

Letter of St. Ignatius to the Romans

(Abridged, with mixed translation)

Greeting

Ignatius, who is also called "*Theophorus*", to the Church which has obtained mercy, through the majesty of the Most High Father, and Jesus Christ, His only-begotten Son; the Church which is beloved and enlightened by the will of Him that wills all things.

To the Church which resides in the place of the region of the Romans, worthy of God, worthy of honour, worthy of the highest happiness, worthy of praise, worthy of obtaining her every desire, worthy of being deemed holy, and which presides over love.

I salute you in the name of Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father, you who are united flesh and spirit to every one of His commandments; you who are filled inseparably with the grace of God, and you who are purified from every foreign stain, I wish abundance of happiness in Jesus Christ our God.

Chapter 1. As a prisoner, I hope to see you

I hope as a prisoner in Christ Jesus to embrace you, if indeed it be the will of God that I be thought worthy of reaching the goal. For an auspicious beginning has been made, if I may obtain grace to cling to my lot without hindrance to the end.

The truth is, I am afraid of your love, that it should do me wrong...

Chapter 2. Do not save me from martyrdom

For it is not my desire to act towards you in a way pleasing to men, but in a way pleasing God. For neither shall I ever have such an opportunity of attaining to God; nor will you, if you shall now be silent, ever be entitled to the honour of a better work. For if you are silent concerning me, I shall become God's; but if you show your love to my flesh, I shall again have to run my race.

Do not seek to confer any greater favour upon me than that I be sacrificed to God while the altar is still prepared. You should form a choir of love and sing a song to the Father through Jesus Christ, that God has deemed me, the bishop of Syria, worthy to be sent from east to west. How glorious to be a setting sun – away from the world, on to God! May I rise in His presence!

Chapter 3. Pray rather that I may attain to martyrdom

I only ask that you beg for me inward and outward strength, that I may not only be *called* a Christian, but truly found to be one. For if I am truly found to be a Christian, then I may also be called one, and deemed faithful when I am no longer seen by this world. Our God, Jesus Christ, certainly is the more clearly seen now that He is with the Father. Whenever Christianity is hated by the world, what counts is not power of persuasion but of manifest greatness.

Chapter 4. Allow me to fall a prey to the wild beasts

I write to the Churches, and impress on them all, that I shall willingly die for God, unless you interfere. I beg you, do not show me an unseasonable kindness. Allow me to become food for the wild beasts which are the means of making my way to God.

I am the wheat of God, and let me be ground by the teeth of the wild beasts, that I may be found the pure bread of Christ. Let the wild beasts become my tomb and leave nothing of my body; so that when I have fallen asleep in death, I may be no trouble to anyone. Then shall I truly be a disciple of Christ, when the world shall not even see my body.

Entreat Christ for me, that by these instruments I may be found a sacrifice to God. I do not, as Peter and Paul, issue commandments to you. They were apostles; I am but a convict: they were free, while I am, even now, a servant. But once I have suffered, I shall become a freedman of Jesus Christ, and, united with Him, I shall rise a free man. And now, being a prisoner, I learn not to desire anything worldly or vain.

Chapter 5. I desire to die

From Syria to Rome I fight with beasts, by land and sea, by night and day, being bound to ten leopards (a band of soldiers) who prove themselves the more malevolent for kindnesses shown them. Yet in the school of this abuse I am more and more trained in discipleship, although I am not therefore justified.

May I enjoy the wild beasts that are prepared for me; and I pray they may be found eager to rush upon me. I will even coax them to make short work of me, not as has happened to some whom they were too timid to touch.

Now I begin to be a disciple. May nothing seen or unseen fascinate me, so that I may happily make my way to Jesus Christ! Let fire and the cross; let the crowds of wild beasts; let tearings, breakings, and dislocations of bones; mangling of limbs; crunching of the whole body; and let all the dreadful torments of the devil come upon me: only let me make my way to Jesus Christ.

Chapter 6. By death I shall attain true life

All the pleasures of the world, and all the kingdoms of this earth, shall profit me nothing. It is better for me to die in behalf of Jesus Christ, than to reign over all the ends of the earth. For what shall it profit a man, if he gain the whole world, but lose his own soul?

Him I seek, who died for us: Him I desire, who rose again for our sake. The birth pangs are upon me. Pardon me, brothers: do not obstruct me from coming to life, do not desire to keep me in a state of death. Allow me to obtain pure light: when I have gone there, I shall indeed be a man of God. Permit me to be an imitator of the passion of my God.

Chapter 7. Reason of desiring to die

The Prince of this world is resolved to abduct me and corrupt my aspirations towards God. Let none of you in Rome help him; rather be on my side, the side of God. Do not have Jesus Christ on your lips and the world in your hearts.

Even if I, upon my arrival plead for your intervention, do not listen to me. Rather, give heed to what I write to you now. I am writing while still alive, but my yearning is for death. My Love has been crucified, and there is no fire in me for earthly things. There is within me a Living Water which speaks "*Come to the Father*".

I have no delight in corruptible food, nor in the pleasures of this life. I desire the Bread of God, the heavenly bread, the bread of life, which is the flesh of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who was of the seed of David; and I desire the drink of God, namely His blood, which is incorruptible love and eternal life.

Chapter 8. Be favourable to me

Pray for me, that I may attain the object of my desire. I have not written to you according to the flesh, but according to the will of God. If I shall suffer, you have wished well to me; but if I am rejected, you have hated me.

Chapter 9. Pray for the church in Syria

Remember in your prayers the Church in Syria, which now has God for its shepherd, instead of me. Jesus Christ alone will be her Bishop, together with your love. But as for me, I am ashamed to be counted one of them; for indeed I am not worthy, as being the very least of them, and one born out of due time. But I have obtained mercy to be somebody, if I shall attain to God.

My spirit salutes you, together with the love of the Churches that have received me, not as a chance visitor, but in deference to Jesus Christ. For even those Churches which were not near to me, have gone before me, city by city, to meet me.

Chapter 10. Conclusion

I am sending you this letter from Smyrna through the kindness of the Ephesians, who deserve so much praise. There is also with me, along with many others, Crocus, one dearly beloved to me.

As to those who have gone before me from Syria to Rome for the glory of God, you have, I trust, made their acquaintance. Please tell them that I am near. They are all worthy, both of God and of you; and you will do well to give them every comfort.

I am writing this to you on the twenty-third day of August. Fare well to the end, in the patience of Jesus Christ. Amen.