

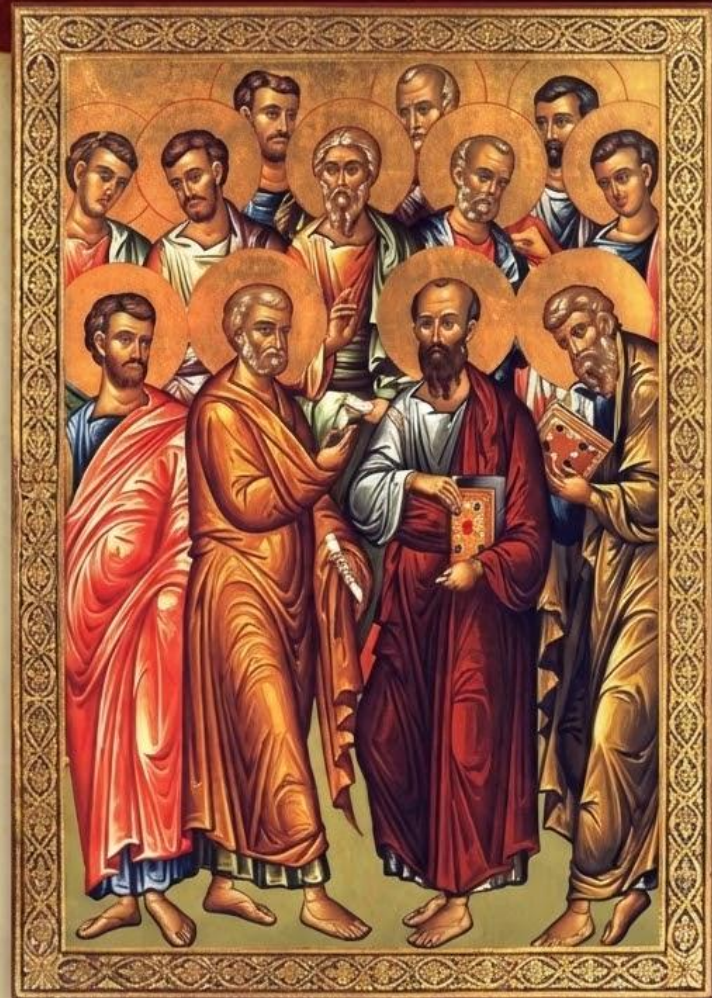
The Early Church Fathers

Ministry Formation - Diocese of Rockford

What is a Father?

In General

- ≈ The Fathers of the Church are a select group of early teachers
- ≈ Church Fathers have a privileged place of doctrinal authority
- ≈ Four criteria: 1. Orthodox doctrine; 2. Holiness of life; 3. Church approval; 4. Antiquity = AD 150 - AD 750
- ≈ Concerned with preserving the unity & integrity of the Church
- ≈ Why “Father”?



MAJOR CATEGORIES OF THE CHURCH FATHERS

APOSTOLIC FATHERS (c. AD 70 - 150)

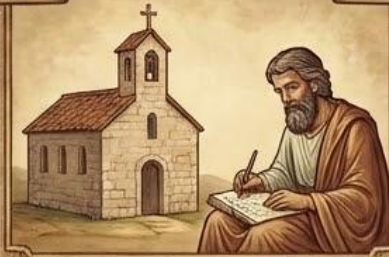


Direct disciples of the Apostles.

Key Figures: Clement of Rome, Ignatius of Antioch, Polycarp of Smyrna.

Focus: Preservation of Apostolic teaching, unity, and martyrdom.

ANTE-NICENE FATHERS (c. AD 150 - 325)

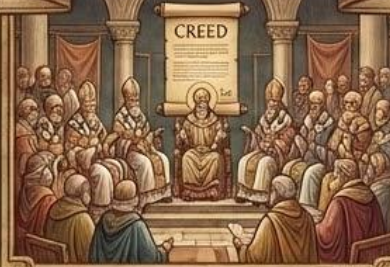


Lived before the Council of Nicaea.

Key Figures: Justin Martyr, Irenaeus of Lyons, Tertullian, Origen.

Focus: Apologetics, defending the faith against heresy and persecution.

NICENE FATHERS (c. AD 325 - 451)



Active during the great ecumenical councils.

Key Figures: Athanasius, Basil the Great, Gregory of Nazianzus, Ambrose, Augustine.

Focus: Defining key doctrines (Trinity, Christology), combating Arianism.

POST-NICENE FATHERS (c. AD 451 - 750)



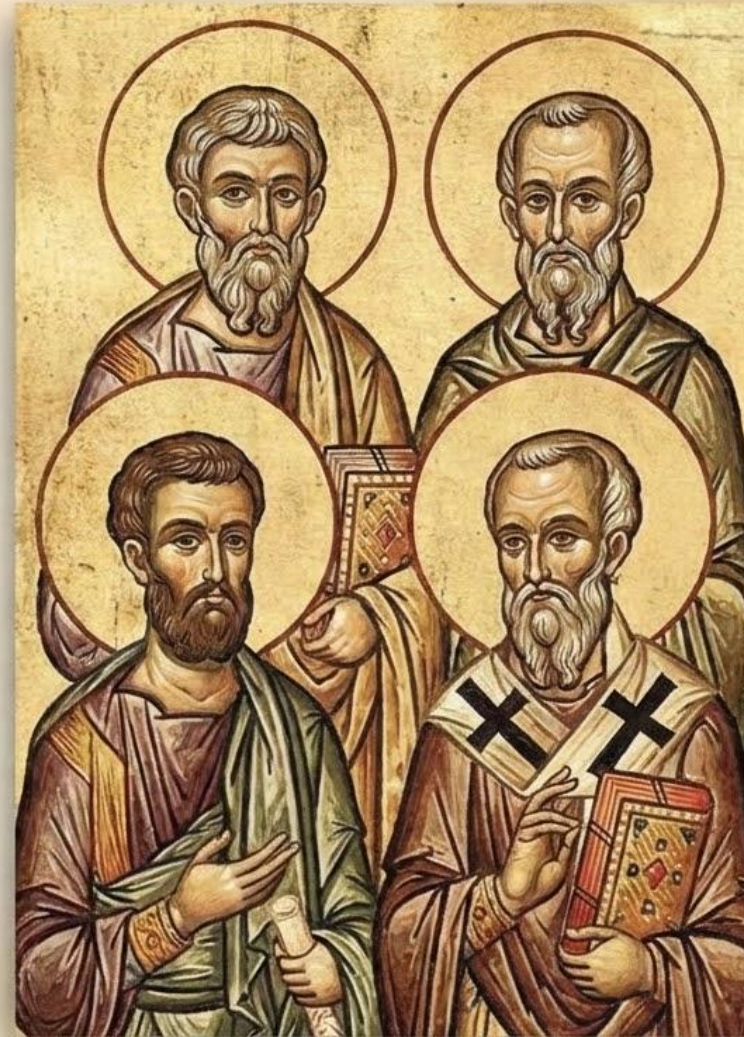
Lived after the Council of Chalcedon.

Key Figures: Leo the Great, Gregory the Great, John of Damascus, Maximus the Confessor.

Focus: Consolidating doctrine, liturgy, monasticism, and mission.

The Apostolic Fathers

- St. Clement of Rome
- St. Ignatius of Antioch
- St. Justin Martyr
- St. Irenaeus of Lyons



Locations of the Apostolic Fathers



St. Clement of Rome

Apostolic Father & Pope

- ✠ Bishop of Rome (c. AD 88-99)
- ✠ Disciple of St. Peter and St. Paul
- ✠ Author of the “First Epistle to the Corinthians” (c. AD 96)
- ✠ Emphasized apostolic succession, order, and obedience
- ✠ Martyred by being tied to an anchor and thrown into the sea



St. Clement of Rome on Apostolic Order

“ The Apostles received the Gospel for us from the Lord Jesus Christ, Jesus the Christ was sent from God. The Christ therefore is from God and the Apostles from the Christ. In both ways, then, they were in accordance with the appointed order of God’s will. Having therefore received their commands, and being fully assured by the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, and with faith confirmed by the word of God, they went forth in the assurance of the Holy Spirit preaching the good news that the Kingdom of God is coming. They preached from district to district, and from city to city, and they appointed their first converts, testing them by the Spirit, to be bishops and deacons of the future believers. And this was no new method, for many years before had bishops and deacons been written of; for the scripture says thus in one place “I will establish their bishops in righteousness, and their deacons in faith.”

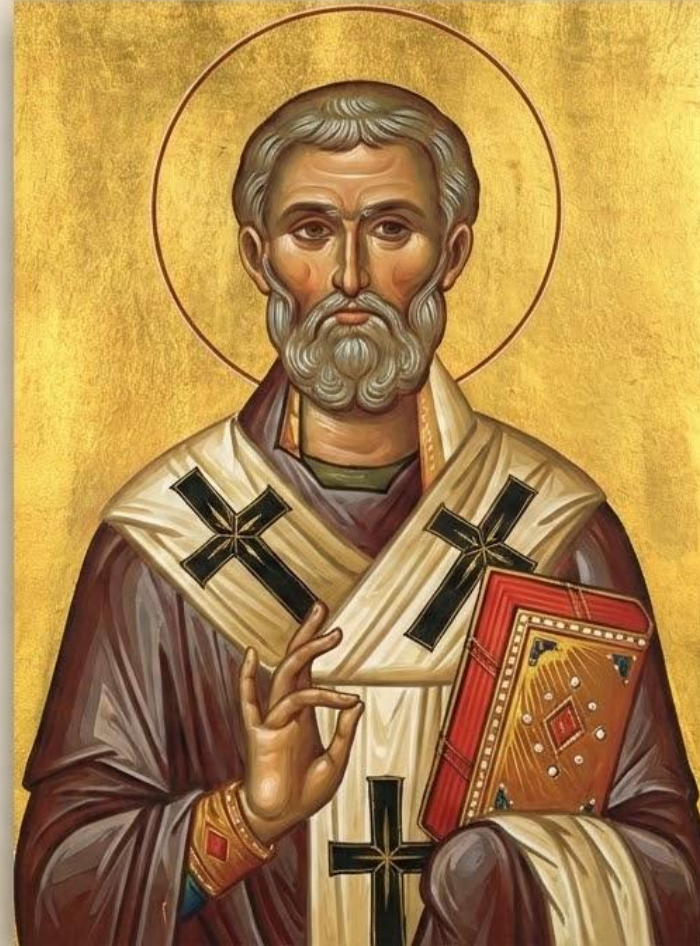
— St. Clement of Rome, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 42



St. Clement of Rome on Apostolic Succession

“Our Apostles also knew, through our Lord Jesus Christ, that there would be strife on account of the office of the episcopate. For this reason, therefore, inasmuch as they had obtained a perfect foreknowledge of this, they appointed those [ministers] already mentioned, and afterwards gave instructions, that when should fall asleep, other approved men should succeed them in their ministry.”

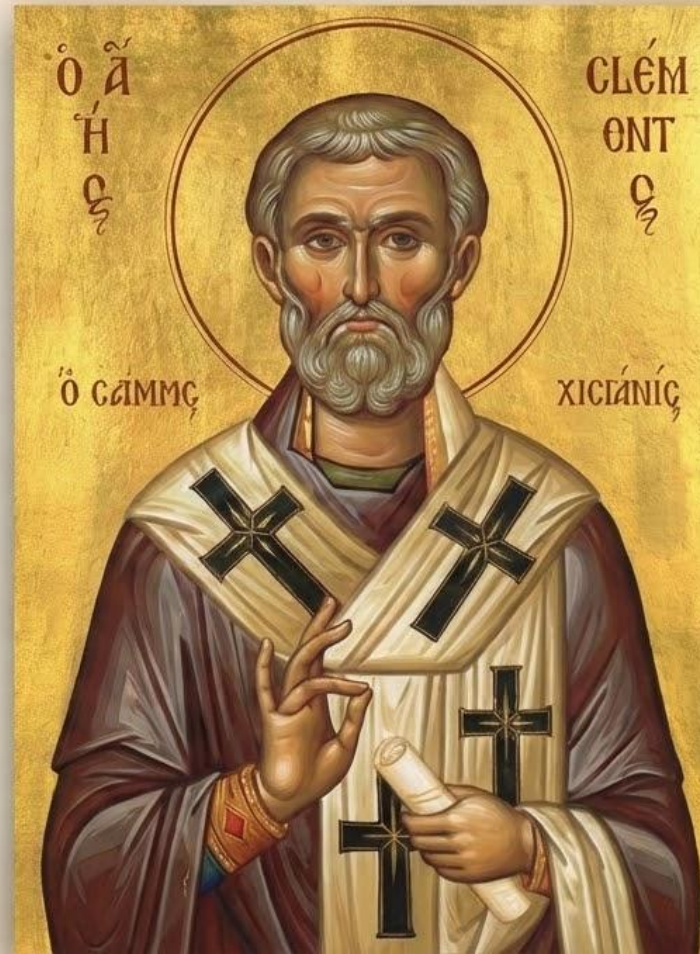
— First Epistle to the Corinthians, 44:1-2



St. Clement of Rome on Disobedience

“But if certain persons should be disobedient unto the words spoken by Him through us, let them understand that they will entangle themselves in no slight transgression and danger.”

— First Epistle to the Corinthians, 59:1-2

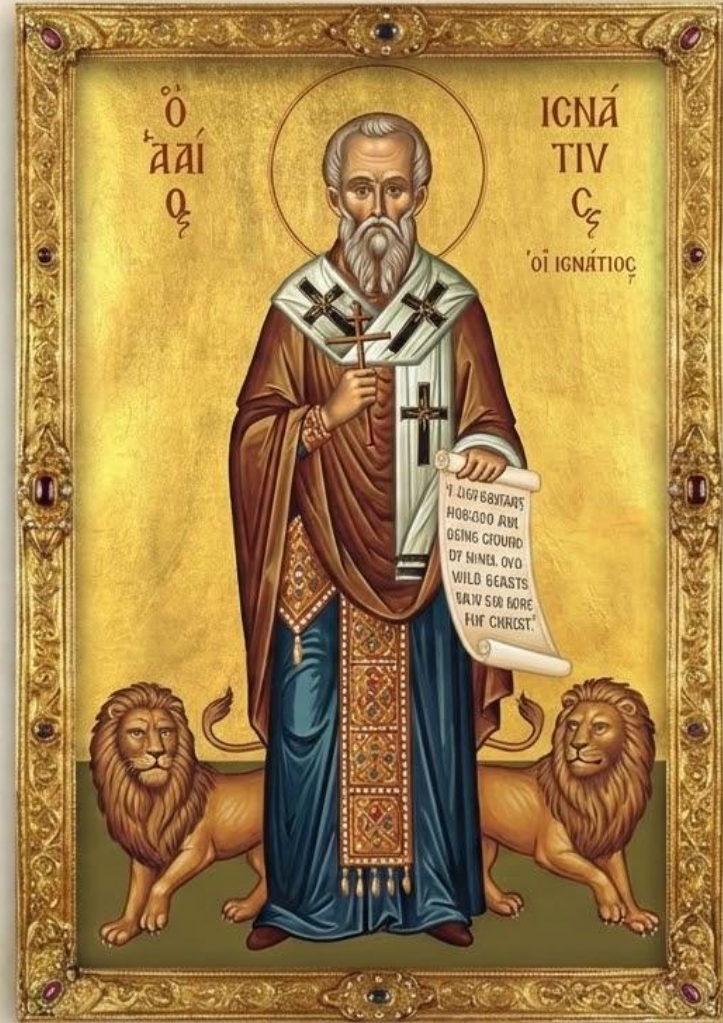


St. Ignatius of Antioch

Apostolic Father & Martyr

- ✠ Bishop of Antioch
- ✠ Disciple of the Apostle John
- ✠ Wrote seven letters on his way to martyrdom in Rome (c. AD 107/110)
- ✠ Emphasized the authority of the bishop, church unity, and the Real Presence in the Eucharist

“I am God’s wheat, and I am being ground by the teeth of wild beasts to make a pure loaf for Christ.”

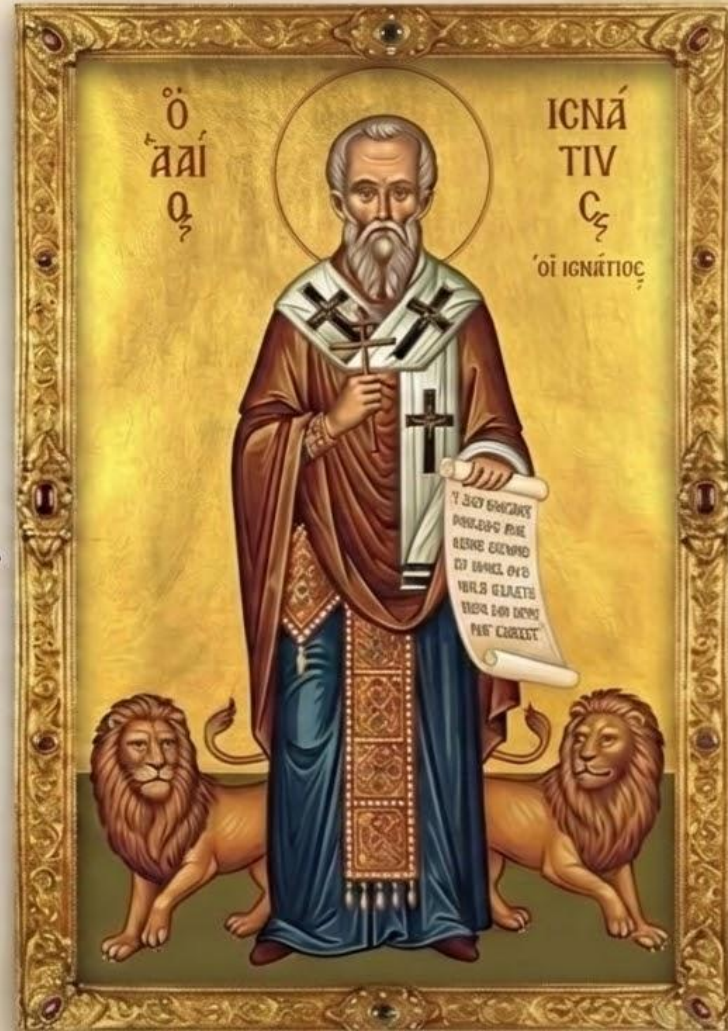


St. Ignatius on the Authority of the Bishop

From his Letters

“Let no one do anything connected with the Church without the bishop. Let that be deemed a proper Eucharist, which is [administered] either by the bishop, or by one to whom he has entrusted it. Wherever **the bishop shall appear**, there let the multitude also be; even as, wherever Jesus Christ is, there is the Catholic Church.”

— St. Ignatius of Antioch, *Letter to the Smyrnaeans*, Ch. 8

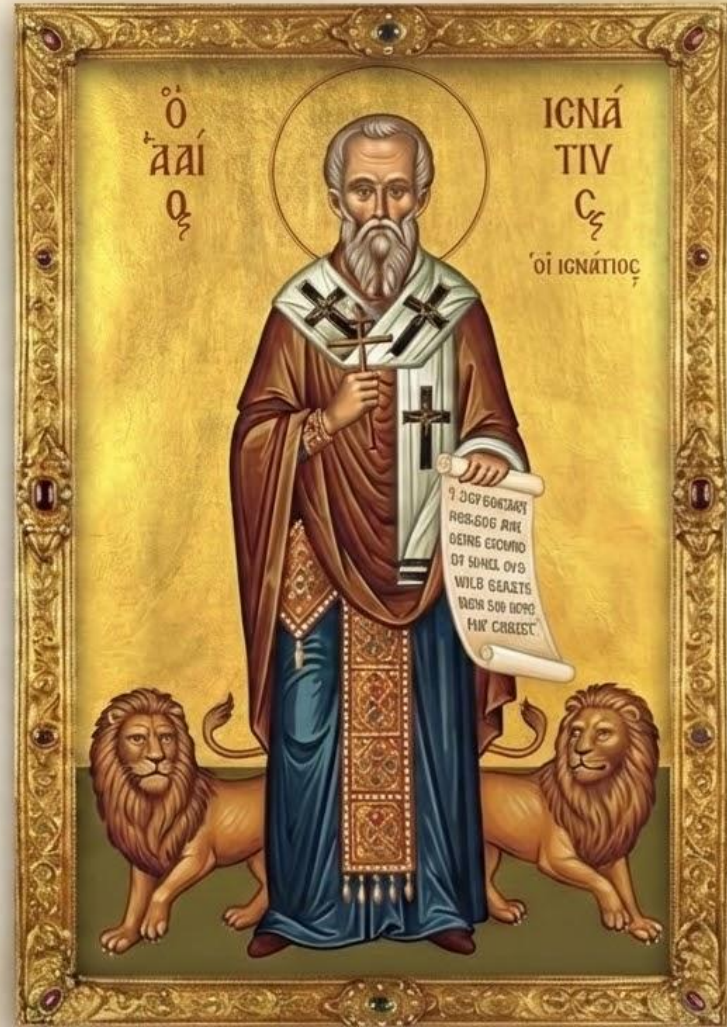


St. Ignatius on the Eucharist

From his Letter to the Smyrnaeans

“They abstain from the Eucharist and from prayer, because they confess not the Eucharist to be **the flesh of our Saviour Jesus Christ**, which suffered for our sins, and which the Father, of His goodness, raised up again.”

— St. Ignatius of Antioch, *Letter to the Smyrnaeans*, Ch. 7

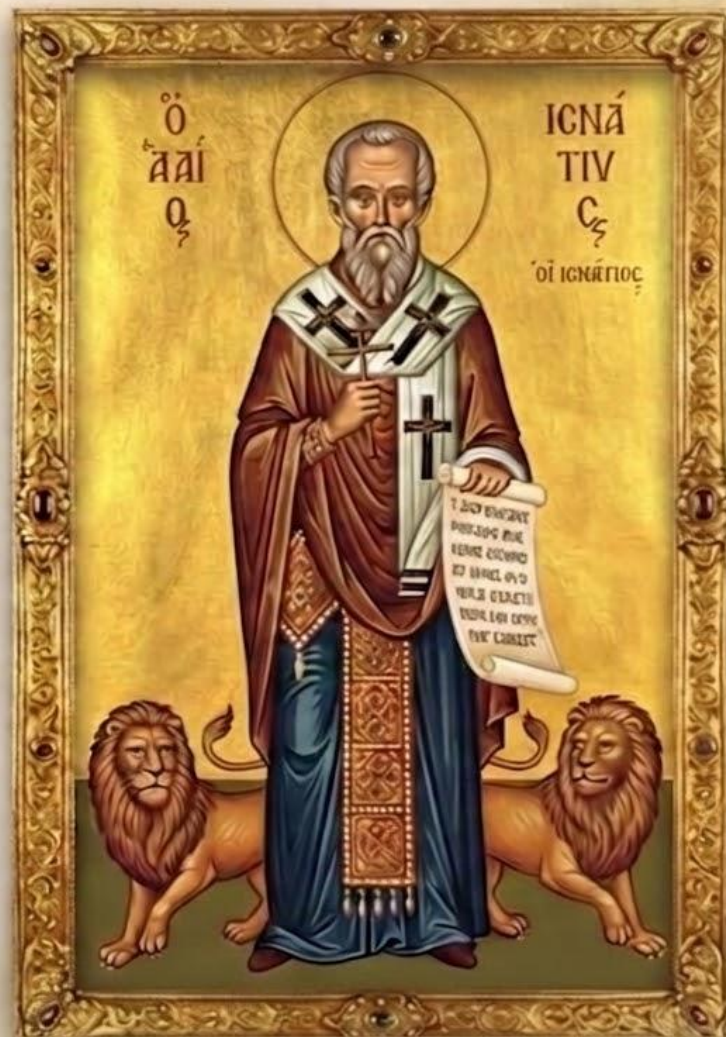


St. Ignatius on the Eucharist

From his Letter to the Ephesians

“breaking one and the same bread, which is **the medicine of immortality**, and the antidote to prevent us from dying, but [which causes] that we should live for ever in Jesus Christ.”

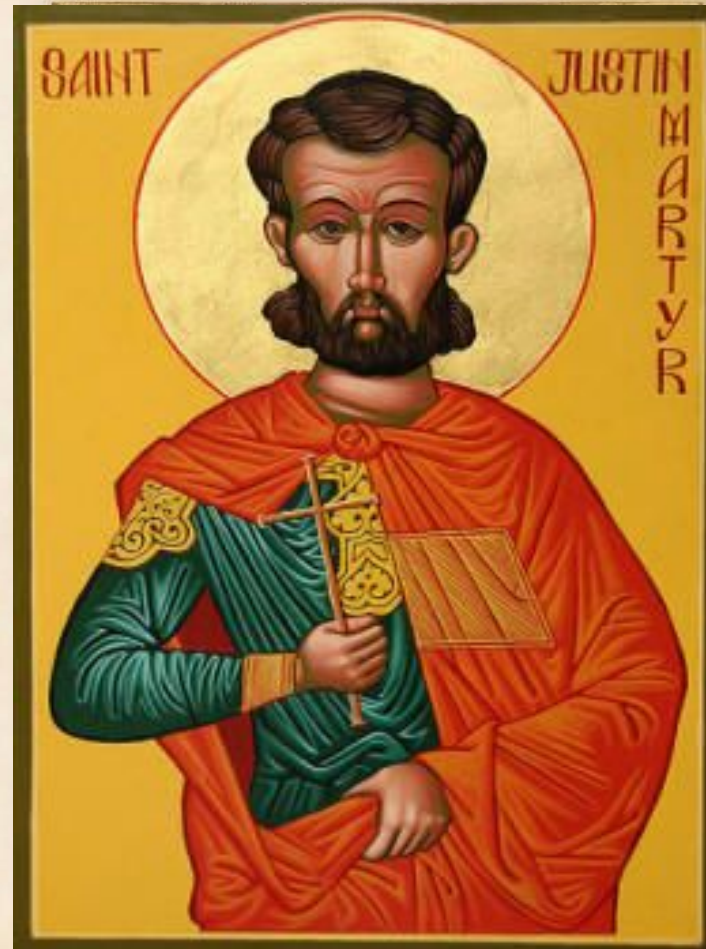
— St. Ignatius of Antioch, *Letter to the Ephesians*, Ch. 20



St. Justin Martyr

Early Christian Apologist & Philosopher

- Born of pagan parents in Neapolis (modern-day Nablus) c. AD 100.
- Converted to Christianity after seeking truth in various philosophical schools.
- Renowned for his defense of the Christian faith against paganism and Judaism.
- Authored important works including the 'First Apology', 'Second Apology', and 'Dialogue with Trypho'.
- Martyred in Rome during the reign of Marcus Aurelius, c. AD 165.



St. Justin Martyr on the Liturgy

From his First Apology, Ch. 67 (c. AD 155)

“On the day called Sunday, all who live in cities or in the country gather together to one place, and the memoirs of the apostles or the writings of the prophets are read... Then, when the reader has ceased, the president verbally instructs, and exhorts to the imitation of these good things. Then we all rise together and offer prayers... When prayer is ended, bread and wine and water are brought, and the president in like manner offers prayers and thanksgivings... and the people assent, saying Amen; and there is a distribution to each... and to those who are absent a portion is sent by the deacons.”



St. Justin Martyr on the Eucharist

From his First Apology, Ch. 66 (c. AD 155)

“And this food is called among us Eucharistia [the Eucharist], of which no one is allowed to partake but the man who believes that the teach are true, and who has been washed with the washing that is for remission of sins, and unto regeneration, and who is so living as Christ has enjoined.”



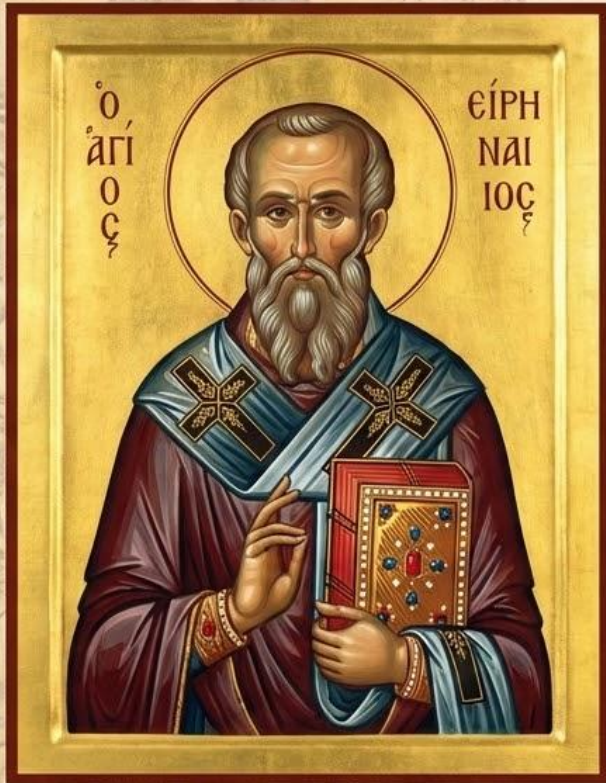
ST. JUSTIN MARTYR ON THE REAL PRESENCE



“For not as common bread and common drink do we receive these; but in like manner as Jesus Christ our Saviour, having been made flesh by the Word of God, had both flesh and blood for our salvation, so likewise have we been taught that the food which is blessed by the prayer of His word, and from which our blood and flesh by transmutation are nourished, is the flesh and blood of that Jesus who was made flesh.”



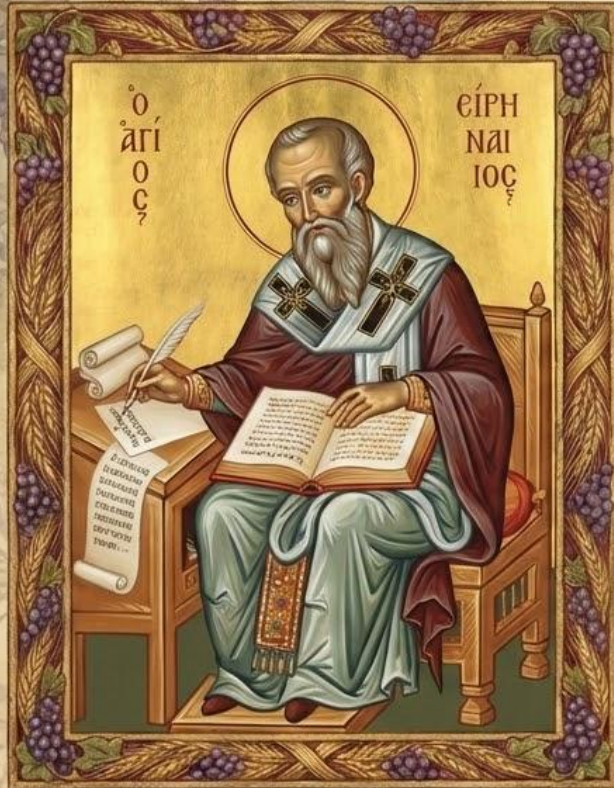
ST. IRENAEUS OF LYONS: DEFENDER OF THE FAITH



KEY CONTRIBUTIONS & THEOLOGY

- ❖ Bishop of Lugdunum (Lyons), c. 130–202 AD. Disciple of St. Polycarp.
- ❖ Major Work: “Adversus Haereses” (Against Heresies). A systematic refutation of Gnosticism.
- ❖ Emphasized Apostolic Tradition and the “Rule of Faith” as the guarantee of truth.
- ❖ Doctrine of Recapitulation: Christ as the New Adam who “sums up” all human history and restores communion with God.
- ❖ Strong affirmation of the Eucharist as the body and blood of Christ, bringing salvation to flesh and spirit.

ST. IRENAEUS OF LYONS ON APOSTOLIC SUCCESSION



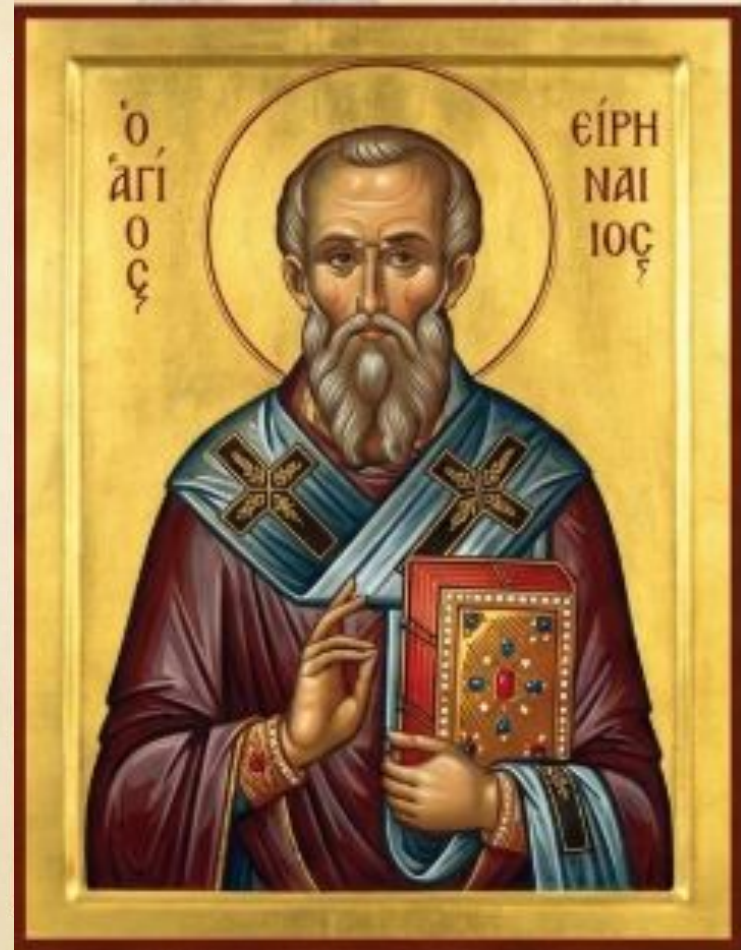
THE GUARANTEE OF TRUTH & ORTHODOXY

- ❖ Apostolic Succession is the unbroken line of bishops going back to the Apostles themselves.
- ❖ It ensures the preservation and authentic transmission of the true faith against heresy.
- ❖ The Church of Rome, founded by Peter and Paul, is the preminent example and standard of this succession.
- ❖ The bishops are the guardians of the “Rule of Faith”.

“We are in a position to reckon up those who were by the apostles instituted bishops in the Churches, and to demonstrate the succession of these men to our own times...” - St. Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses* 3.3.1

“But vain in every respect are they who despise the entire dispensation of God, and disallow the salvation of the flesh, and treat with contempt its regeneration, maintaining that it is not capable of incorruption. But if this indeed does not attain salvation, then neither did the Lord redeem us with His blood, nor is the cup of the Eucharist the communion of His blood, nor the bread which we break the communion of His body. 1 Corinthians 10:16 For blood can only come from veins and flesh, and whatsoever else makes up the substance of man, such as the Word of God was actually made.”

- St. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 5.2.2

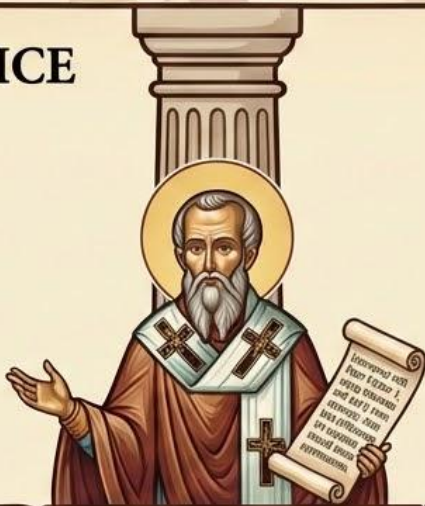


THE EASTER CONTROVERSY & ST. IRENAEUS

QUARTODECIMAN PRACTICE (ASIA MINOR)



Celebrated Pascha on 14th of Nisan (Jewish Passover), regardless of the day of the week.
Emphasized Christ's death.



**ST. IRENAEUS:
PEACEMAKER & MEDIATOR**
Intervened with Pope Victor I, urging tolerance and unity in diversity. Maintained that differences in custom should not break communion.

SUNDAY CELEBRATION (ROME & WEST)



Celebrated Pascha on the Sunday following 14th of Nisan.
Emphasized the Resurrection.