

“Holy Father, I pray not only for these, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, so that they may all be one, as you, Father, are in me and I in you” (Jn 17:20-21). Through Jesus, we learn “that there is one God and Father, who holds all things together and gives them their being. As it is written in the Gospel: No man has ever seen God, except the only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father; he has revealed him.”<sup>xi</sup> These words of explanation come from Saint Irenaeus, a bishop of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century, whose memorial we celebrate (today) on the 28<sup>th</sup> of June.

Irenaeus was a trusted priest in the Diocese of Lyons at a time of persecution and widespread heresies. In 177, “he was sent to Rome bearing a letter from the community in Lyons to Pope Eleutherius.”<sup>xii</sup> In the brief time he was away in Rome, 48 Christians were martyred in his home diocese including the 90-year-old bishop. On his return home, Irenaeus was appointed as the new bishop, and he served faithfully for 25 years.

Through his writings, Bishop Irenaeus taught the faith and countered the heretical thoughts of the day. Gnostics held “that the faith taught in the Church was merely a symbolism for the simple who were unable to grasp difficult concepts; instead...the intellectuals ... claimed to understand what was behind these symbols and thus formed an elitist and intellectualist Christianity.” As bizarre as these heretical ideas were, they appealed to people who thought they were part of the select elite. Gnostics “denied faith in the one God and Father of all, Creator and Savior of man and of the world.”<sup>xiii</sup> They also held that the things of this world were inherently evil.

Guided by the Holy Spirit and his own rich understanding of the Bible, Irenaeus taught that the world that God created is inherently good. For Irenaeus, the Apostles’ Creed is the key to interpreting the Gospel. “The Creed, which is a sort of Gospel synthesis, helps us understand what it means and how we should read the Gospel itself.”<sup>xiv</sup>

The true Gospel is the one imparted by the bishops who received it in an uninterrupted line from the Apostles. They taught nothing except this simple faith, which is also the true depth of God’s revelation. ... There is no secret doctrine concealed in the Church’s common Creed. There is no superior Christianity for intellectuals. The faith publicly confessed by the Church is the common faith of all. This faith alone is apostolic, it is handed down from the Apostles, that is, from Jesus and from God.<sup>v</sup>

The Holy Spirit has protected the deposit of faith for two thousand years through the Apostles, their apostolic teaching, and the faith as taught by their successors. As in the time of Irenaeus, we are called to observe the faith and traditions of the church faithfully handed to the bishops of our own day and age.

Although heresies have been refuted, the false ideas continue to live on. Some people today still believe they possess a special knowledge that they themselves have invented. “Truth and salvation are not the privilege or monopoly of the few, but are available to all through the preaching of the Successors of the Apostles, especially of the Bishop of Rome.” Apostolic Tradition can be summed up in three points:<sup>vi</sup>

- The true faith as passed on by Apostolic Tradition is “public”, not private or secret.
- Apostolic Tradition is “one.” United by tradition and teaching, the Catholic church in Europe believes the same as the church in Africa, America, and any region of the world. There is a common content despite the diversity of languages and cultures.
- The Holy Spirit guides the church and ensures the faith is truthfully transmitted from one generation to the next.

“Righteous Father ... they know that you sent me. I made known to them your name and I will make it known, that the love with which you loved me may be in them and I in them” (Jn 17:25-26).

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<sup>i</sup> Irenaeus, Office of Readings. From the treatise Against Heresies by Saint Irenaeus, bishop and martyr (Lib 4, 20, 5-7: SC 100, 640-642, 644-648).

<sup>ii</sup> [vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/audiences/2007/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_aud\\_20070328.html](http://vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/audiences/2007/documents/hf_ben-xvi_aud_20070328.html)

<sup>iii</sup> Ibid.

<sup>iv</sup> Ibid.

<sup>v</sup> Ibid.

<sup>vi</sup> Ibid.