

St. Cyril of Jerusalem

(315–387; March 18)

In the net of Jesus

The basis of [St. Cyril's] instruction on the Christian faith also served to play a polemic role against pagans, Judaeo Christians and Manicheans. The argument was based on the fulfillment of the Old Testament promises, in a language rich in imagery. Catechesis marked an important moment in the broader context of the whole life—particularly liturgical—of the Christian community, in whose maternal womb the gestation of the future faithful took place, accompanied by prayer and the witness of the brethren. Taken as a whole, Cyril's homilies form a systematic catechesis on the Christian's rebirth through Baptism. He tells the catechumen: "You have been caught in the nets of the Church (cf. Mt 13:47). Be taken alive, therefore; do not escape for it is Jesus who is fishing for you, not in order to kill you but to resurrect you after death. Indeed, you must die and rise again (cf. Rom 6:11, 14). . . . Die to your sins and live to righteousness from this very day" (*Procatechesis*, 5).

*General Audience
June 27, 2007*

St. Polycarp of Smyrna

(69–155; February 23)

Eucharist and witness

I would like to reflect on a notion dear to the early Christians, which also speaks eloquently to us today: namely, witness even to the offering of one's own life, to the point of martyrdom. Throughout the history of the Church, this has always been seen as the culmination of the new spiritual worship: "Offer your bodies" (Rom 12:1). One thinks, for example, of the account of the martyrdom of St. Polycarp of Smyrna, a disciple of St. John: the entire drama is described as a liturgy, with the martyr himself becoming Eucharist.

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