AD. Saint Justin would describe how Christians, in Rome, worshipped. If the early Mass and the belief that Jesus is present in the Eucharist can be seen in his writing, then I sincerely ask you: Are we, their descendants, fully living in accord with the ancient Christian faith IF we profess that the Eucharist is no more than a symbol?