

Ash Wednesday

Almighty and everlasting God, you hate nothing that you have made and forgive the sins of all those who are penitent: create and make in us new and contrite hearts that we, worthily lamenting our sins and acknowledging our wretchedness, may receive from you, the God of all mercy, perfect remission and forgiveness; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

23 February

Polycarp Bishop of Smyrna, Martyr c.155

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.

Amen.

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23 February

Polycarp Bishop of Smyrna, Martyr

Honoured as one of the first Christian martyrs, Polycarp had been Bishop of Smyrna on the Aegean 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 gathered together and buried outside the city; thus began the practice of celebrating the eucharist over his burial place on the anniversary of his death, a practice which also grew over the martyrs' tombs in the Roman catacombs. Polycarp died in the year 155.

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