

Thought for the day – Friday 19th March 2021

Revd John Marshall

Polycarp

On 23rd February we remembered Polycarp. I am not sure that I know anything about him, and if anyone had asked I might have said that he was a cross between a parrot and a fish.

However Polycarp was very important -- he was a link back to Jesus' disciples. He was a disciple of John the Apostle; ie John the fisherman, the beloved disciple.

Polycarp became Bishop of Smyrna. He was an important figure. He defended the orthodox Christian belief against gnostic heresies.

He was well thought of by friends and opponents. Irenius of Lyons praised his gravity, holiness and appearance. He wrote a letter to the Philippians was so esteemed that it was read in the churches of Asia. As he was getting older he went to Rome and visited the Pope to discuss the date of Easter – they agreed to differ and Polycarp was invited to celebrate the Eucharist in the papal chapel.

Eventually there was a persecution, his friends tried to hide him, but Polycarp stood firm. He prayed and then was arrested.

He was asked to repent of Christianity but said "I have served him (Jesus Christ) these eighty six years and He never did me any harm, but much good. How can I then, blaspheme my King and my Saviour. If you require me to swear by the genius of Caesar as you call it, hear my free confession; I am a Christian. But if you desire to learn the Christian religion, appoint a time and hear what I have to say. "

He was threatened with lions and fire. But he warned the proconsul of his danger of "the fire prepared for the wicked." He died bravely, faithful to his Lord Jesus.

We can learn much from the life and death of Polycarp, who heard the wise words of John the Apostle and loved Jesus.

Let us pray for those who have to stand up for their faith.

What would you say?