

Feast of St. Ignatius of Antioch,

PRIVATE

October 17, 2026

I knew a Baptist minister, who was a very good Christian, and who used to come often to make retreats at our monastery in Conyers. Several years ago he did not feel too well and went to see a doctor. After a series of tests the doctor told him that he had terminal cancer, and had probably only a few months to live. The man received that news with a very great peace and did not seem to be disturbed at all. The doctor was puzzled by that serenity and told him: *"Most people are very deeply disturbed or even discouraged when they are told that they have cancer, especially terminal cancer. How is it that you are so peaceful ?"* The man answered: *"Well, my conviction is that we are all terminal!"*

This, I think was the attitude of the great martyrs, like Ignatius, whom we celebrate today, who was one of the first Christian martyrs, and one of the greatest. For the martyrs, the whole meaning of life here on earth was that it was only a passage to the eternal life with God. And, therefore, death was not feared. It was rather awaited, often with joy, as the happy moment of entering into that eternal happiness.

Ignatius was the bishop of Antioch and was condemned to death. He is brought from Antioch to Rome by a group of Roman soldiers. It is a very long journey, and all along his journey, Ignatius writes seven letters to various Churches. These letters are among the most beautiful things ever written by a Christian. Ignatius, who knows that he will be given as food to the lions, in Rome, writes: *"I am the wheat of Christ, ground by the teeth of beasts to become pure bread"*.

As we receive the Body of Christ in this Eucharist, let us remember that it is the Body of Christ, that was ground like wheat during his passion and died for us. Let us ask for the courage to die to ourselves, to accept all the daily deaths that will allow us to face our own final death, when it comes, as a happy transition to a life of eternal happiness with God.

This Gospel text we have just read is a continuation of the one we had yesterday.

In Luke's Gospel, the whole of Jesus' teaching is set in a context of struggle between the kingdom of God, whose coming Jesus announces, and the forces of evil, represented first by the tempter in the desert, then by the increasingly strong opposition that the Pharisees and Scribes offer Jesus, until his long ascent to Jerusalem, where the forces of evil seem to have triumphed over him when he is put to death and laid in the tomb, awaiting the final victory of the Son of God on the morning of the Resurrection.

In the Gospel text we have just read, Jesus continues the long list of rebukes to the Pharisees and Doctors of the Law, much of which we read yesterday.

And all these rebukes are summarized in one terrible sentence: "Woe to you, doctors of the Law. You have taken away the key to knowledge; you yourselves have not entered into it, and those who tried to enter into it, you prevented them.

The knowledge of God is at the heart of all Revelation in both the Old and New Testaments. The human being, created in the image and likeness of God, is capable of knowing him and therefore also of loving him. But this knowledge is given to him - it is a gift. Here on earth we see God through the images we have of Him. In the age to come, we will see him face to face. But already here on earth we have a genuine knowledge of Him through love. A love that is pure gift, since this love has been placed in our hearts by the Holy Spirit. A love that manifests itself through faithfulness to His commandment - which is itself first of all the commandment of love, which underlies all the others.

In the temptation of Adam and Eve at the beginning of Genesis, the tempter wants to convince them that they can monopolize that knowledge which God, according to the tempter, would like to reserve for Himself. Jesus reproaches the Pharisees for having taken away the key to knowledge, replacing love with the observance of a multitude of commandments and practices.

At this Eucharist, let us ask ourselves to what extent we ourselves penetrate the mystery of the knowledge of God, through fidelity to His commandment of love of God and neighbor, and to what extent we close ourselves off from this knowledge - and at the same time block access to it for our brothers and sisters - whenever we fail to keep this fundamental commandment of love of God and neighbor.

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