

Tuesday 23 February 2021



St Polycarp

Polycarp was one of the first Christian martyrs. He was Bishop of Smyrna on the Adriatic coast of Asia Minor for over forty years when the persecution of Christians began. He was arrested and given the option to renounce his faith and so save his life. His response was, 'I have been Christ's servant for eighty-six years and he has done me no harm. Can I now blaspheme my King and my Saviour?'

He was immediately burnt at the stake. His remains were buried outside the city. The practice began of celebrating the Eucharist over his burial place on the anniversary of his death. This practice grew to include services over the tombs of other martyrs' in the Roman cata-

combs. Polycarp is thought to have died on this day in the year 155 AD.

- All the Bible readings come from the *New Revised Standard Version*.
- The liturgy assumes the service is Eucharistic. The prayers of consecration have been included at the end rather than in situ because many following the service will be in isolation and unable to celebrate the sacrament.
- The hymns are YouTube links. To hear the hymns please hover the mouse over each link, press Ctrl and then return.
- To see service transcripts from previous weeks, please visit the page, <http://www.medlockhead.co.uk/resources/index.htm>

Introduction and welcome

HYMN 1 I will sing the wondrous story (please click on this link to hear the hymn)

The Welcome

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit

All Amen.

The Lord be with you

All And also with you.

The Preparation

All Almighty God,
to whom all hearts are open,
all desires known,
and from whom no secrets are hidden:
cleanse the thoughts of our hearts
by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit,
that we may perfectly love you,
and worthily magnify your holy name;
through Christ our Lord.

Amen.

Our Lord Jesus Christ said:

The first commandment is this:

'Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is the only Lord.'

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart,
 with all your soul, with all your mind,
 and with all your strength.'

And the second is this: 'Love your neighbour as yourself.'

There is no other commandment greater than these.

On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.

All Amen. Lord, have mercy.

Christ calls us to share the heavenly banquet of his love with all the saints in earth and heaven. Therefore, knowing our unworthiness and sin, let us confess our sins in penitence and faith, firmly resolved to keep God's commandments and to live in love and peace with all.

All Almighty God, our heavenly Father,
we have sinned against you
and against our neighbour
in thought and word and deed,
through negligence, through weakness,
through our own deliberate fault.
We are truly sorry
and repent of all our sins.
For the sake of your Son Jesus Christ,
who died for us,
forgive us all that is past
and grant that we may serve you in newness of life
to the glory of your name.
Amen.

Almighty God,
who forgives all who truly repent, have mercy upon you,
pardon and deliver you from all your sins,
confirm and strengthen you in all goodness,
and keep you in life eternal;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

All **Amen.**

The Gloria

It's usual to omit the Gloria during Lent.

The Collect for Polycarp

Almighty God,
who gave to your servant Polycarp
boldness to confess the name of our Saviour Jesus Christ
before the rulers of this world
and courage to die for his faith:
grant that we also may be ready
to give an answer for the faith that is in us
and to suffer gladly for the sake of our Lord Jesus Christ,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.

All **Amen.**

First reading

A reading from the Wisdom of Solomon

The righteous live forever, and their reward is with the Lord; the Most High takes care of them. Therefore they will receive a glorious crown and a beautiful diadem from the hand of the Lord, because with his right hand he will cover them, and with his arm he will shield them. The Lord will take his zeal as his whole armour, and will arm all creation to repel his enemies; he will put on righteousness as a breast-plate, and wear impartial justice as a helmet; he will take holiness as an invincible shield, and sharpen stern wrath for a sword, and creation will join with him to fight against his frenzied foes. *Wisdom 5:15–20*

This is the Word of the Lord

All Thanks be to God.

Second reading

A reading from the Revelation of St John the Divine

One like the Son of Man said to me, ‘To the angel of the church in Smyrna write: These are the words of the first and the last, who was dead and came to life: “I know your affliction and your poverty, even though you are rich. I know the slander on the part of those who say that they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Beware, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison so that you may be tested, and for ten days you will have affliction. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life. Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches. Whoever conquers will not be harmed by the second death.”’ *Revelation 2:8–11*

This is the Word of the Lord

All Thanks be to God.

HYMN 2 I could sing of your love for ever ([click on this link to hear the hymn](#))

Gospel reading

Hear the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to John

All Glory to you O Lord.

Jesus said to his disciples, ‘I am the true vine, and my Father is the vine-grower. He removes every branch in me that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit. You have already been cleansed by the word that I have spoken to you. Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot

bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing. Whoever does not abide in me is thrown away like a branch and withers; such branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples.' *John 15:1–8*

This is the Gospel of the Lord

All Praise to you O Christ.

Sermon

The story of Polycarp is shocking: the judicial murder of an extremely old man. At the time when Polycarp lived, extraordinary age was often regarded as nearly miraculous and maybe a sign of his sanctity—think of the patriarchs in the earliest chapters of Genesis who lived hundreds of years; Methuselah died at an age of 969.

Actually, the story of Polycarp informs both today's first reading from Solomon, 'The righteous live forever, and their reward is with the Lord' and the second reading from the Revelation of St John the Divine, where God says to the ancient city of Smyrna over which Polycarp was Bishop, 'Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.' Both tell us to look beyond this life to the next. Polycarp was an exceptionally good man, a holy man, *and that's why he had to be stopped.*

The powers of darkness always try to stop those who do the work of God. The powers of darkness play dirty and they particularly work against us whenever we sincerely seek to bring about the Kingdom of God. It's therefore in their nature to stop all expressions of love and goodness and to stop anything that is truly godly.

The powers of darkness want us to fall away from God. To that end, they work in two directions: on the 'inside' through temptation, and through persecution at the hands of earthly powers and those with vested interests on the 'outside'. We therefore need to be aware that all attempts to win eternal life will be opposed. That's why all the saints suffered intense temptations and most were persecuted.

We should stop and pause if we're not aware of spiritual powers trying to stop our lives of discipleship—it implies that our lives are not encroaching onto their domain. These powers allow us to continue simply because we don't threaten them.

Today's Gospel reading comes from a long conversation between Jesus and his disciples that occurred the night he was arrested. Dark spiritual forces felt compelled to stop him precisely because His ministry was God-filled. And if Jesus was opposed then we should also expect opposition. These spiritual powers working

against Jesus will work against us. That's why we need to listen to Jesus' soundbites when he says, 'Every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit.' He's telling us how to oppose spiritual evil by using their own tools against them.

The powers of darkness are clever and they know us extremely well—in fact, they know us far too well. They know the ways in which we are weakest and most likely to crumble: when they tempt us to work against God, they are stress-testing our faith in a way that is personally customised. But in so doing they are also alerting us to those same weak points. Listening to the temptations placed in our path tells us a lot about ourselves and therefore helps alert us to the best ways in which we need to develop our souls. If we find ourselves tempted to pride, for example, it's a clue telling us to ask God to help us with work toward humility; if we are tempted to greed, we can ask God to help us live simpler lives, and so on.

The person of faith will want to follow the will of God and will find themselves stumbling fairly often. They'll be tempted and opposed. But if they persist and look at the ways they fell, they'll usually see a spiritual pattern. They need to seek God's help each time they're tempted: 'Help me with my pride!' ; 'Lord help me with my lust!' ; 'Loving God, help me with my greed!' and He will. (He sometimes does so in ways we don't expect. That aspect is irrelevant—what's vital is His loving help.)

In time, we grow stronger spiritually and find ourselves wanting God more than sin. We have been pruned. We are growing in holiness. We are pleasing God. And we're growing toward eternal life. That's why the prayer Jesus taught us ends with a note of clear warning, 'Help us when we are tempted!'

The Creed

Do you believe and trust in God the Father,
the source of all being and life,
the one for whom we exist?

All We believe and trust in him.

Do you believe and trust in God the Son,
who took our human nature,
died for us and rose again?

All We believe and trust in him.

Do you believe and trust in God the Holy Spirit,
who gives life to the people of God
and makes Christ known in the world?

All We believe and trust in him.

This is the faith of the Church.

All **This is our faith.**

**We believe and trust in one God,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit.**

Amen.

Prayers of intercession

Dear Lord, give me the wisdom to walk away when I am tempted, and the clarity to see the way out that You always provide.

Lord in your mercy

All **Hear our prayer.**

Thank you, Lord, that you are a faithful deliverer and that I can count on your help in my time of need. Thank you for being here for me.

Lord in your mercy

All **Hear our prayer.**

Lord, I desire to be faithful but I've yielded to temptation and often. Although I've tried to live up to your standards, I continue to fail and fall short. Lord, I know that I have tried to resist in my own strength and I confess that I can't do this by myself any more.

Lord in your mercy

All **Hear our prayer.**

Lord, I want You to teach me how to draw strength from You rather than relying on my own limited resources. Teach me to entrust my life to Your hands and to submit to the leading of the Holy Spirit in my life. Help me to walk in Your Spirit and truth. Teach me what it really means in Your Word when it says 'without me you can do nothing,' so that I may learn the truth that "I can do all things through Christ Jesus, Who gives me the strength.'

Lord in your mercy

All **Hear our prayer.**

Merciful Father,

All **accept these prayers
for the sake of your Son,
our Saviour Jesus Christ.**

Amen.

The peace

May the God of peace sanctify you:
may he so strengthen your hearts in holiness
that you may be blameless before him
at the coming of our Lord Jesus with his saints.

The peace of the Lord be always with you,

All And also with you.

HYMN 3 O for a closer walk with God ([please click on this link to hear the hymn](#))

The liturgy of the Communion Service appears below

The Dismissal

May God,
who kindled the fire of his love in the hearts of the saints,
pour upon you the riches of his grace.

All Amen

May he give you joy in their fellowship
and a share in their praises.

All Amen

May he strengthen you to follow them in the way of holiness
and to come to the full radiance of glory.

All Amen

And the blessing of God the Almighty:
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, be with you now and remain with you always.

All Amen

HYMN 4 How great thou art ([please click on this link to hear the hymn](#))

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.

All In the name of Christ.

Amen.

The Liturgy of the Sacrament

Eucharistic Prayer (prayer E)

The Lord be with you

All and also with you.

Lift up your hearts.

All We lift them to the Lord.

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

All It is right to give thanks and praise.

It is indeed right, our duty and our joy,
always and everywhere to give you thanks,
holy Father, almighty and eternal God, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

And now we give thanks, most gracious God,
surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses
and glorified in the assembly of your saints.

The glorious company of apostles praise you.
The noble fellowship of prophets praise you.
The white-robed army of martyrs praise you.

We, your holy Church, acclaim you.

In communion with angels and archangels,
and with all who served you on earth and worship you now in heaven,
we raise our voice to proclaim your glory,
for ever praising you and saying:

**All Holy, holy, holy Lord,
God of power and might,
heaven and earth are full of your glory.
Hosanna in the highest.
Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.
Hosanna in the highest.**

We praise and bless you, loving Father,
through Jesus Christ, our Lord;
and as we obey his command,
send your Holy Spirit,
that broken bread and wine outpoured
may be for us the body and blood of your dear Son.

On the night before he died he had supper with his friends
and, taking bread, he praised you.

He broke the bread, gave it to them and said:

Take, eat; this is my body which is given for you;
do this in remembrance of me.

When supper was ended he took the cup of wine.

Again he praised you, gave it to them and said:

Drink this, all of you;

this is my blood of the new covenant,
which is shed for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins.

Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.

So, Father, we remember all that Jesus did,

in him we plead with confidence his sacrifice made once for all upon the cross.

Bringing before you the bread of life and cup of salvation,
we proclaim his death and resurrection
until he comes in glory.

Great is the mystery of faith:

All Christ has died.

Christ is risen.

Christ will come again.

Lord of all life,
help us to work together for that day
when your kingdom comes
and justice and mercy will be seen in all the earth.

Look with favour on your people,
gather us in your loving arms
and bring us with Polycarp and all the saints
to feast at your table in heaven.

Through Christ, and with Christ, and in Christ,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
all honour and glory are yours, O loving Father,
for ever and ever.

All Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

As our Saviour taught us, so we pray

All **Our Father in heaven,**
 hallowed be your name,
 your kingdom come,
 your will be done,
 on earth as in heaven.
 Give us today our daily bread.
 Forgive us our sins
 as we forgive those who sin against us.
 Lead us not into temptation
 but deliver us from evil.

For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours
now and for ever. Amen.

Breaking of the Bread

We break this bread to share in the body of Christ.

All **Though we are many, we are one body,**
 because we all share in one bread.

All **Lamb of God,**
 you take away the sin of the world,
 have mercy on us.

Lamb of God,
you take away the sin of the world,
have mercy on us.

Lamb of God,
you take away the sin of the world,
grant us peace.

Draw near with faith.

Receive the body of our Lord Jesus Christ
which he gave for you,
and his blood which he shed for you.

Eat and drink in remembrance that he died for you,
and feed on him in your hearts
by faith with thanksgiving.

All **We do not presume
to come to this your table, merciful Lord,
trusting in our own righteousness,
but in your manifold and great mercies.**

**We are not worthy
so much as to gather up the crumbs under your table.
But you are the same Lord
whose nature is always to have mercy.
Grant us therefore, gracious Lord,
so to eat the flesh of your dear Son Jesus Christ
and to drink his blood,
that our sinful bodies may be made clean by his body
and our souls washed through his most precious blood,
and that we may evermore dwell in him,
and he in us.**

Amen.

Communion is distributed.

Prayer after Communion

God our Redeemer,
whose Church was strengthened
by the blood of your martyr Polycarp:
so bind us, in life and death, to Christ's sacrifice
that our lives, broken and offered with his,
may carry his death and proclaim his resurrection in the world;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

All **Amen**

All **Almighty God,
we thank you for feeding us
with the body and blood of your Son Jesus Christ.
Through him we offer you our souls and bodies
to be a living sacrifice.
Send us out in the power of your Spirit
to live and work
to your praise and glory.**

Amen.