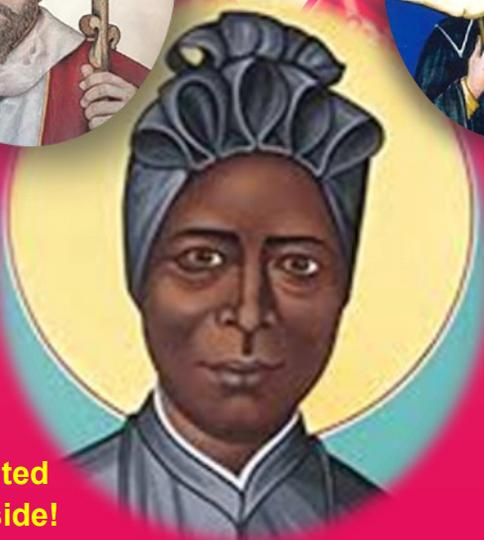
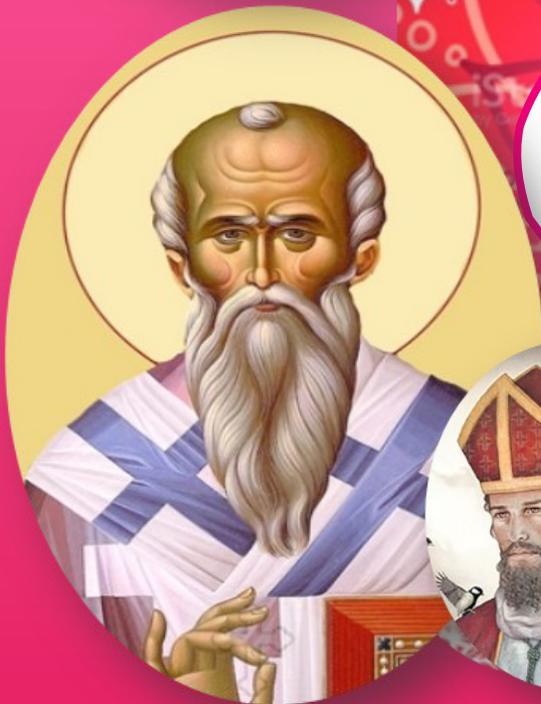


THE LITTLE FLOWER MONTHLY



Saints
Honored
in February

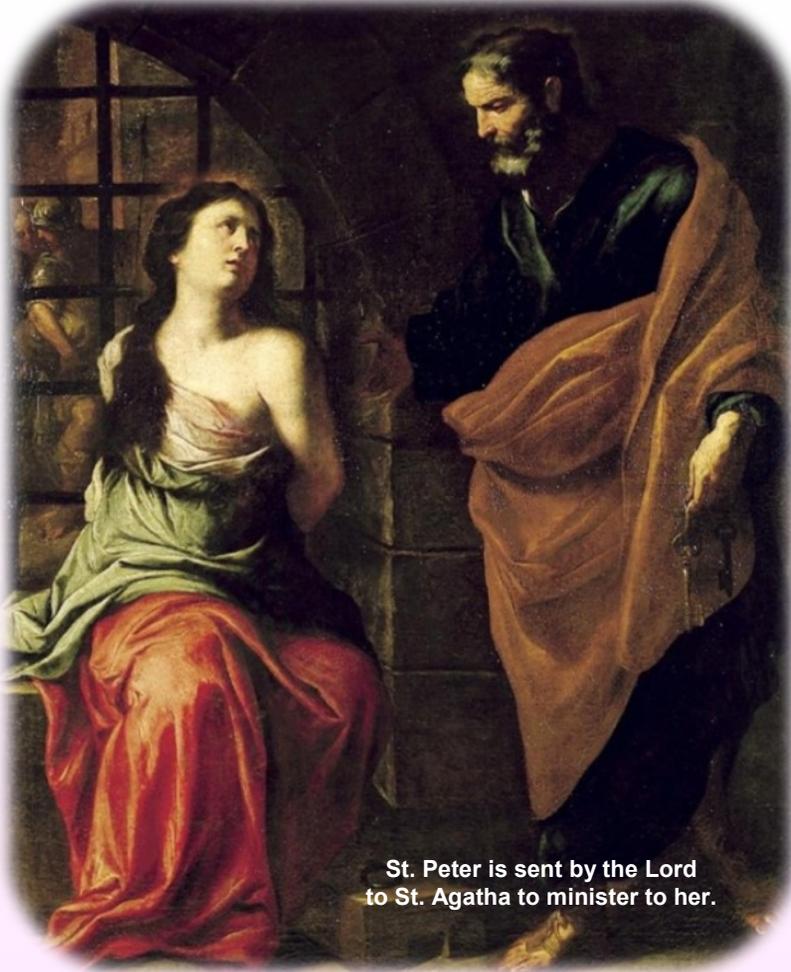
FEBRUARY SAINTS

- 3 — St. Blaise
 - 5 — St. Agatha
 - 6 — St. Paul Miki & Companions
 - 8 — St. Jerome Emiliani
 - 8 — St. Josephine Bakhita
 - 10 — St. Scholastica
 - 14 — St. Valentine
 - 23 — St. Polycarp
- Those highlighted are featured inside!**

OTHER FEASTS & HOLY DAYS IN FEBRUARY

- 11 — Our Lady of Lourdes
- 17 — Ash Wednesday
- 22 — Chair of St. Peter

St. Agatha ~ Feast: February 5



St. Peter is sent by the Lord to St. Agatha to minister to her.

St. Agatha is recognized by the Church as a Virgin and a Martyr. She was born in Catania or Palermo, Sicily, in 231 AD. Agatha was a woman of rare beauty and came from a noble and illustrious family. Her good looks caught the attention of Quintian (sometimes called Quintianus), the Governor of Sicily. However, Agatha refused his advances, having taken a Christian vow of chastity and devotion to Christ. In retaliation, Quintian reportedly sent Agatha to a house of prostitution. Despite an extended period of time there, Agatha remained firm in her vow. Quintian then reportedly had Agatha

imprisoned and brutally tortured. This torture included Quintian's order that her breasts be torn off with iron shears. After this she was sent to a dungeon to die.

Legend tells us that the Lord sent either an angel or **St. Peter** to restore and heal her breasts. Since she did not die, Quintian was filled with rage and furiously directed that Agatha be burned alive. Approximately a year after her death in 251, the city survived the volcanic eruption of Mount Etna. People became convinced the city had been spared because of St. Agatha's prayers. Devotion to her spread beyond Sicily and was so fervent in the early Church that St. Agatha's name came to be included in the first Eucharistic Prayer. She is honored for her courage in suffering and her devotion and commitment to Christ.

St. Agatha is the patron saint of Sicily, nurses, bakers, miners, jewelers, Alpine guides, and those suffering from breast cancer. She is also the protector against earthquakes, volcanoes, fires, and thunderstorms.

St. Paul Miki & Companions ~ Feb. 6



Christianity spread like wildfire in sixteenth-century **Japan**. By the 1580s, less than forty years after St. Francis Xavier (1506-1552) introduced the Faith there, the Church in Japan counted two hundred thousand converts—despite the opposition of Buddhist priests and many rulers. However, in 1587, Emperor Hideyoshi ordered the banishment of all Catholics,

forcing them to operate from hiding. Many churches were destroyed, but few episodes of martyrdom took place during this time. Within a decade, 100,000 more Japanese converted.

In 1593, Franciscan missionaries came to Japan from the Philippines by order of Spain's King Philip II. These new arrivals gave themselves zealously to the work of charity and evangelism, but their presence disturbed a delicate situation between the Church and Japanese authorities. Suspicion against Catholic missionaries grew when a Spanish ship was seized off the Japanese coast and found to be carrying artillery. It wasn't until late in 1596 that outright persecution broke out, when Hideyoshi rounded up twenty-six Jesuits, Franciscans, and laypeople and prepared to martyr them. Hideyoshi had the left ears of each of them severed as a sign of disrespect and paraded them through Kyoto. Among the victims was **Paul Miki** (born in 1562), a Jesuit novice who had just completed eleven years of training and was preparing to be canonized a priest. Paul's noble family was converted when he was a child and at age five he was baptized. Educated by Jesuits, the gifted youth joined their novitiate at age twenty-two. Along with his studies of the Catholic Faith, he also studied intensively the teachings of the Buddhists so as to be able to debate their priests. Also among the 26 were St. John of Goto (a catechist preparing to enter the Jesuit order) and St. James Kisai (a lay Jesuit brother).

Dressed in his simple black cassock, Paul stood out among them. Most onlookers realized that this noble young man could have been a samurai. The whole display had the unexpected effect of evoking compassion from the crowd, some of whom later became converts.

Sentenced to die by crucifixion and lancing, they were first marched 600 miles to the city of Nagasaki. During the journey they underwent public torture meant to terrorize other Japanese believers in Christ. But all 26 held out courageously, even singing sacred hymns along the way. When they arrived at their hill of martyrdom, they were tied to crosses; beside them were executioners ready to strike. An eyewitness gave this account: "Our brother, Paul Miki, seeing himself raised to the most honorable position that he had ever occupied, openly proclaimed that he was both Japanese and a Jesuit and that he was being put to death for preaching the Gospel." St. Paul Miki's last act of evangelism took place as he hung on his cross, preaching to the crowds: "After Christ's example, I forgive my persecutors and do not hate them. I ask God to have pity on all and hope our blood will fall on our fellow men as a fruitful rain. Having arrived at this moment, I believe that not one of you thinks I want to hide the truth. That is why I declare to you that there is no other way of salvation than the one followed by Christians. I pray that all will obtain the desire of Christian baptism." At this point, he turned his eyes toward his companions and began to encourage them in their final struggle. Their faces shone with great gladness. Another Christian shouted to him that he would soon be in Paradise. "Like my Master," murmured Paul, "we shall die upon the cross. Like him, a lance will pierce our hearts so that our blood and our love can flow out upon the land and sanctify it to His name."

As they came closer to death, the entire group sang the Canticle of Zachary (Luke 1:67-79). The executioners stood by respectfully until they had intoned the last verse. Then at a given signal, they thrust their spears into the victims' sides at the site that became known as "Martyrs' Hill." **On that day, February 5, 1597, the Church in Japan welcomed its first martyrs, who were canonized by Pope Paul IX in 1862.**

St. Jerome Emiliani ~ Feast: February 8

St. Jerome Emiliani was born in Venice, Italy, in 1481, the son of wealthy parents, Angelo and Eleanor Mauroceni Emiliani. Shortly after his father died in 1496, Jerome ran away from home at the age of 15. After living a dissolute life for the next ten years, he became a soldier in 1506. Joining the military pulled Jerome from his wayward path, and he soon rose in rank to command a league of forces in charge of a castle in the mountains near Treviso, Italy. When the fortress was captured by Venetian forces on August 27, 1511, Jerome was chained in a dungeon. While there, he had a lot of time to think, and he gradually learned to pray. He promised the Blessed Mother that if she helped him escape, he would live a life worthy of being called a Christian. She appeared to him in a vision, freed him from his chains, and led him out past his captors. When he returned to Venice, he placed his shackles in a Church as an offering of thanksgiving and a sign of his dedication.

He then returned to Venice where he took charge of the education of his nephews—and began his own studies for the priesthood. In the years after his **ordination in 1518**, events again called Jerome to a new lifestyle. Because plague and famine swept northern Italy, Jerome began caring for the poor and the sick, feeding them at his own expense. While serving them, he resolved to devote himself and his property solely to others, particularly to abandoned children. He rented a house for the orphans and fed, clothed, and educated them. It may have been his experience as a homeless teenager that allowed him to feel such compassion for these abandoned children. Jerome was the first to use a question-and-answer format to teach children the Catholic faith, an approach that became common in catechisms. He was known to wander the streets of Venice to bury the dead who had died of the plague that day. In his lifetime, St. Jerome also founded three orphanages, a shelter for penitent prostitutes who wish to do penance, and a hospital for incurables.

In 1532, Jerome and two other priests, Fr. Alessandro Besuzio and Fr. Agostino Bariso, established a congregation called the Clerks Regular of Somasca (Somasca being the city where they were located), dedicated to the care of orphans and the education of youth (they were also known as the Company of the Servants of the Poor). The group was recognized by the papal nuncio to the Republic of Venice in 1535. Their rules states that “the principal work of the community is the care of orphans, the poor and sick” and demands that their “dwellings, food, and clothing shall bear the mark of religious poverty.” The spirituality of the order consists in the desire to bring the Church “to the state of holiness of the early Christian communities,” serving Christ in poor, abandoned children, showing them the tender “fatherhood and motherhood” of God. The Order extended its charitable ministries beyond the care of orphans by supporting and staffing seminaries, by educating and forming youth, and by ministering to people in parishes. The Somascan Fathers and Brothers continue St. Jerome's mission as either priests or brothers by living in community practicing humility, kindness, and loving poverty—while pursuing holiness by prayer and ministry to the poor. Today, they continue to work in group homes, treatment and rehabilitation centers, retreat houses, schools, youth centers, and parishes.

St. Jerome fell a martyr to his zeal, contracting a disease at Bergamo and dying at Somasca on February 8, 1537, at the age of fifty-six. After his death, his community was considering disbanding, but was kept together by Fr. Angelo Marco Gambarana, who obtained the approval of the Order by Pope Paul III in 1540; in 1563, St. Pius V raised it to the dignity of a religious order, according to the Rule of St. Augustine, with solemn vows and the privileges of the mendicants. In 1569 the first six members made their profession, and Fr. Gambarana was appointed to be their first superior general. Great favor was shown to the order by St. Charles Borromeo, the Archbishop of Milan at the time, who assigned them to the parish church of St. Mayeul at Pavia. Later the education of youth was put into the official program of the Order, and the colleges they founded in Rome and Pavia became renowned.

St. Jerome was beatified by Pope Benedict XIV in 1747 and canonized by Pope Clement XIII in 1767. The Office and Mass in his honor were approved eight years later. In 1928 Pope Pius XI declared him the patron saint of orphans and abandoned children. St. Jerome Emiliani shares his liturgical feast day with St. Josephine Bakhita on February 8.



St. Josephine Bakhita ~ Feast: February 8



St. Josephine was born in the southern Sudan region of Darfur in 1869. Her family was affluent, but this did not protect them from the atrocities of Arab slave raiders in the area. Like her sister before her, Bakhita was kidnapped and sold into slavery at the age of nine—never to see her family again. Ironically, her kidnappers named her “Bakhita,” meaning “fortunate” in Arabic. In the years that followed, Bakhita was sold five different times in the markets of El Obeid and Khartoum to cruel masters. She experienced the humiliations and sufferings of slavery, both physical and moral. She was raped, branded, beaten, and cut. In one horrific incident, a master rubbed salt into the 114 cuts he had made on her body.

Her last sale was to Callisto Legnani, an official of the Italian consul in Khartoum, the capital of Sudan. He bought her as a gift for an Italian merchant, Augusto Michieli, who then brought her to Genoa, Italy, to be the nanny for his daughter Mimmina. Bakhita was pleasantly surprised that no one used the lash when giving her orders; instead, she was treated in a loving and cordial way. While at the Michieli estate, Bakhita was given a silver crucifix, her first encounter with Christ. The image of His suffering body must have resonated with her tremendously. While accompanying

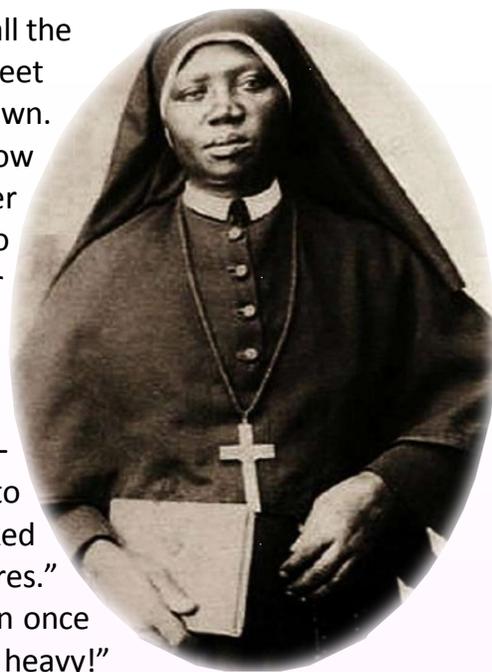
the Michielis’ daughter to Catholic school in Venice, she fell in love with the Catholic Faith.

In time, the Michielis acquired a big hotel in Suakin on the Red Sea. On the advice of their administrator, rather than take the girls with them, the Michielis entrusted both their daughter Mimmina and Bakhita to the Daughters of Charity of Canossa (the Canossian Sisters) at their convent in Venice. It was there that Bakhita came to know more about God, whom she had experienced in her heart since childhood “without knowing who He was.” As a child, looking at the sun, the moon and the stars, Bakhita wondered who could be the Master of these beautiful things. She said, “I felt a great desire to see Him, to know Him, and to pay Him homage...” When the Michielis returned to Italy to take their daughter and Bakhita back with them to Sudan, Bakhita refused to leave and took her case to court. Backed by the Sisters and the patriarch of Venice, Bakhita was declared a free woman, since her enslavement had been illegal since its inception.

After several months in the catechumenate, on January 9, 1890, Bakhita received the Sacraments of Christian initiation and was given the new name, Josephine. From then on, she was often seen kissing the baptismal font and saying: “Here, I became a daughter of God!” With each new day, she became more aware of who this God was, whom she now knew and loved, who had led her to Him through mysterious ways, holding her by the hand.

Six years later, on December 8, 1896, she became a novice in the Institute of St. Magdalene of Canossa as a Daughter of Charity (in their convent in Schio, Italy) and committed her life to the God she called “the Master!” For the next fifty years, she served the community in Schio by cooking, sewing, and attending to the door. When she was on duty at the door, her friendly, sweet voice, which had the inflection and rhythm of the music of her country, was pleasing to the little ones, comforting to the poor and suffering, and encouraging to all who knocked at the door. She would gently lay her hands on the heads of the children who attended the Canossian school and caress them. To this day, the nuns remember her as “our Black Mother”.

Her humility, her simplicity, and her constant smile won the hearts of all the citizens. Her sisters in the community esteemed her for her inalterable sweet nature, her exquisite goodness, and her deep desire to make the Lord known. She often said, “Be good, love the Lord, pray for those who do not know Him. What a great grace it is to know God!” In 1910, in obedience to her superior, Josephine dictated her life story to another Canossian sister so that it could be transcribed and preserved as a testament to her strength and grace. (Note: Our patroness, St. Therese, was also asked by her superior—15 years before—to write her life story, which is the famous *Story of A Soul*.)



As she grew older, Mother Bakhita suffered greatly in sickness—experiencing long, painful years of sickness. She continued to witness to faith, goodness, and Christian hope. To those who visited her and asked how she was, she would respond with a smile: “As the Master desires.” During her agony, she relived the terrible days of her slavery—more than once begging the nurse who assisted her: “Please, loosen the chains... They are heavy!” It was the Blessed Mother who freed her from all pain. Her last words were: “Our Lady! Our Lady!” and her final smile testified to her encounter with the Mother of the Lord. She was eighty-seven when she died on February 8, 1947, at the Canossian convent in Schio, surrounded by the other Sisters. At her funeral, hundreds of ordinary people came to see their “Mother Moretta” lying in state to ask for her protection from Heaven. Along with these visits came stories about how the simple nun had given them comfort, advice and encouragement as she served as the convent’s doorkeeper. Almost immediately graces and miracles attributed to Bakhita's intercession began to be reported.

Divine Providence which “cares for the flowers of the fields and the birds of the air,” guided the Sudanese slave through unspeakable sufferings to human freedom, to the freedom of faith, to the consecration of her whole life to God for the coming of His Kingdom and, finally, to the eternal Kingdom of her Loving Master. The fame of her sanctity has spread to all the continents and many are those who receive graces through her intercession. A testament to the inner strength and grace of St. Josephine Bakhita is that, in spite of a life that was marked by overwhelmingly brutality and pain, she was able to recognize the glory of God all around her. Ever since she died, the place where she lived and died has been a shrine visited by people from all over the world. They come to seek the intercession of one who was no stranger to loss and suffering and yet had complete confidence in the Lord.

The process for the cause of Canonization began just twelve years after her death in 1955. She was declared Venerable on December 1, 1978; beatified on May 17, 1992; and named a saint of the Church on October 1, 2000, by Pope John Paul II. At her canonization ceremony, St. John Paul said of St. Josephine: “In today’s world, countless women continue to be victimized, even in developed modern societies. In St. Josephine Bakhita we find a shining advocate of genuine emancipation. The history of her life inspires not passive acceptance but the firm resolve to work effectively to free girls and women from oppression and violence, and to return them to their dignity in the full exercise of their rights.”

Her feast day on February 8th became the first **International Day for Prayer and Reflection on Human Trafficking**. St. Josephine is the patroness of Sudan and of all victims of human trafficking.

St. Josephine knew the reality of being a slave, an immigrant, and a spiritual seeker. Even while she was outwardly denied freedom and human dignity, her spirit was free. It was that freedom of spirit that allowed her to follow her heart and live her true vocation.



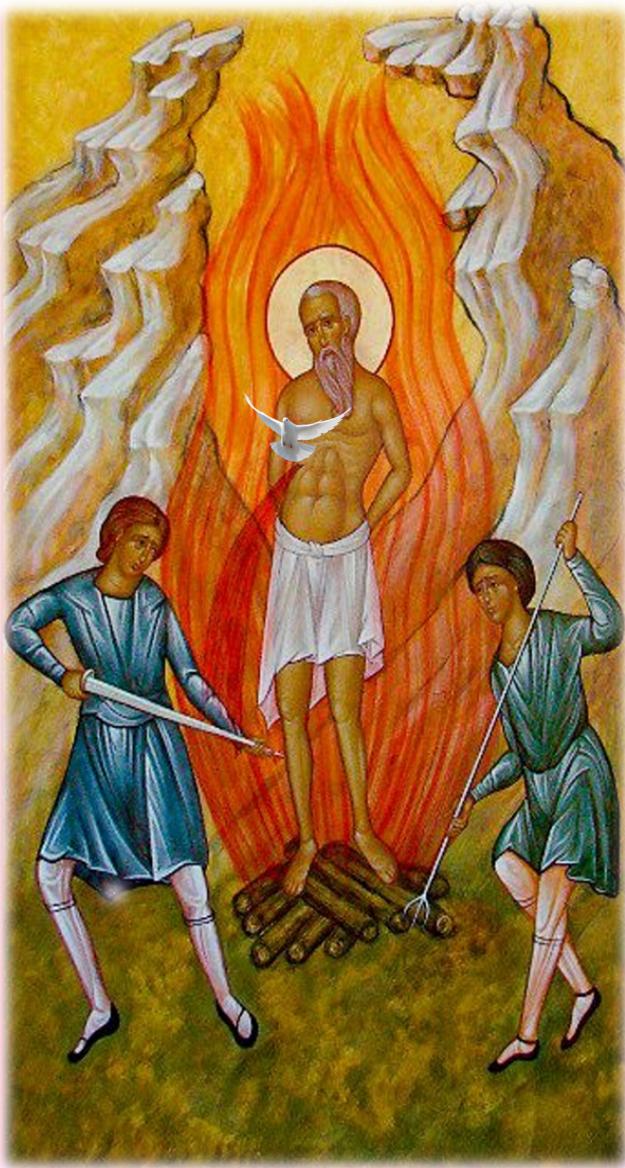
St. Polycarp ~ Feast: February 23

On Feb. 23, the Catholic Church remembers the life and martyrdom of St. Polycarp, a disciple of the apostle and evangelist St. John. Polycarp is known to later generations primarily through the account of his martyrdom, rather than by a formal biography. However, it can be determined from that account that he was born around the year 69 AD. From the testimony he gave to his persecutors—stating he had served Christ for 86 years—it is clear that he was either raised as a Christian, or became one in his early youth. Growing up among the Greek-speaking Christians of the Roman Empire, Polycarp received the teachings and recollections of individuals who had seen and known Jesus during His earthly life. This important connection—between Jesus' first disciples and apostles and their respective students—served to protect the Catholic Church against the influence of heresy during its earliest days, particularly against early attempts to deny Jesus' bodily incarnation and full humanity.

Polycarp's most significant teacher, with whom he studied personally, was St. John—whose contributions to the Bible included not only the clearest indication of Jesus' eternal divinity, but also the strongest assertions of the human nature He assumed on behalf of mankind. By contrast, certain tendencies had already emerged among the first Christians to deny the reality of Jesus' literal suffering, death, and resurrection, regarding them as mere "symbols" of highly abstract ideas. With John's help, Polycarp may have been the one who compiled, edited, and published the New Testament.

Another Catholic teacher of the second century, St. Irenaeus, wrote that Polycarp "was not only instructed by the apostles and conversed with many who had seen Christ; but he was also appointed by the apostles to be the Bishop of the Church in Smyrna." In a surviving letter that he wrote to the Philippians, he reminded them not to surrender their faith to the "Gnostic" teachers claiming to teach a more intellectually refined Gospel. "For everyone who shall not confess that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh, is antichrist," he wrote—citing St. John himself—"and whosoever shall not confess the testimony of the Cross is of the devil; and whosoever shall pervert the oracles of the Lord to his own lusts and say that there is neither resurrection nor judgment, that man is the firstborn of Satan. Let us, therefore, without ceasing, hold fast by our hope and by the pledge of our righteousness, Jesus Christ, who took up our sins in His own body upon the cross." With eloquence and clarity, he reminded the Philippian Church that Christ, "for our sakes, endured all things so that we might live in Him."





However, Polycarp's most eloquent testimony to his faith in Jesus came not through his words but through his martyrdom. The Church of Smyrna, in present-day Turkey, compiled their recollections of their bishop's death at the hands of public authorities in a letter to another local church: "We have written to you, brethren, as to what relates to the martyrs, and especially to the blessed Polycarp who put an end to the persecution—having, as it were, set a seal upon it by his martyrdom." Around the year 155, when he was eighty-six, Polycarp became aware that government authorities were on the lookout for him, seeking to stamp out the Catholic Church's claim of obeying a higher authority than the Emperor. He retreated to a country house and occupied himself with constant prayer, before receiving a vision of his death that prompted him to inform his friends: "I must be burned alive." He changed locations, but was betrayed by a young man who knew his whereabouts and confessed under torture.

He was captured by two public officials, who urged him to submit to the state's demands. "What harm is there," one asked, "in saying, 'Caesar is Lord,' and in sacrificing to him, with the other ceremonies observed on such occasions, so as to make sure of safety?" He answered, "I shall not do as you advise me." Outraged by his response, the officials had him violently thrown from their chariot and taken to an arena for execution. Entering the stadium, the bishop—along with some of his companions, who survived to tell of it—heard a heavenly voice, saying: "Be strong, and show yourself a man, O Polycarp!" Before the crowd, the Roman proconsul demanded again that he worship the emperor. "Hear me declare with boldness, I am a Christian," the bishop said. "And if you wish to learn what the doctrines of Christianity are, appoint me a day and you shall hear them."

"You threaten me with fire," he continued "which burns for an hour, and after a little while is extinguished. But you are ignorant of the fire of the coming judgment and of eternal punishment, reserved for the ungodly. But," he challenged the proconsul, "what are you waiting for? Bring forth what you will." Although the crowds clamored for Polycarp to be devoured by beasts, it was decided he should be burned alive, just as he had prophesied. He prayed aloud to God: "May I be accepted this day before you as an acceptable sacrifice—just as you, the ever-truthful God, have foreordained, revealed beforehand to me, and now have fulfilled."

What happened next struck Polycarp's companions with amazement; they recorded the sight in the letter that they circulated after Polycarp's death: "As the flames blazed forth in great fury," they wrote, "we to whom it was given to witness it, beheld a great miracle. **The fire did not seem to touch the bishop's body but shaped itself into the form of an arch, circling the body of the martyr.** And he appeared within not like flesh which is burnt, but as bread that is baked, or as gold and silver glowing in a furnace. Moreover, we perceived such a sweet odor coming from the flames, as if frankincense or some such precious spices had been burning there." The executioners perceived that Polycarp's death was not going as planned. **Losing patience, they ordered him to be stabbed to death. From the resulting wound "there came forth a dove and a great quantity of blood, so that the fire was extinguished."**

The people in the crowd, as the Christian witnesses recalled, were understandably amazed. "All the people marveled," they wrote, "that there should be such a difference between the unbelievers and the elect." Polycarp, they proclaimed, had been among that elect, "having in our own times been an apostolic and prophetic teacher, and bishop of the Catholic Church in Smyrna." St. Polycarp has been venerated as a saint since his death in 155.