

The Lord led me to share this letter to the Philadelphians by Saint Ignatius of Antioch, bishop and martyr penned around 98AD . When you read these early letters of the early Christians, you see the early Church celebrating Mass with the Eucharist, with Seven Sacraments, Baptizing, with a visible hierarchy and structure, and bearing the Four Marks of the Early Church (One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic). Saint Ignatius wrote this not long before his own martyrdom. Enjoy. i did.

One bishop with the presbyters and deacons

Ignatius, also called Theophorus, to the church of God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ located at Philadelphia in the province of Asia. You have found mercy and have been strengthened in the peace of God; you are now filled with gladness because of the passion of our Lord, and by his mercy you are made believers in his resurrection. I greet you in the blood of Jesus Christ. You are my abiding and unshakeable joy, especially if your members remain united with the bishop and with his presbyters and deacons, all appointed in accordance with the mind of Christ who by his own will has strengthened them in the firmness which the Spirit gives.

I know that this bishop has obtained his ministry, which serves the community, neither by his own efforts, nor from men nor even out of vainglory, but from the love of God the Father and of the Lord Jesus Christ. I am deeply impressed by his gentleness, and by his silence he is more effective than the empty talkers. He is in harmony with the commandments as is a lute with its strings. I call him blessed, then, for his sentiments toward God, since I know these to be virtuous and perfect, and for his stability and calm, in which he imitates the gentleness of the living God.

As sons of the light of truth, flee divisions and evil doctrines; where your shepherd is, follow him as his flock.

For all who belong to God and Jesus Christ are with the bishop; all who repent and return to the unity of the Church will also belong to God, that they may live according to Jesus Christ. Do not be deceived, my brothers. If anyone follows a schismatic, *he will not obtain the inheritance of God's kingdom*; if anyone lives by an alien teaching, he does not assent to the passion of the Lord.

-Be careful, therefore, to take part only in the one eucharist; for there is only one flesh of our Lord Jesus Christ and one cup to unite us with his blood, one altar and one bishop with the presbyters and deacons, who are his fellow servants. Then, whatever you do, you will do according to God.

My brothers, I overflow with love for you and with a joyous heart I make you strong—although it is not so much I but Jesus Christ. Although imprisoned for his sake, I fear more because of my imperfection. But your prayers will perfect me

in the eyes of God so that I might yet receive the inheritance promised me by the merciful God. I seek refuge in the person of Christ through the Gospels and I appeal to the true ministry of the Church through the apostles.

**Vivat Jesus,
Father Vic Gournas**