

# Letter of St. Ignatius to the Smyrnaeans

(Abridged, with mixed translation)

## Greeting

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Ignatius, who is also called "*Theophorus*", to the Church of God the Father, and of the beloved Jesus Christ, which is filled with faith and love, lacking in no gift, radiant with God's splendor and fruitful mother of saints.

## Chapter 1. Thanks to God for your faith

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I glorify Jesus Christ, the God who has granted you such wisdom. For I have observed that you are thoroughly trained in unshaken faith, as if you were nailed to the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ both in the flesh and in the spirit. I have seen that you are established in love through the Blood of Christ.

You firmly believe that the Lord was truly of the line of David according to the flesh, and the Son of God according to the will and power of God; that He was truly born of a virgin, was baptized by John, in order that all righteousness might be fulfilled by Him; and was truly, under Pontius Pilate and Herod the tetrarch, nailed to the cross for us in His flesh. We are the fruit of His most blessed passion. And thus, through His resurrection, He raised a banner for all time for His saints and faithful followers, whether among Jews or Gentiles, that they might be united in a single body, that is, His Church.

## \* Chapter 2. Christ's true passion

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Now, He suffered all these things for our sakes, that we might be saved. And He suffered truly, just as He also truly raised Himself from the dead. It is not as some unbelievers say, that He only *seemed* to suffer, as they themselves only *seem* to be Christians. And as they believe, so shall it happen to them, when they shall be divested of their bodies, and be mere evil spirits.

## Chapter 3. Christ was possessed of a body after His resurrection

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For I know that even after His resurrection He still possessed flesh. When, for instance, He came to Peter and Peter's companions, He said to them, "*Here, feel me and see that I am not a bodiless spirit*". Immediately they touched Him and, through contact with His flesh and spirit, believed. For this reason they despised death, and were found its conquerors. And after his resurrection He ate and drank with them, as being possessed of flesh, although spiritually He was united to the Father.

## Chapter 4. Beware of these heretics

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I give you these instructions, beloved, assured that you also hold the same opinions. I am warning you in advance of those beasts in human form whom you should not receive and, if possible, whom you should avoid. But pray for them, that they may change their mind – a difficult thing! But that is in the power of Jesus Christ, our true Life.

But if these things were done by our Lord only in *appearance*, then am I also only in *appearance* bound in chains? Moreover, why did I surrender myself to death, to fire, to the sword, to wild beasts? Well, to be near the sword is to be near God; to be in the claws of wild beasts is to be in the hands of God. Only let it be done in the name of Jesus Christ! I undergo all these things that I may suffer together with Him, He who became the perfect man gives me strength.

## **Chapter 5. Their dangerous errors**

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## **\* Chapter 6. The Unbelievers**

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Consider those who are of a different opinion with respect to the grace of Christ, how opposed they are to the will of God. They have no regard for charity; no care for the widow, or the orphan, or the oppressed; for those in prison or for those hungry or thirsty.

## **Chapter 7. Let us stand aloof from such heretics**

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They abstain from the Eucharist and from prayer, because they do not confess the Eucharist is the flesh of our Saviour Jesus Christ, which suffered for our sins, and which the Father, in His loving-kindness, raised from the dead. Those, therefore, who speak against this gift of God, perish in the midst of their disputes. But it were better for them to treat it with respect, that they also might rise again.

It is fitting, therefore, that you should avoid such people, and not even speak about them either in private or in public. Instead, you should study the prophets, and above all, the Gospel, in which the passion of Christ is revealed to us, and the resurrection shown in its fulfillment. Shun division, as the beginning of evil.

## **Chapter 8. Let nothing be done without the bishop**

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Let no man do anything connected with the Church without the bishop. The celebration of the Eucharist is valid only if it is administered by the bishop or by one to whom he has entrusted it. Where the bishop is, there let the people also be; just as where Jesus Christ is, there is the Catholic Church. It is not permitted to baptize or to celebrate an agape without authorization from the bishop.

## **Chapter 9. Honour the bishop**

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## **\* Chapter 10. Acknowledgment of their kindness**

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You have done well in receiving Philo and Rheus Agathopus as servants of Christ our God, who have followed me for the sake of God. None of these things shall be lost to you.

## **Chapter 11. Request to them to send a messenger to Antioch**

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Your prayer made its way to the Church at Antioch. In order, therefore, that your work may be complete both on earth and in heaven, it is fitting that, for the honour of God, your Church should elect some worthy delegate; who may congratulate them now that they are at peace and are restored to their proper greatness. It seems to me a praiseworthy thing that you should also send a letter rejoicing that they now have reached the harbour. Be perfect, therefore, and devise a perfect method. You need only be willing to do well, and God is ready to assist you.

## **\* Chapter 12. Salutations**

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The brethren at Troas wish to be remembered to you. It is from here that I send this letter through the kindness of Burrus, whom you and the Ephesians commissioned to accompany me. Greetings to your most worthy bishop, and your venerable presbytery, and your deacons and your whole community in the name of Jesus Christ, and in His Flesh and Blood, in His Passion and Resurrection, both body and spirit, in union with God and with you. Grace, mercy, peace, and patience be with you forever.

## **\* Chapter 13. Conclusion**

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I salute the families of my brethren, with their wives and children, and the virgins who are enrolled among the widows. Be strong, I pray, in the power of the Holy Spirit. Philo, who is with me, greets you. I salute the house of Tavius, Alce, Daphnus and Eutecnus. Farewell in the grace of God.

