



POLYCARP c.69 – 155

Polycarp was a personal disciple of the Apostle John. As an old man, he was bishop of the Church at Smyrna in Asia Minor (present-day Turkey). Persecution against Christians broke out there and believers were being fed to the wild beasts in the arena. The crowd began to call for the Christians' leader, Polycarp. So the authorities sent out a search party to bring him in.

It was a Friday afternoon and Polycarp was resting upstairs in a country home when they came in like a posse, fully armed as if they were arresting a dangerous criminal. Polycarp's friends wanted to sneak him out, but he refused, saying, "God's will be done." (The Christians there taught that a believer was not to make oneself available for martyrdom, and should not seek it out, but neither should he/she avoid it when there was no choice.)

He welcomed his captors, talked with them and ordered that food and drink be served to them. He made one request: one hour to pray before they took him away.

Despite the cries of the crowd, the Roman authorities saw the senselessness of making his aged man a martyr. So when Polycarp was brought into the arena, the pro-counsel pled with him: "Curse Christ and I will release you."

His reply: "Eighty-six years I have served Him. He has never done me wrong. How then can I blaspheme my King who has saved me?"

Searching for a way out the pro-counsel asked him to just swear by the genius of the emperor and that would be enough; but Polycarp refused: "Hear it plainly, I am a Christian." He was threatened with being burned alive. His reply: "You threaten fire that burns for an hour and is over. But the judgment on the ungodly is forever."

He was burned alive and finished off with the stab of a dagger. His followers gathered his remains and buried them. The year was probably 155. In the strange way known to the eyes of faith, it was as much a day of triumph as it was a day of tragedy. The account of his death was sent as a letter to believers throughout the region.