

Master? For even when they were so torn by whips that the internal structure of their flesh was visible as far as the inner veins and arteries, they endured so patiently that even the bystanders had pity and wept. But they themselves reached such a level of bravery that not one of them uttered a cry or a groan, thus showing to us all that at the very hour when they were being tortured the martyrs of Christ were absent from the flesh, or rather that the Lord was standing by and conversing with them. 3 And turning their thoughts to the grace of Christ they despised the tortures of this world, purchasing at the cost of one hour an exemption from eternal punishment. And the fire of their inhuman torturers felt cold to them, for they set before their eyes the escape from that eternal fire which is never extinguished, while with the eyes of their heart they gazed upon the good things that are reserved for those who endure patiently, things that neither ear has heard nor eye has seen, nor has it entered into the human heart, but that were shown to them by the Lord, for they were no longer humans but already angels. 4 And in a similar manner those who were condemned to the wild beasts endured terrible punishments—they were forced to lie on sharp shells and afflicted with various other forms of torture in order that he might, if possible, by means of the unceasing punishment compel them to deny their faith—for the devil tried many things against them.

The Example of Germanicus

3 But thanks be to God, for the devil did not prevail against any of them. For the most noble Germanicus encouraged them, fearful though they were, by his own patient endurance; he also fought with

2.2 *martyrs* Some ancient authorities read *most noble martyrs*. 2.3 *an exemption* ... *punishment* One ancient authority reads *eternal life*. • *inhuman* One ancient authority reads *cruel*. • *that neither ... heart* 1 Cor. 2:9. 2.4 *he* I.e., the devil. One ancient authority reads *the tyrant*.

THE MARTYRDOM OF POLYCARP

Salutation

The church of God that sojourns at Smyrna, to the church of God that sojourns in Philomelum and to all the communities of the holy and catholic church sojourning in every place: may mercy, peace, and love from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ be multiplied.

A Martyrdom in Accord with the Gospel

1 We are writing to you, brothers and sisters, an account of those who were martyred, especially the blessed Polycarp, who put an end to the persecution as though he were setting his seal upon it by his martyrdom. For nearly all the preceding events happened in order that the Lord might show us once again a martyrdom that is in accord with the gospel. 2 For he waited to be betrayed, just as the Lord did, in order that we too might be imitators of him, looking not only to our own interests but to our neighbors' interests as well. For it is the mark of true and steadfast love to desire that not only oneself be saved but all the brothers and sisters as well.

Nobility and Bravery of the Martyrs

2 Blessed and noble, therefore, are all the martyrdoms that have taken place in accordance with the will of God (for we must reverently assign to God the power over all things). 2 For who could fail to admire their nobility and patient endurance and loyalty to the

1.1 *brothers and sisters* Gk *adelphoi*. • *once again* Or *from above*; cf. John 3:3, 7. 1.2 *looking ... as well* Phil. 2:4. • *brothers and sisters* Gk *adelphous*.

the wild beasts in an outstanding way. For when the proconsul wished to persuade him and asked him to consider his youthfulness, he forcibly dragged the wild beast toward himself, desiring to be released as quickly as possible from their unrighteous and lawless life. ² So after this the whole multitude, marveling at the bravery of the God-loving and God-fearing race of Christians, began shouting, "Away with the atheists! Find Polycarp!"

Cowardly Quintus

⁴ (Now there was one man, Quintus by name, a Phrygian recently arrived from Phrygia, who, when he saw the wild beasts, turned coward. This was the man who had forced himself and some others to come forward voluntarily. The proconsul, after many appeals, finally persuaded him to swear the oath and to offer the sacrifice. For this reason therefore, brothers and sisters, we do not praise those who hand themselves over, since the gospel does not so teach.)

Polycarp Prophesies His Own Death

⁵ Now the most admirable Polycarp, when he first heard the news, was not disturbed. In fact, he wanted to remain in town, but the majority persuaded him to withdraw. So he withdrew to a small country house not far from the city and stayed there with a few companions, doing nothing else night and day except praying for everyone and for the churches throughout the world, for this was his constant habit. ² And while he was praying he fell into a trance three days before his arrest and saw his pillow being consumed by fire. And he turned and said to those who were with him: "It is necessary that I be burned alive."

⁴ *brothers and sisters* Gk *adelphoi*. • *band* . . . *over*. Some ancient authorities read *come forward on their own*.

Searching for Polycarp

⁶ And as those who were searching for him persisted, he moved to another country house. Immediately, those searching for him arrived, and not finding him, they seized two young slaves, one of whom confessed under torture. ² For it really was impossible for him to remain hidden, since the very persons who betrayed him were members of his own household. And the captain of the police, who just happened to have the same name—Herod, as he was called—was eager to bring him into the stadium in order that he [Polycarp] might fulfill his appointed destiny of being made a sharer with Christ, while those who betrayed him received the punishment of Judas himself.

⁷ So, taking the young slave with them, on Friday about supper time the mounted police and horsemen set out, armed with their usual weapons as though chasing after an armed rebel. And closing in on him late in the evening, they found him in bed in an upstairs room in a small cottage; and though he still could have escaped from there to another place, he refused, saying, "May God's will be done."

² So when he heard that they had arrived, he went down and talked with them, and those who were present marveled at his age and his composure and wondered why there was so much eagerness for the arrest of an old man like him. Then he immediately ordered that a table be set for them to eat and drink as much as they wished at that hour, and he asked them to grant him an hour so that he might pray undisturbed. ³ When they consented, he stood and prayed, so full of the grace of God that for two hours he was unable to stop speaking; those who heard him were amazed, and many regretted that they had come after such a godly old man.

^{6.1} *arrived* I.e., at the first farm. ^{7.1} *armed with their* . . . *rebel* Cf. Matt. 26:55. • *May* . . . *done* Acts 21:14; cf. Matt. 6:10. ^{7.3} *prayed* One ancient authority reads *facing the east*.

Transporting the Prisoner

8 Now when at last he finished his prayer, after remembering everyone who had ever come in contact with him, both small and great, known and unknown, and all the universal church throughout the world, it was time to depart, and so they seated him on a donkey and brought him into the city on the day of a great sabbath. **2** Herod, the police captain, and his father, Nicetes, came out to meet him. After transferring him to their carriage and sitting down at his side, they tried to persuade him, saying, "Why, what harm is there in saying, 'Caesar is Lord,' and offering incense" (and other words to this effect) "and thereby saving yourself?" Now at first he gave them no answer. But when they persisted, he said: "I am not about to do what you are suggesting to me." **3** Thus failing to persuade him, they began to utter threats and made him dismount in such a hurry that he bruised his shin as he got down from the carriage. And without even turning around, he went on his way eagerly and quickly as if nothing had happened to him, and as he was led to the stadium, there was such an uproar in the stadium that no one could even be heard.

The Hearing in the Arena

9 But as Polycarp entered the stadium, there came a voice from heaven: "Be strong, Polycarp, and courageous." And no one saw the speaker, but those of our people who were present heard the voice. And then, as he was brought forward, there was a great uproar when they heard that Polycarp had been arrested. **2** Therefore, when he was brought before him, the proconsul asked if he were Polycarp. And when he confessed that he was, the proconsul tried to persuade him to recant, saying, "Have respect for your age," and other such things as

8.1 great sabbath Cf. John 19:31. **9.1 Be strong... courageous** Cf. Josh. 1:7. • *courageous* Or *act like a man*. **9.2 if he were Polycarp One ancient authority reads *if it were he*.**

they are accustomed to say: "Swear by the genius of Caesar; repent; say, 'Away with the atheists!'" So Polycarp solemnly looked at the whole crowd of lawless heathen who were in the stadium, motioned toward them with his hand, and then (groaning as he looked up to heaven) said, "Away with the atheists!" **3** But when the magistrate persisted and said, "Swear the oath, and I will release you; revile Christ," Polycarp replied, "For eighty-six years I have been his servant, and he has done me no wrong. How can I blaspheme my King who saved me?"

10 But as he continued to insist, saying, "Swear by the genius of Caesar," he answered: "If you vainly suppose that I will swear by the genius of Caesar, as you request, and pretend not to know who I am, listen carefully: I am a Christian. Now if you want to learn the doctrine of Christianity, name a day and give me a hearing." **2** The proconsul said: "Persuade the people." But Polycarp said: "You I might have considered worthy of a reply, for we have been taught to pay proper respect to rulers and authorities appointed by God, as long as it does us no harm; but as for these, I do not think they are worthy, that I should have to defend myself before them."

11 So the proconsul said: "I have wild beasts; I will throw you to them, unless you change your mind." But he said: "Call for them! For the repentance from better to worse is a change impossible for us; but it is a noble thing to change from that which is evil to righteousness." **2** Then he said to him again: "I will have you consumed by fire, since you despise the wild beasts, unless you change your mind." But Polycarp said: "You threaten with a fire that burns only briefly and after just a little while is extinguished, for you are ignorant

9.2 genius I.e., the guardian spirit. Or *Fortune* (goddess of luck). **9.3 have... servant** One ancient authority reads *have served him*. **10.1 genius** Or *Fortune* (twice). **10.2 for we have been taught... by God** Cf. Rom. 13:1; 1 Pet. 2:13-14.

of the fire of the coming judgment and eternal punishment, which is reserved for the ungodly. But why do you delay? Come, do what you wish."

The Verdict and the Sentence

12 As he spoke these and many other words, he was inspired with courage and joy, and his face was filled with grace, so that not only did he not collapse in fright at the things that were said to him, but on the contrary the proconsul was astonished, and sent his own herald into the midst of the stadium to proclaim three times: "Polycarp has confessed that he is a Christian." ² When this was proclaimed by the herald, the entire crowd, Gentiles as well as Jews living in Smyrna, cried out with uncontrollable anger and with a loud shout: "This is the teacher of Asia, the father of the Christians, the destroyer of our gods, who teaches many not to sacrifice or worship." Saying these things, they shouted aloud and asked Philip the Asiarch to let a lion loose upon Polycarp. But he said that it was not lawful for him to do so since he had already brought to a close the animal hunts. ³ Then it occurred to them to shout out in unison that Polycarp should be burned alive. For it was necessary that the vision be fulfilled that he received concerning his pillow, when he saw it on fire while praying and turned and said prophetically to the faithful who were with him, "It is necessary that I be burned alive."

Preparing the Pyre

13 These things then happened with surprising swiftness, quicker than words could tell, the crowd swiftly collecting wood and kindling from the workshops and baths, the Jews being especially eager to assist in this, as is their custom. ² When the pyre was ready, he took off all his clothes and removed his belt; he also tried to take off his shoes, though not previously in the habit of doing this, because all the faithful were always eager to be the first to touch his flesh. For he had been honored in every respect on account of his holy life even before his martyrdom. ³ Then the materials prepared for the pyre were placed around him; and as they were also about to nail him, he said: "Leave me as I am; for the one who enables me to endure the fire will also enable me to remain on the pyre without moving, even without the sense of security that you get from the nails."

Polycarp's Prayer

14 So they did not nail him, but tied him instead. Then, having placed his hands behind himself and having been bound, like a splendid ram chosen from a great flock for a sacrifice, a burnt offering prepared and acceptable to God, he looked up to heaven and said: "O Lord God Almighty, Father of your beloved and blessed Son Jesus Christ, through whom we have received knowledge of you, the God of angels and powers and of all creation, and of the whole race of the righteous who live in your presence, ² I bless you because you have considered me worthy of this day and hour, so that I might receive

^{13.2} *pyre* Some ancient authorities read *fire*. • *martyrdom* One ancient authority reads *gray hair appeared*.

a place among the number of the martyrs in the cup of your Christ, to the resurrection to eternal life, both of soul and of body, in the incorruptibility of the Holy Spirit. May I be received among them in your presence today, as a rich and acceptable sacrifice, as you have prepared and revealed beforehand, and have now accomplished, you who are the undecieving and true God. 3 For this reason, indeed for all things, I praise you, I bless you, I glorify you, through the eternal and heavenly high priest, Jesus Christ, your beloved Son, through whom be glory to you, with him and the Holy Spirit, both now and for the ages to come. Amen."

Death by Fire and Sword

15 When he had offered up the "Amen" and finished his prayer, the men in charge of the fire lit it. And as a mighty flame blazed up, we saw a miracle (we, that is, to whom it was given to see), and we have been preserved in order that we may tell the rest what happened. 2 For the fire, taking the shape of an arch, like the sail of a ship filled by the wind, completely surrounded the body of the martyr; and it was there in the middle, not like flesh burning but like bread baking or like gold and silver being refined in a furnace. For we also perceived a very fragrant aroma, as if it were the scent of incense or some other precious spice.

16 When the lawless men eventually realized that his body could not be consumed by the fire, they ordered an executioner to go up to him and stab him with a dagger. And when he did this, there came

out a dove and a large quantity of blood, so that it extinguished the fire; and the whole crowd was amazed that there should be so great a difference between the unbelievers and the elect. 2 This man was certainly one of the elect, the most remarkable Polycarp, who proved to be an apostolic and prophetic teacher in our own time, bishop of the catholic church in Smyrna. For every word that came from his mouth was accomplished and will be accomplished.

Conflict over Polycarp's Body

17 But the jealous and envious Evil One, the adversary of the race of the righteous, when he observed the greatness of Polycarp's martyrdom and the irrefragable character of his life from the beginning, and realized that he was now crowned with the crown of immortality and had won a prize that no one could challenge, saw to it that not even his poor body should be taken away by us, even though many desired to do this and to touch his holy flesh. 2 So he incited Nicetes, the father of Herod and brother of Alce, to appeal to the magistrate not to hand over his body, "or else," he said, "they may abandon the crucified one and begin to worship this man." All this was done at the instigation and insistence of the Jews, who even watched when we were about to take the body from the fire. They did not know that we will never be able either to abandon the Christ who suffered for the salvation of the whole world of those who are saved, the blameless on behalf of sinners, or to worship anyone else. 3 For we worship this one, who is the Son of God, but the martyrs we love as disciples and imitators of the Lord, as they deserve,

16.1 a dove and One ancient authority omits. 16.2 remarkable Some ancient authorities read remarkable martyr. * catholic Some ancient authorities read body. 17.1 to touch Or to commune with, or possibly to receive a part of, i.e., as a relic.

on account of their matchless devotion to their own King and Teacher. May we also become their partners and fellow disciples!

18 The centurion, therefore, seeing the opposition raised by the Jews, set Polycarp's body in the middle and cremated it, as is their custom. ² And so later on we took up his bones, which are more valuable than precious stones and finer than refined gold, and deposited them in a suitable place. ³ There, when we gather together as we are able, with joy and gladness, the Lord will permit us to celebrate the birthday of his martyrdom in commemoration of those who have already fought in the contest and also for the training and preparation of those who will do so in the future.

Summary: A Martyrdom in Accord with the Gospel

19 Such is the story of the blessed Polycarp. Although he (together with those from Philadelphia) was the twelfth person martyred in Smyrna, he alone is especially remembered by everyone, so that he is spoken of everywhere, even by pagans. He proved to be not only a distinguished teacher but also an outstanding martyr whose martyrdom all desire to imitate since it was in accord with the pattern of the gospel of Christ. ² By his endurance he defeated the unrighteous magistrate and so received the crown of immortality; now he rejoices with the apostles and all the righteous, and glorifies the almighty God and Father, and blesses our Lord Jesus Christ, the Savior of our souls and Helmsman of our bodies and Shepherd of the catholic church throughout the world.

Instructions and Farewell

20 You did indeed request that the things that happened be reported to you in some detail, but for the present we have given a summary, as it were, through our brother Marcion. When you have informed yourselves about these things, send the letter on to the brothers and sisters who are farther away, in order that they too may glorify the Lord, who selects from among his own servants. ² Now to the one who is able to bring us all by his grace and bounty into his eternal kingdom, through his only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, be glory, honor, power, and majesty forever. Greet all the saints. Those who are with us greet you, as does Evaristus, who wrote this, and his whole house.

Later Additions: The Date of the Martyrdom

21 Now the blessed Polycarp was martyred on the second day of the first part of the month Xanthicus, seven days before the calends of March, on a great sabbath, about two o'clock in the afternoon. He was arrested by Herod when Philip of Tralles was high priest during the proconsulship of Statius Quadratus, but while Jesus Christ was reigning as King forever. To him be glory, honor, majesty, and the eternal throne from generation to generation. Amen.

A Second Farewell

22 We bid you farewell, brothers and sisters, as you walk by the word of Jesus Christ that is in accord with the gospel, with whom

20.1 *Marrion* One ancient authority reads *Marrionus*; some ancient authorities read *Mark*. Not to be confused with the Marcion of *Marr. Pol. 22.2*. • *brothers and sisters* *Gk adelphoi*. **21** On the date of Polycarp's death, see the introduction. • *Jesus Christ* Some ancient authorities read *our Lord Jesus Christ*. **22.1** *We bid . . . Christ* Some ancient authorities omit the entire paragraph. • *brothers and sisters* *Gk adelphoi*.

be glory to God for the salvation of the holy elect; just as the blessed Polycarp was martyred, in whose footsteps may we also be found in the kingdom of Jesus Christ.

A Note from Socrates

2 Gaius (who lived in the same city as Irenaeus) transcribed this account from the papers of Irenaeus, a disciple of Polycarp. And I, Socrates, wrote it down in Corinth from the copies of Gaius. Grace be with everyone.

A Note from Pionius

3 And I, Pionius, wrote it down again from the previously-mentioned copy, after making a search for it (for the blessed Polycarp showed it to me in a revelation, as I will explain in the sequel). I gathered it together when it was nearly worn out by age, so that the Lord Jesus Christ might also gather me together with his chosen ones into his heavenly kingdom; to whom be the glory with the Father and the Holy Spirit forever and ever. Amen.

THE ENDING ACCORDING TO THE MOSCOW MANUSCRIPT

2 Gaius transcribed this account from the papers of Irenaeus; he also lived in the same city as Irenaeus, who had been a disciple of the holy Polycarp. For this Irenaeus, who was in Rome at the time of the martyrdom of the bishop Polycarp, instructed many people; and many most excellent and orthodox writings of his are in circulation. In these he makes mention of Polycarp, saying that he had been taught by him. And he ably refuted every heresy and handed on the

22.1 God Some ancient authorities read *God the Father and the Holy Spirit*.

ecclesiastical and catholic rule just as he had received it from the saint. He mentions this fact also, that when Marcion, after whom the Marcionites are named, once met the holy Polycarp and said, "Recognize us, Polycarp," he said in reply to Marcion, "Yes, I recognize you; I recognize the firstborn of Satan!" The following statement also is made in the writings of Irenaeus, that on the very day and hour when Polycarp was martyred in Smyrna, Irenaeus, who was in the city of Rome, heard a voice like a trumpet saying, "Polycarp has been martyred." From these papers of Irenaeus, then, as has been stated already, Gaius transcribed a copy, and from the copy of Gaius Isocrates made another in Corinth.

3 And I, Pionius, wrote it down again from the copy of Isocrates, after searching for it in obedience to a revelation of the holy Polycarp, gathering it together when it was nearly worn out by age, so that the Lord Jesus Christ might also gather me together with his chosen ones into his heavenly kingdom; to whom be the glory with the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit forever and ever. Amen.

