

## **The Martyrdom of Polycarp**

The martyrdom of Polycarp is an inspiring story about remaining committed to Christ even to the point of death. Polycarp lived during the latter half of the 1st century A.D. and into the first half of the second century. He was martyred around A.D. 155. Polycarp was bishop of Smyrna, one of the seven churches mentioned in Revelation. He was well known for his godliness, and according to church tradition he was discipled by John the Apostle.

While Polycarp was bishop of Smyrna, a persecution broke out against the church and some were killed for the faith. An arrest warrant went out for Polycarp; and though he wanted to turn himself in, the church convinced him to go into hiding. Romans soldiers were sent to arrest him, and he went from farmhouse to farmhouse hiding from them. Finally, two slaves were arrested and when threatened with torture one of them told where Polycarp was located.

When the Roman soldiers saw Polycarp, they were amazed that an arrest warrant had been sent out for this elderly man. Polycarp had a meal prepared for his captors and asked for one undisturbed hour of prayer before going with them. They allowed him to do this and then took him away.

As he entered the stadium where he would be killed, a voice said to him, "Be strong, Polycarp, and contend manfully." They attempted several times to get him to deny Christ so that he could be spared; yet he refused. In the stadium he was brought before the proconsul, Philip the Asiarch. He said, "Have respect for your age." All Polycarp had to say was, "Away with the atheists (i.e. the Christians)," and then he would be released. Yet instead, Polycarp waved toward the pagan crowd, saying, "Away with the atheists!" When given another opportunity to recant, he said, "Eighty-six years I have been his servant, and he has done me no wrong. How can I blaspheme my King who saved me?" After more threats and opportunities, he continued to stay true until finally he was burned at the stake.

In his message to the church in Smyrna, Christ said, "Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life" (Rev 2.10). Polycarp was faithful to death, not turning his back on Christ who had died for him. Now, I realize that most of you reading this devotion may never be called upon to die for the faith. Yet, everyday we face challenges where we have the opportunity to die to our own will and desires and to put Christ first. Jesus said, "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me" (Luke 9.23). I challenge you today to follow in the steps of the Crucified One and to give your life in service to his cause.

*Pastor Mark*