

## Synaxarion of Holy Hieromartyr Ignatius the Godbearer of Antioch (December 20)

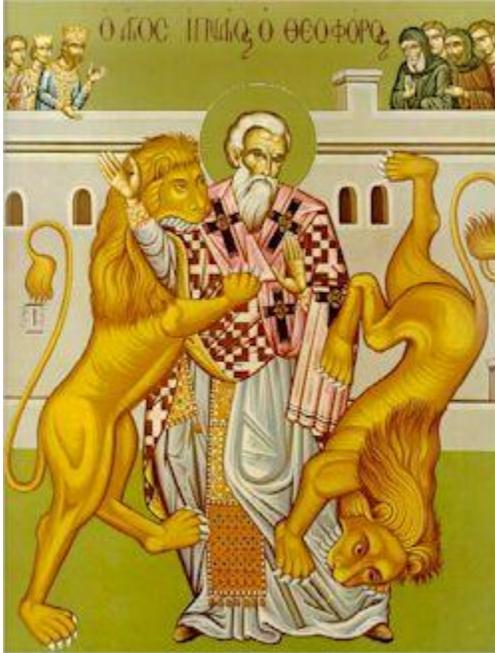
The 20<sup>th</sup> of the month of December, beginning of the Fore feast of the nativity according to the flesh of Our Lord God and Savior Jesus Christ, and Memory of the Holy Hieromartyr IGNATIUS the GODBEARER. Disciple of the Apostle, father of Bishops, bold warrior in the vanguard of the victorious Martyr Saint Ignatius has been thrice crowned, and shine brilliantly in the firmament of the friends of God. True to his name, which betoken fire **Ignatius**, love of Christ burned so strongly in his heart that he was called *Theopboros* - Godbearer an epithet which, without boastfulness, he did not he irate to apply to him elf ; for all Christian after Baptism become Christbearer (*Christophorz* ) and are clothed in the Holy Spirit.

Ignatius had known the Apostles in his youth and, in company with Polycarp (23 Feb), he was initiated into the deepest my terie of the Faith by Saint John the Evangelist. He later succeeded Evodua second Bishop of Antioch, the capital of Syria and greatest city of the East, whose episcopal see was founded by the Apostle Peter. During the persecution of Domitian (81 -96 AD) Saint Ignatius encouraged the many confe or to make light of torment and fleeting tribulations, for the sake of winning ever-lasting life. He brought them consolation in prior, and conveyed to them his own eager desire to follow Christian Hi death, in order to be united to Him forever. But the fearle hope was not arrested at that time and when the persecution abated, he was disappointed that God had not called him to the perfection of a true disciple.

In the year of peace that followed Saint Ignatius was concerned to organize the Church on firm foundations and to bow that the Grace which came down upon the Apostle at Pentecost persisted in the episcopal ministry, even though the Twelve had passed away. The authoritative voice of the Bishop of the great city penetrated to all the Church e mall lo al communities at the time-exhorting each one of them to remain in unity and love around the bishop, who is the earthly image of the one veritable Bishop and High Priest, Jesus Christ, united by unshakeable faith in the crucified and risen savior, and in the oneness of heart born of love and common hope, the faithful should come together as often as they can, especially on the Lord's day, to celebrate the holy Eucharist with their bishop and the assembled priest and deacon; *breaking the same bread , which is the medicine of immortality, and the remedy against death and specific forever lasting life in Jesus Christ. Here is the bishop is has said there is Jesus Christ, there is the Catholic Church*, the assurance of everlasting life, the pledge of communion with God. Hence the only rightful Eucharistic assembly (*synaxis*) is the one gathered by the Church in unity of faith around the bishop or his representative. And after the assembly has dispersed, Christian sought to thrive, in their behavior toward one other and the out ide world, and in their thoughts and feelings, to achieve harmonious accord like the

well-tuned strings of a lyre, in order *to sing with one voice a hymn of praise to the Father through Jesus Christ. Be united to the Bishop*, he advises the Ephesians, *as the Church is to Jesus Christ, and Jesus Christ is to the Father; so that all things may accord in unity.* Beyond hatred and quarrel, he enjoins them to flee division of all kind *as the origins of every evil.*' strengthened in love and

unity of heart, they will then dwell in the Truth; and the Church like a heavenly stronghold, will remain pure and inaccessible to the contamination of heresy. Following the Apostle Paul Saint Ignatius states, the same unchanged and unalterable principles to the nature of the Church, the office of bishop, the status of the Eucharistic assembly, the relation between local Churches and the Universal Church – and all things which lead the Holy Church to say: *The King's daughter all glorious within; her clothing is embroidered gold adorned with many colors* (PS 44:14-15).



The Emperor Trajan (98-117) was taken up with campaigning against the barbarian in the first year of his reign but following his victories over the Scythians and Dacians he imposed the worship of idols and the imperial cult on all his subjects under the pain of death. On his way to war in Armenia and Parthia about the year 113, he spent some time in Antioch, where he initiated local persecution of prominent Christians. Realizing that the long-awaited moment had arrived, Saint Ignatius appeared of his own accord before the Emperor and replied boldly to his questions. He confessed God the creator and Friend of man and the only Son Jesus Christ, and he was not afraid to pour scorn on the superstition that made the mighty prince invoke figment of the imagination to protect his legions. The Emperor was dis-pleased, and said, “so you are a disciple of the one crucified under Pontius Pilate, are you?” I am the

disciple of Him who has nailed my sins to the Cross and has trodden the Devil and his services underfoot; the Saint replied. Why do you call yourself ‘God-bearer?’ Because I carry the living Christ, within me! Therefore, let the hearer of the Crucified One be taken in chains to Rome; the emperor commanded, there to be fed to the lions for the amusement of the people; like Saint Paul and many others glorious Martyrs. The servant of God was filled with joy and he fervently kissed the heavy chain they loaded him with. Calling them “my most precious pearls.” The longed for bounds which would obtain life in Christ for him. Bidding farewell to His Church, and exhorting his children and to change their tears to joyous hymns, he left Antioch on foot with other prisoners. They were guarded by a squad of ten soldiers, veritable leopards the saint called them men of insatiable cruelty, who accumulated mistreatment of him only added to his eagerness and joy.

From Antioch they made their way very laboriously by boat and on foot to Smyrna, where Ignatius was greeted with great emotion by the Bishop, his fellow-disciple saint Polycarp. Bishop of neighboring cities also came out to meet him: Onesimus, from Ephesus, Demas from Magnesia and Polybes from Trailes. He communicated his final teaching to them and exhorted them in the face of the insults and mockery of pagan to imitate the meekness of humility of Our Lord Jesus Christ before his persecutor. So affectively did he inspire them with his joy and his desire to attain as soon as possible the perfection of martyrdom, that they did not bid him farewell as on condemned to death but saluted him as an already triumphant athlete, a traveler setting off for

heaven. From Ephesus Saint Ignatius sent wonderful letter to the Christian of the Churches of Asia Minor in order to confirm them in the faith, to share with them his burning inspiration, and to urge them to keep clear of heresies by staying untied around the bishop and presbyter in a single Eucharistic assembly. Having learned that the faithful in Rome intended to prevent his contest if they could, he wrote begging them to refrain their inopportune zeal and not to intervene; *now I am beginning to be a disciple ... my earthly desire has been crucified, and there is no more fire in me to love material things, but a living water which murmurs and says within me, come to the Father. The love of Christ work so strongly in him that it that inspired him in words of fire: forgive me, brethren; do not prevent me from living, do not desire that I die. Allow me allow me t be an imitator of the pass of my God. ... Let me be food for the beasts, whereby it will be possible for me to find God. I am God's Wheat and I shall be ground by the teeth of the beasts to become Christ's pure bread.* To become, in the likeness of Christ, true Eucharistic bread to serve through his own self the veritable and perfect Liturgy; such was the sole desire of the holy Bishop.

The convoy stop for a while at Troas, and there Ignatius learnt to his joy that the persecution in Antioch had come to an end. He therefore wrote to the Churches asking them to send messengers to rejoice with his spiritual children and he entrusted the care of his Church to Polycarp.

They proceeded by long and weary stages to Rome, where the faithful of the city greeted Ignatius in an atmosphere of tear of sorrow and anguish mingled with joy at receiving this star from the East living this which had orbited the earth in order to set in the West. When the moment of his final contest arrived, Saint Ignatius entered the arena a though approaching the holy altar to serve his last Liturgy in the presence of the faithful who were crowd among pagan on the steps of the amphitheater. Now fully Bishop and disciple of the High Priest of our salvation, Jesus - at once priest and victim – he offered himself willing! to the ravenous lion who sprang on him and devoured him in a few moments, leaving nothing as he had wished but the largest bones.

The precious relics were devoutly gathered up by the faithful and taken back to Antioch with great solemnity, venerated by the Christians along their way as though the Shepherd was returning alive and triumphant to his flock.