

In the Name of the Father, and of the ✠ Son, and of the Holy Ghost.

St. James writes “do not be deceived, my beloved brethren”. In the time of James, many false teachings contradicted the right teaching of Christ, and of salvation. The Judaizers taught that man must be circumcised to be saved. The beginnings of Gnosticism taught a salvation outside of Christ. And like the plethora of false teachings of our day, those of James’ day multiplied as well.

St. Irenaeus was a disciple of Polycarp, who himself was a favored disciple of St. John, son of Zebedee, the Disciple whom Jesus loved, the Virgin Mary’s adopted son. In that, Irenaeus was only a generation removed from the Apostles. As the heresies of the Apostolic age grew, God worked through His Word rightly taught and preached to establish through Irenaeus foundational doctrinal teaching and preaching. In his writings what we know today as the doctrine of the churches of the east and the west are present, in that he lived before the church was so divided.

Undoubtedly influenced by Polycarp and by Justin Martyr, Irenaeus served as Pastor, Missionary, and ultimately Bishop of Lugdunum of Gaul, now Lyon, France. He is most famous for combatting Gnosticism, especially that of Valentius, which was linked historically with Simon Magus, or Simon the Magician, mentioned in chapter 8 of the Book of the Acts of the Apostles. Irenaeus’ most important work was the five volume *Adversus Haereses*, or “Against Heresies”.

Against the Gnostics, who held that their oral tradition was passed on from Jesus Himself, Irenaeus insisted that Bishops with Apostolic succession were only trustworthy interpreters of Scripture. He stressed not only the role of Bishops, but also that of Scripture and tradition. He insisted on Biblical authority, and was among the earliest to count the Four Gospels as equal. In his writings he cites directly from 21 of the 27 Books of the New Testament, pointing towards the acceptance of the Canon.

Citing St. Paul, he taught Christ as “last Adam”, and Mary as the new Eve – who, while a virgin was childless, and became the mother of all that die; Mary, while a virgin was childless, and while still a virgin became Mother of Christ, hence a cause of salvation, and so the mother of all that live.

Irenaeus equated the Roman Empire and its capitol with the ten horns of Daniel and the Apocalypse. He described a coming antichrist, treated the number 666, examined the times/time/and half a time of Daniel and Revelation, taught Christ as the Rider on the white horse, taught an intermediate state after death, and held a literal, earthly 1000 year reign of Christ. Both Hippolytus and Tertullian relied on Irenaeus’ teachings.

The world strives to draw the Christian away from the truth. From secular education to “progressive” television and radio programming, anti-Christian teaching bombards the faithful. Even the car in front of you seeks to convert you, with all the theological depth and intellectual prowess of a “co-exist” bumper sticker. Valentius has his children too.

But the problem is not simply external. It is within you. It is in your fallen flesh and your corrupted reason. There is a little heretic in each of us, one who believes in salvation by works,

and who believes that you have the capacity to achieve it. There is a little gnostic inside of each of us, seeking by mystical formulations to achieve way to paradise.

And the most trustworthy Book written against heresies, Holy Scripture, points to that heretic in your flesh, that doubter, that anxious, self-absorbed, incredulous old man. And the Scripture reveals how all such men, every sinner, will be judged on the Day of Judgment.

So “blessed”, the Apostle writes, “is the man who endures temptation...” For each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desire and enticed. And you know what that is, for your flesh too has known ungodly, forbidden, and harmful desires. But beware, for when desire has conceived it gives birth to sin, and sin brings forth death. So, the Apostle writes “do not be deceived.”

That you not be deceived, that you be saved from the coming wrath, that you know the Truth, God brought you forth by the Word of Truth. Faith comes by hearing. The Word of Truth, the Truth that God took on the flesh of the Virgin Mary, that He suffered and died for the sins of the world, and that He defeated death - that Truth is sufficient for faith.

Not by secret knowledge, not by shady oral tradition, but by Holy Scripture purely preached and taught does God bring you forth, as the Apostle writes, by the Word of Truth, forth out of death and into life eternal. By His grace, by the work of the Holy Spirit, by the Mystery of Holy Baptism, by the power of the Name of the Triune God, He works a right faith in you.

By the grace of God, in James’ time, in Irenaeus’ time, and in our time the Lord gives you His Word, by which we may know the Truth, and discern true teaching from false teaching. Through the Apostolic Scriptures, and through their disciples, and through generations of disciples afterwards, God works to bring the saving Doctrine of the pure Gospel of Jesus Christ to you, and to countless generations of men.

Irenaeus was martyred, ushered into the eternal peace he believed and taught, in the Year of our Lord 202, on this day - June 28. The means of his martyrdom are unknown. He is free of the raging of this fallen world, free to worship without end the Christ he rightly taught. And you, dear Christian, you who eat Christ’s Body and drink His Blood this day, you will join him according to the Lord’s Promise through the Apostle: “Blessed is the man who endures temptation, for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.”

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