

IGNATIUS TO THE SMYRNAEANS

Ignatius, also called Theophorus, to the Church of God the Father and the beloved Jesus Christ; a church mercifully endowed with every gift; overflowing with faith and love; lacking in no gift; radiant with God's splendor, and fruitful mother of saints. To the Church at Smyrna in Asia I send best wishes for irreproachableness of sentiment and loyalty to the word of God.

1. I extol Jesus Christ, the God who has granted you such wisdom. For I have observed that you are thoroughly trained in unshaken faith, being nailed, as it were, to the Cross of the Lord Jesus Christ both in body and in soul, and that you are well established in love through the Blood of Christ and firmly believe in Our Lord: He is really of the line of David according to the flesh, and the Son of God by the will and power of God; was really born of a virgin, and baptized by John in order to comply with every ordinance. Under Pontius Pilate and the tetrarch Herod He was really nailed to the cross in the flesh for our sake--of whose fruit we are, in virtue of His most blessed Passion. And thus, through the Resurrection, He raised a banner for all times for His saints and faithful followers, whether among the Jews or the Gentiles, that they might be united in a single body, that is, His Church.

2. All these sufferings, assuredly, He underwent for our sake, that we might be saved. And He suffered really, as He also really raised Himself from the dead. It is not as some unbelievers say, who maintain that His suffering was a make-believe. In reality, it is they that are make-believes: and, as their notion, so their end: they will be bodiless and ghostlike shapes!

3. For myself, I know and believe that He was in the flesh even after the Resurrection. And when He came to Peter and Peter's companions, He said to them: "Here; feel me and see that I am not a bodiless ghost." Immediately they touched Him and, through this contact with His Flesh and Spirit, believed. For the same reason they despised death and, in fact, proved stronger than death. Again, after the Resurrection, He ate and drank with them like a being of flesh and blood, though spiritually one with the Father.

4. I am urging these things on you, beloved, although I know that you are of the same mind. I am cautioning you betimes, however, against wild beasts in human form, whom you ought not only not to receive, but, if possible, even avoid meeting. Only pray for them, if somehow they may change their mind--a difficult thing! But that is in the power of Jesus Christ, our true Life. Surely, if those things were done by Our Lord as a mere make-believe, then I in my chains, too, am a make-believe! Why, moreover, did I surrender myself to death, to fire, to the sword, to wild beasts? Well, to be near the sword is to be near God; to be in the claws of wild beasts is to be in the hands of God. Only let it be done in the name of Jesus Christ! To suffer with Him I endure all things, if He, who became perfect man, gives me the strength.

5. Some disown Him through ignorance, or, rather, were disowned by Him, being advocates of death rather than the truth. They were not convinced by the prophecies or by the Law of Moses; no, not even to this day by the Gospel or the sufferings of our own people; for they entertain the same

view of us. Really, what good does anyone do me if he praises me, but blasphemes my Lord by not admitting that He carried living flesh about Him? He who does not admit this, has absolutely disowned Him, and what he carries about him is a corpse. Their names--names of unbelievers they are!--I do not think advisable to write down. In fact, I even wish I did not remember them, until they change their mind concerning the Passion, which is our resurrection.

6. Let no one be deceived! Even the heavenly powers and the angels in their splendor and the principalities, both visible and invisible, must either believe in the Blood of Christ, or else face damnation. Let him grasp it who can. Let no rank puff up anyone; for faith and love are paramount--the greatest blessings in the world. Observe those who hold erroneous opinions concerning the grace of Jesus Christ which has come to us, and see how they run counter to the mind of God! They concern themselves with neither works of charity, nor widows, nor orphans, nor the distressed, nor those in prison or out of it, nor the hungry or thirsty.

7. From Eucharist and prayer they hold aloof, because they do not confess that the Eucharist is the Flesh of our Savior Jesus Christ, which suffered for our sins, and which the Father in His loving-kindness raised from the dead. And so, those who question the gift of God perish in their contentiousness. It would be better for them to have love, so as to share in the resurrection. It is proper, therefore, to avoid associating with such people and not to speak about them either in private or in public, but to study the Prophets attentively and, especially, the Gospel, in which the Passion is revealed to us and the Resurrection shown in its fulfillment. Shun division as the beginning of evil.

8. You must all follow the lead of the bishop, as Jesus Christ followed that of the Father; follow the presbytery as you would the Apostles; reverence the deacons as you would God's commandment. Let no one do anything touching the Church, apart from the bishop. Let that celebration of the Eucharist be considered valid which is held under the bishop or anyone to whom he has committed it. Where the bishop appears, there let the people be, just as where Jesus Christ is, there is the Catholic Church. It is not permitted without authorization from the bishop either to baptize or to hold an agape; but whatever he approves is also pleasing to God. Thus everything you do will be proof against danger and valid.

9. It is consonant with reason, therefore, that we should come to our senses, while we still have time to change our ways and turn to God. It is well to revere God and bishop. He who honors a bishop is honored by God. He who does anything without the knowledge of the bishop worships the devil. May all things, then, be yours in abundance through grace, for you deserve it. You have brought relief to me in every respect, and may Jesus Christ do so to you! Whether I was absent or present, you have shown me love. Your reward is God, to whom you will come if you endure all things for His sake.

10. As to Philo and Rheus Agathopus, who accompanied me in the name of God, it was good of you to give them a warm reception as to servants of Christ God. For their part, they thank the Lord on your behalf, because you offered them ransoms. A ransom for you are my life and my chains, which you did not despise and of which you were not ashamed. Neither will Jesus Christ, our consummate hope, be ashamed of you.

11. Your prayer made its way to the Church at Antioch in Syria. Coming from there in chains radiant with divine splendor, I send greetings to all. Not that I deserve to belong to that community, being the least of its members; but by the will (of God) I was granted this favor--no, not because of any conscious deed, but because of the grace of God. Would that this grace were given me in perfection, that through your prayer I may make my way to God! Now, that your own work may be made perfect both on earth and in heaven, it is proper, for the honor of God, that your Church should send a God-empowered delegate to go to Syria and congratulate the people on enjoying peace, having recovered their normal greatness, and having their full status restored to them. It therefore appears to me to be a God-inspired undertaking to send one of your number with a letter for the purpose of joining in the celebration of their God-given tranquillity, and because they have, thanks to your prayer, at last made port. Be perfect, therefore, and devise a perfect method. You need only be willing to do well, and God is ready to assist you.

12. In their affection the brethren at Troas wish to be remembered to you. It is from here that I send this letter through the kindness of Burrus, whom you conjointly with your brethren, the Ephesians, commissioned to accompany me. He has given me every possible comfort. And would that all might imitate him, for he is a pattern of what a minister of God should be. God's grace will reward him in every way. Greetings to the bishop, that man of God, to the God-minded presbytery, to the deacons my fellow servants, to the whole community, individually and collectively, in the name of Jesus Christ, in His Flesh and Blood, in His Passion and Resurrection, both corporal and spiritual, in unity with God and with you. Grace be to you and mercy and peace and patient endurance forever.

13. Greetings to the families of my brethren, including their wives and children, and to the virgins who are enrolled among the widows. Farewell in the power of the Father! Philo, who is with me, wishes to be remembered to you. Offer my respects to the household of Tavia, and I pray that she may be firmly rooted in faith and love, both carnal and spiritual. Give my regards to Alce, that most dear friend of mine, and to the incomparable Daphnus, and to Eutecnus, and to all the rest by name. Farewell in the grace of God!

Made available to the net by:
Paul Halsall
Halsall@murray.fordham.edu