

October 17: Eucharist and Mission

The feast of Saint Ignatius of Antioch, bishop and martyr, is commemorated today. He was arrested and taken by soldiers to Rome to be thrown to lions. While on his arduous journey he managed to write seven letters to various local churches. Addressing the Christian Romans, he urges them not to seek his release. Professing his faith, Ignatius writes: "I am the wheat of God, and am ground by the teeth of the wild beasts, that I may be found the pure bread of Christ." Ignatius saw that his mission was to become the Eucharist!

Saint John Paul II in *Mane Nobiscum Domine* (28) notes: "We cannot delude ourselves: by our mutual love and, in particular, by our concern for those in need we will be recognized as true followers of Christ (cf. Jn 13:35; Mt 25:31-46). This will be the criterion by which the authenticity of our Eucharistic celebrations is judged."

In his *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* (20) the same pope notes that the Eucharist "increases, rather than lessens, our sense of responsibility for the world today." He also quotes the poignant words of Saint John Chrysostom: "Do you wish to honor the body of Christ? Do not ignore him when he is naked. Do not pay him homage in the temple clad in silk, only then to neglect him outside where he is cold and ill-clad. He who said: 'This is my body' is the same who said: 'You saw me hungry and you gave me no food,' and 'Whatever you did to the least of my brothers you did also to me.' ... What good is it if the Eucharistic table is overloaded with golden chalices when your brother is dying of hunger? Start by satisfying his hunger and then with what is left you may adorn the altar as well." Mission means imitating the self-giving Christ in the Eucharist!