Martyr and Early Father of the Church.

Polycarp resided in Asia Minor as bishop of Smyrna and sent an epistle to the Philippians c. 120-140 CE. [**subject of our reading**]. [Polycarp was martyred](http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/polycarp-smyrnaeans.html) (see link that describes his Marytrdom – **warning** graphic but powerful) c. 155 CE.

St. Irenaeus mentions Polycarp in *Adv. Haer.*, III.3.4. (source: <http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/polycarp.html>)

“But Polycarp also was not only instructed by apostles, and conversed with many who had seen Christ, but was also, by apostles in Asia, appointed bishop of the Church in Smyrna, whom I also saw in my early youth, for he tarried [on earth] a very long time, and, when a very old man, gloriously and most nobly suffering martyrdom, departed this life, having always taught the things which he had learned from the apostles, and which the Church has handed down, and which alone are true. To these things all the Asiatic Churches testify, as do also those men who have succeeded Polycarp down to the present time, a man who was of much greater weight, and a more stedfast witness of truth, than Valentinus, and Marcion, and the rest of the heretics. He it was who, coming to Rome in the time of Anicetus caused many to turn away from the aforesaid heretics to the Church of God, proclaiming that he had received this one and sole truth from the apostles, that, namely, which is handed down by the Church. There are also those who heard from him that John, the disciple of the Lord, going to bathe at Ephesus, and perceiving Cerinthus within, rushed out of the bath-house without bathing, exclaiming, "Let us fly, lest even the bath-house fall down, because Cerinthus, the enemy of the truth, is within." And Polycarp himself replied to Marcion, who met him on one occasion, and said, "Dost thou know me? "I do know thee, the first-born of Satan." Such was the horror which the apostles and their disciples had against holding even verbal communication with any corrupters of the truth; as Paul also says, "A man that is an heretic, after the first and second admonition, reject; knowing that he that is such is subverted, and sinneth, being condemned of himself." There is also a very powerful Epistle of Polycarp written to the Philippians, from which those who choose to do so, and are anxious about their salvation, can learn the character of his faith, and the preaching of the truth. Then, again, the Church in Ephesus, founded by Paul, and having John remaining among them permanently until the times of Trajan, is a true witness of the tradition of the apostles.”

A good historical contextual reading about St. Polycarp’s Epistle to the Philippians (source: New Advent):

The Epistle of St. Polycarp was a reply to one from the Philippians, in which they had asked St. Polycarp to address them some words of exhortation; to forward by his own messenger a letter addressed by them to the [Church of Antioch](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/01567a.htm); and to send them any epistles of St. Ignatius which he might have [**see Chapters 9 and 13 of our reading**]. The second request should be noted. St. Ignatius had asked the Churches of [Smyrna](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/14060b.htm) and Philadelphia to send a messenger to congratulate the [Church of Antioch](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/01567a.htm) on the restoration of peace; presumably, therefore, when at [Philippi](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/12007c.htm), he gave similar instructions to the Philippians. This is one of the many respects in which there is such complete harmony between the situations revealed in the Epistles of St. Ignatius and the Epistle of St. Polycarp, that it is hardly possible to impugn the genuineness of the former without in some way trying to destroy the credit of the latter, which happens to be one of the best attested documents of antiquity.

**Scriptural Reflection**: St. Polycarp refers to the term “righteousness” 8 times in his epistle referencing its use multiple times in Scripture. In fact, on line 36 he states that righteousness is the purpose (or at least a key purpose) of writing the epistle. The CCC gives us some hints but no definition of what this means. Modern scholars Chris Mitch (trustee of the St. Paul Center for Biblical Theology and Dr. Edward Sri (St. Augustine Institute, Denver) explain righteousness as “…ethical conduct, that is obedience to God, or to God’s faithfulness to his covenant promises.” Pg. 90 “The Gospel of Matthew” (2010).

This dual aspect of the term adds depth to our understanding of Scripture.

Reflect upon Jesus’ Baptism, “But Jesus answered him, Let it be so now; for this it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.” [MT 3:15] How are both aspects of righteousness fulfilled?

Reflect again upon the Beatitude, “Blessed are those persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” [MT 5:10] Given our understanding of righteousness, does the door of heaven now seem wider? Explain how and why?

**Catechism Reflection**: The title of Chapter 7 includes the strange word “Docetæ” a reference to those supporting the heresy of Gnostic Docetism. The following lines 99-102 go on to strongly rebuke anyone who would deny that the “true humanity” of Jesus as “antichrist” and “the devil” or “first born of Satan”. CCC 465 tells us that this was one of the first heresy’s of the early Church – not in denying the divinity of Christ but of his humanity and his substance not being “of the Father” rather of some other substance, “from things that were not” (Arian Heresy).

Do you have the same strong visceral reaction to these or similar modern heresies of moral relativism, atheism, or faiths which deny or pervert the True Faith? Or do you find that you are “luke-warm” or absent of feeling toward these ideas. Why do you suppose St. Polycarp is so strong here? Should we be as strong as he in our lives? Do we shrink from it? What should we do differently in our thinking, our words and our actions?

**Spiritual Reflection**: Is Holy Righteousness (justice) formed through suffering patiently and silently? See Chapters 8-9 (lines 109-127). St. Polycarp recounts the example of Christ’s patience if we suffer for His name’s sake. Of course Christ we know suffered silently (as does our Blessed Mother watching her Son’s Passion) until enthroned in glory on the Cross (St. James proclaims this to the eunuch-convert in Acts 8:32-36. The prophet Isaiah foretells this in the song of the Suffering Servant (rejected Messiah), “He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb led to the slaughter…” [Is 53:7] (see CCC 601). Jesus’ life is a lesson accentuated loudly in silent, patient, suffering, by His example, showing those who love Righteousness, the path (the Way).

Where are you? Do you patiently endure suffering? Do you see suffering as something God allows to be imparted upon His most beloved as His Son and adopted sons and daughters? Do you embrace suffering as a communion with God and his Saints and Holy Martyrs? Why or why not? Are you willing to suffer, but not silently? If you saw suffering as a great grace and mercy from God (suffering for all Righteousness (Justice) of God) would/could you be silent? Why or why not? What is St. Polycarp, by the grace of God, asking of us? How will you respond? When is the right time to speak when injustice is being perpetrated? Do we speak for ourselves or only for others?