

Fourth Sunday of Ordinary Time (English)
Septuagesima Sunday (Latin)
February 1, 2026
Year of the Church in History

“It is therefore meet that we not only be called Christians, but also be such; even as some persons have the bishop’s name on their lips, but in everything act apart from him.”
(Saint Ignatius of Antioch, Epistle to the Magnesians, circa A.D. 110)

The next epistle of Saint Ignatius of Antioch we shall reflect upon was his Letter to the Magnesians. Beginning with a historical overview, the town of Magnesia was located approximately 40 miles northeast of Smyrna. The archaeological site of the town is found near the city of Ortaklar, in modern-day Western Turkey. The city was an important center for trade and culture during the Greek (Hellenistic) and Roman periods. Tradition holds that Damas, the bishop of Magnesia, had visited with Saint Ignatius in the town of Smyrna (Saint Polycarp) as Saint Ignatius was being transported to Rome to face his eventual martyrdom.

“Yea, and it becometh you also not to presume upon the youth of your bishop, but according to the power of God the Father to render unto him all reverence, even as I have learned that the holy presbyters also have not taken advantage of his outwardly youthful estate, but give place to him as to one prudent in God; yet not to him, but to the Father of Jesus Christ, even to the Bishop of all. . .For a man doth not so much deceive this bishop who is seen, as cheat that other who is invisible; and in such a case he must reckon not with flesh but with God who knoweth the hidden things.” (paragraph #3)

“And attempt not to think anything right for yourselves apart from others: but let there be one prayer in common, one supplication, one mind, one hope, in love and in joy unblameable, which is Jesus Christ, than who there is nothing better. Hasten to come together all of you, as to one temple, even God; as to one altar, even to one Jesus Christ, who came forth from One Father and is with One and departed unto One.” (paragraph #7)

As was done last weekend, I am combining excerpts from two paragraphs to form one train of thought which is the role of the bishop (and his priests) concerning our salvation. Let us begin with this statement: At every moment of His life upon Earth, Jesus was in union with the Father and guided by the Holy Spirit. We may further state, everything Jesus said and all actions He performed were in union with God. Therefore, in the mind of God, man would be asked to offer assistance in the continued salvation of mankind. We believe this because Jesus chose Apostles offering each one His Holy Spirit to assist them as they went out to preach, teach and heal in His Name (Luke 9:1-6). This

commission does not end with His Death, Resurrection nor His Ascension. One may read these passages from Sacred Scripture noting that the Apostles were not chosen due to their ages or influence within Jewish society at that time. Jesus, God, chooses because God sees within the heart of the man, not solely upon their physical appearance (1 Samuel 16:7). As mentioned in his letter, Saint Ignatius acknowledges the youth of Damas, but his young age does not disqualify him from participating in the mission to save God's children. The people are reminded that they should remain in union with their young bishop as a rich symbol of the union of the Trinity. Just as God is One (Trinity - Three Persons, One God), so should everything be concerning the saving Faith established by Jesus and taught by His selected Apostles and their successors. God's Holy Spirit chose Damas, and other bishops of the time, and it is God's Holy Spirit who makes the bishop more like Christ each day, provided the bishop cooperates with the Spirit through remaining far from sin.

Turning to our times, we must always remember that a priest (not all priests become bishops) is not holy AFTER the ordaining bishop imposes hands upon his head. The blessings of the Holy Spirit we receive as faithful Christians, comes through the hands of these same priests. And, the holiness required of the priest to perform this task of our salvation, must come through great effort. One may say that as God chose a frail Simon Peter to guide His infant Flock/Church, from the very beginning, before creation was first breathed into existence, God, knew when He created man in His Image, in His Likeness, man would be capable of rejecting Him. God would therefore choose certain men, men with the same frail Simon Peter nature, to assist Him with saving His children. As Saint Ignatius encouraged the Magnesians to be in union with their bishop, a union bound by prayer, support and love, so too does God want us to be in union with our priests. I conclude offering this thought: the life of a priest can be rather thankless. He is always on call for others. He is there at their best moments and their worst. He baptizes, restores through confession and anoints as they prepare for their final journey. He is called to offer himself, his life, for others without benefit to himself. His words and actions are judged for he is an ambassador of God Almighty and these same words and actions must convey that dignity for which he has been called. Pray for priests. A priest may have all of these gifts given him by God, but he still must wage war within himself to become holy, the living embodiment of Jesus Christ who walks with His People.