

## IGNATIUS: To the Romans

Ignatius, also called Theophorus, to the Church that has found mercy in the transcendent Majesty of the Most High Father and of Jesus Christ, His only Son; the church by the will of Him who willed all things that exist, beloved and illuminated through the faith and love of Jesus Christ our God; which also presides in the chief place of the Roman territory; a church worthy of God, worthy of honor, worthy of felicitation, worthy of praise, worthy of success, worthy of sanctification, and presiding in love, maintaining the law of Christ, and bearer of the Father's name: her do I therefore salute in the name of Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father. Heartiest good wishes for unimpaired joy in Jesus Christ our God, to those who are united in flesh and spirit by every commandment of His; who imperturbably enjoy the full measure of God's grace and have every foreign stain filtered out of them.

1. By prayer to God I have obtained the favor of seeing your venerable faces; in fact, I have been pleading for an even greater favor: as a prisoner in Christ Jesus I hope to embrace you, provided it is His will that I should be privileged to reach the goal. An auspicious beginning has certainly been made--if only I obtain the grace of taking due possession of my inheritance without hindrance. The truth is, I am afraid it is your love that will do me wrong. For you, of course, it is easy to achieve your object; but for me it is difficult to win my way to God, should you be wanting in consideration for me.

2. Surely, I do not want you to court the good pleasure of men, but to please God, as indeed you do please Him. Yes, I shall never again have such an opportunity of winning my way to God, nor can you, if you remain quiet, ever have your name inscribed on a more glorious achievement. For, if you quietly ignore me, I am the word of God; but if you fall in love with my human nature, I shall, on the contrary, be a mere sound. Grant me no more than that you let my blood be spilled in sacrifice to God, while yet there is an altar ready. You should form a choir of love and sing a song to the Father through Jesus Christ, because God has graciously summoned the bishop of Syria to come from the rising of the sun to the setting. How glorious to be a setting sun--away from the world, on to God! May I rise in His presence!

3. You have never grudged any man. You have taught others. All I want is that the lessons you inculcate in initiating disciples remain in force. Only beg for me strength within and without, that I may be a man not merely of words, but also of resolution. In this way I shall not only be called a Christian, but also prove to be one. For if I prove to be one, I can also be called a true believer even then when I am no longer seen by the world. Nothing that is seen is good. Our God Jesus Christ certainly is the more clearly seen now that He is in the Father. Whenever Christianity is hated by the world, what counts is not power of persuasion, but greatness. 4. I am writing to all the Churches and state emphatically to all that I die willingly for God, provided you do not interfere. I beg you, do not show me unseasonable kindness. Suffer me to be the food of wild beasts, which are the means of my making my way to God. God's wheat I am, and by the teeth of wild beasts I am to be ground that I may prove Christ's pure bread. Better still, coax the wild beasts to become my tomb and to leave no part of my person behind: once I have fallen asleep, I do not wish to be a burden to anyone. Then only shall I be a genuine disciple of Jesus Christ when the world will not see even my body. Petition Christ in my behalf that through these instruments I may prove God's sacrifice. Not like Peter and Paul do I issue any orders to you. They were Apostles, I am a convict; they were free, I am until this moment a slave. But once I have suffered, I shall become a freedman of Jesus Christ, and, united with Him, I shall rise a free man. Just now I learn, being in chains, to desire nothing.

5. All the way from Syria to Rome I am fighting wild beasts, on land and sea, by day and night, chained as I am to ten leopards, that is, a detachment of soldiers, who prove themselves the more malevolent for kindnesses shown them. Yet in the school of this abuse I am more and more trained in discipleship, although I am not therefore justified. Oh, may the beasts prepared for me be my joy! And I pray that they may be found to be ready for me. I will even coax them to make short work of me, not as has happened to some whom they were too timid to touch. And should they be unwilling to attack me who am willing, I will myself compel them. Pardon me--I know very well where my advantage lies. At last I am well on the way to being a disciple. May nothing seen or unseen, fascinate me, so that I may happily make my way to Jesus Christ! Fire, cross, struggles with wild beasts, wrenching of bones, mangling of limbs, crunching of the whole body, cruel tortures inflicted by the devil--let them come upon me, provided only I make my way to Jesus Christ.

6. Of no use to me will be the farthest reaches of the universe or the kingdoms of this world. I would rather die and come to Jesus Christ than be king over the entire earth. Him I seek who died for us; Him I love who rose again because of us. The birth pangs are upon me. Forgive me, brethren; do not obstruct my coming to life--do not wish me to die; do not make a gift to the world of one who wants to be God's. Beware of seducing me with matter; suffer me to receive pure light. Once arrived there, I shall be a man. Permit me to be an imitator of my suffering God. If anyone holds Him in his heart, let him understand what I am aspiring to; and then let him sympathize with me, knowing in what distress I am.

7. The Prince of this world is resolved to abduct me, and to corrupt my Godward aspirations. Let none of you, therefore, who will then be present, assist him. Rather, side with me, that is, with God. Do not have Jesus Christ on your lips, and the world in your hearts. Give envy no place among you. And should I upon my arrival plead for your intervention, do not listen to me. Rather, give heed to what I write to you. I am writing while still alive, but my yearning is for death. My Love has been crucified, and I am not on fire with the love of earthly things. But there is in me a Living Water, which is eloquent and within me says: "Come to the Father." I have no taste for corruptible food or for the delights of this life. Bread of God is what I desire; that is, the Flesh of Jesus Christ, who was of the seed of David; and for my drink I desire His Blood, that is, incorruptible love.

8. No longer do I wish to live after the manner of men; and this is what will happen if you wish it so. Wish it, that your own wishes, too, may be fulfilled. By this short letter I beseech you: do believe me! Jesus Christ will make it clear to you that I speak the truth--He on whose lips there are no lies, through whom the Father has spoken truthfully. Pray for me that I may succeed. What I write to you does not please the appetites of the flesh, but it pleases the mind of God. If I suffer, you have loved me; if I am rejected, you have hated me!

9. Remember in your prayers the Church in Syria which now has God for her Shepherd in my stead. Jesus Christ alone will be her Bishop, together with your love. For myself, I am ashamed to be counted as one of her members. I certainly do not deserve to be one, being the least of them and one that came to birth unexpectedly. However, if I but make my way to God, then by His mercy I shall be someone. My spirit salutes you, and so does the affection of the Churches that offered their hospitality to me, not as to a chance visitor, but in deference to Jesus Christ. Why, even those not adjoining my route--the route by which my body traveled hastened in advance from town after town to meet me.

10. I am sending you this letter from Smyrna through the kindness of the Ephesians, who deserve so much praise. Among many others Crocus is here with me--a dearly beloved name to me! As to the men from Syria who for the glory of God have gone to Rome to meet you there, you have, I trust, made their acquaintance. Please, inform them also that I am near. One and all they are men of God and will be an honor to you. You will do well to give them every comfort. I am writing this to you on the 24th of August. Farewell to the end in the patient endurance of Jesus Christ.

Made available to the net by: Paul Halsall [Halsall@murray.fordham.edu](mailto:Halsall@murray.fordham.edu)