

***Third Sunday of Ordinary Time***  
***January 25, 2026***  
***Year of the Church in History***

*“For every one whom the Master of the household sendeth to be steward over His own house, we ought so to receive as Him that sent him. Plainly therefore we ought to regard the bishop as the Lord Himself.” (Saint Ignatius of Antioch, Epistle to the Ephesians, circa A.D. 98–117)*

This weekend, I would like to introduce you to Saint Ignatius of Antioch. Saint Ignatius is believed to have been born in Syria around A.D. 50. He would be known as a friend of Saint Polycarp, bishop of Smyrna, who was a disciple of Saint John the Apostle. He was ordained as the third bishop of Antioch. This was a great honor for it was in Antioch where the name “Christian” was first used to describe followers of “The Way.” Also, Antioch was the base of operations for the great missionaries Saints Paul and Barnabas. According to the stories written of his life, in the ninth year of the reign of the Emperor Trajan, it was decreed that all subjects of Rome should unite in the worship of the gods. They were to offer a sacrifice as a means of thanksgiving for Trajan’s recent military victories. Any who refused to offer the prescribed sacrifice would incur the penalty of death. Ignatius, aware of what this would mean to younger Christians if he were to perform the ritual, refused. He was arrested and led before Trajan, who was traveling through Antioch at that time. Accused by Emperor Trajan of violating the imperial edict and inciting others to do likewise, Saint Ignatius received the penalty of death. He would be led to Rome to perish in the Flavian amphitheater (Colosseum) by wild animals. Saint Ignatius would write a series of seven epistles (letters) during his journey to Rome. It will be these epistles, in no particular order, which will guide our reflection in these next weeks.

*“Let no man be deceived. If any one be not within the precinct of the altar, he lacketh the bread [of God]. For, if the prayer of one and another hath so great force, how much more that of the bishop and of the whole Church. Whosoever therefore cometh not to the congregation, he doth thereby show his pride and hath separated himself; for it is written, God resisteth the proud. Let us therefore be careful not to resist the bishop, that by our submission we may give ourselves to God.” (paragraph #5)*

*“Be not deceived, my brethren. Corrupters of houses shall not inherit the kingdom of God. If then they which do these things after the flesh are put to death, how much more if a man through evil doctrine corrupt the faith of God for which Jesus Christ was crucified. Such a man, having defiled himself, shall go into the unquenchable fire; and in like manner also shall he that hearkeneth unto him.” (paragraph #16)*

I thought it best to combine these two statements from Saint Ignatius because they convey an idea of what is happening (historically) in the early Church and his remedy to these early conflicts. Initially, as I have said prior, the Apostles were not presented a “how to” manual of the Christian faith. For their part, they sought to offer their lives preaching and teaching the Faith under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. The Apostolic Fathers, like Saint Ignatius of Antioch, are the first generation after the Apostles and are tasked with explaining the Faith. Their explanations will be the first statements of that which will later be called the Deposit of the Faith. As the Deposit of the Faith slowly begins to develop, erroneous ideas will be promulgated by both innocent and corrupt teachers. In these two paragraphs,

Saint Ignatius is doing just that. He is reminding the Ephesians of the “right teaching” also called the orthodox Faith or “Orthodoxy.” This is very important. Saint Ignatius, as a loving father and shepherd, does not want to lose any of the flock entrusted to him by Jesus. He wants to shield them, even to the surrendering of his life, from the ravenous wolves who perverted the orthodox Faith.

Saint Ignatius, not content with only acknowledging these early heresies (a heresy is an idea offered which corrupts, misguides or denies some essential teaching of the Deposit of the Faith) offers an early remedy. Christians must remain unified with their bishop. This we could define as the spoken intention. However, there is also something unspoken, yet assumed in his words. They allow us to see that in the early Church there is an understood Hierarchy consisting of a bishop who guides the local church. The bishop will also have co-workers in the persons of presbyters (priests) and deacons. Saint Ignatius understands that a task has been given to the bishop. He must, like Saint Ignatius, protect his flock from any idea or person who would seek to separate the Body of Christ/the Church. A bishop must be willing to do this, even to the offering up of his life as a witness of the Deposit of the Faith. Besides reaching the orthodox Faith, those members who remain unified with the bishop will receive the “bread of God” which we know as the Eucharist. For Saint Ignatius, the false teachers sow division by their pride. They may promise other avenues, as opposed to the one, true and right Faith, but these paths lead only to destruction and separation for themselves and those who follow after them. Lastly, there is another unspoken statement being made. As followers, we are still required to study the Deposit of the Faith. It is not enough to just be a follower relying on the bishop’s word for the orthodox Faith. A Christian must also listen, reflect upon and pray concerning what they are being taught. As he so rightly points out, the corrupting teacher will be cast out and so will those who have fallen in line after him. Never grow weary of getting to know God through the prayerful studying of your Christian Faith.