

***Second Sunday of Lent***  
***March 1, 2026***  
***Year of the Church in History***

*“Bear all men, as the Lord also beareth thee.” (Saint Ignatius of Antioch, Epistle to Saint Polycarp, circa A.D. 107-110)*

Saint Ignatius of Antioch has now composed an Epistle or Letter to his dear friend Polycarp, Bishop of Smyrna. As I have mentioned prior, Polycarp was a disciple of Saint John the Apostle and would later in his own life follow Saint Ignatius of Antioch by also suffering martyrdom. In his letter, Saint Ignatius would ask Bishop Polycarp (later Saint Polycarp) to form a council of respected Christians and choose his successor who would become the Bishop of Antioch. He would also encourage him to hold the catholic doctrine and shepherd the flock entrusted to him by God. This shepherd would come not only in teaching the catholic faith but also tending the sheep through those actions which would later be taught as the Corporal Works of Mercy.

*“Tell my sisters to love the Lord and to be content with their husbands in flesh and in spirit. In like manner also charge my brothers in the name of Jesus Christ to love their wives, as the Lord loved the Church.” (paragraph #5)*

In his Epistle to Saint Polycarp, Saint Ignatius of Antioch refers to the teaching of Saint Paul concerning marriage, which is expressed in Saint Paul’s Letter to the Ephesians, chapter 5. To understand Saint Ignatius, we must begin with Saint Paul’s teaching.

One may recall the famous line of Ephesians which states: *“Wives, be subject (submissive) to your husbands, as to the Lord”* (Ephesians 5:22). This one line often provides a friendly jab or grinning glance between couples. Saint Paul would continue his description of marriage by encouraging husbands with these words: *“Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her”* (Ephesians 5:25). We know, as did both Saint Paul and Saint Ignatius, that wives are not being told they must be submissive to a husband who commands them to act either unlawfully or immorally. This example not only applies to wives, but all people. Yet both Saint Paul and Saint Ignatius clearly state that a husband must be ready to sacrifice himself, not just his life, but all of himself in a Christ-like manner for love of his wife. Saint John Chrysostom would further stress this point using these words:

*“Even if you must offer your own life for her, you must not refuse. Even if you must undergo countless struggles on her behalf and have all kinds of things to endure and suffer, you must not refuse. Even if you suffer all this, you have still done not as much as Christ has for the church. For you are already married when you act this way, whereas Christ is acting for one who has rejected and hated him. So just as he, when she was rejecting, hating, spurning and nagging him, brought her to trust him by his great solicitude, not by threatening, lording it over her or intimidating her or anything like that, so must you also act toward your wife.”*  
(Homily on Ephesians 20)

There is a temptation to stop at this time and conclude believing the words of both Saint Paul and Saint Ignatius must only apply to married couples. I offer for our reflection; these words must also apply to Saint Paul, Saint Ignatius of Antioch, Saint Polycarp and every man who has ever raised either the Precious Body or Blood of Jesus in offering the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. For these men and all priests, the analogy of husbands and wives must guide the way they view their priesthood. All priests must offer themselves daily, not solely for a physical person, but for the Bride of Christ, the Church. This offering may be through the red martyrdom, the shedding of blood, which these saintly men did experience. Every Catholic of every generation should pray this form of persecution would not occur during their lifetimes. More so, every priest should joyfully offer themselves daily through a white martyrdom; a bloodless offering of their whole persons for the Bride of Christ, the Church entrusted to them. The Church was purified through the shedding of blood by Christ her Head. The Church of now can only remain purified through the shedding of the “wants” of her priests today. Saint Ignatius of Antioch was willing to experience his red martyrdom because he had daily experienced a white martyrdom for love of both Jesus and His Bride, the Church. We pray more men, those ordained now and those yet to come, will have this same needed dedication.