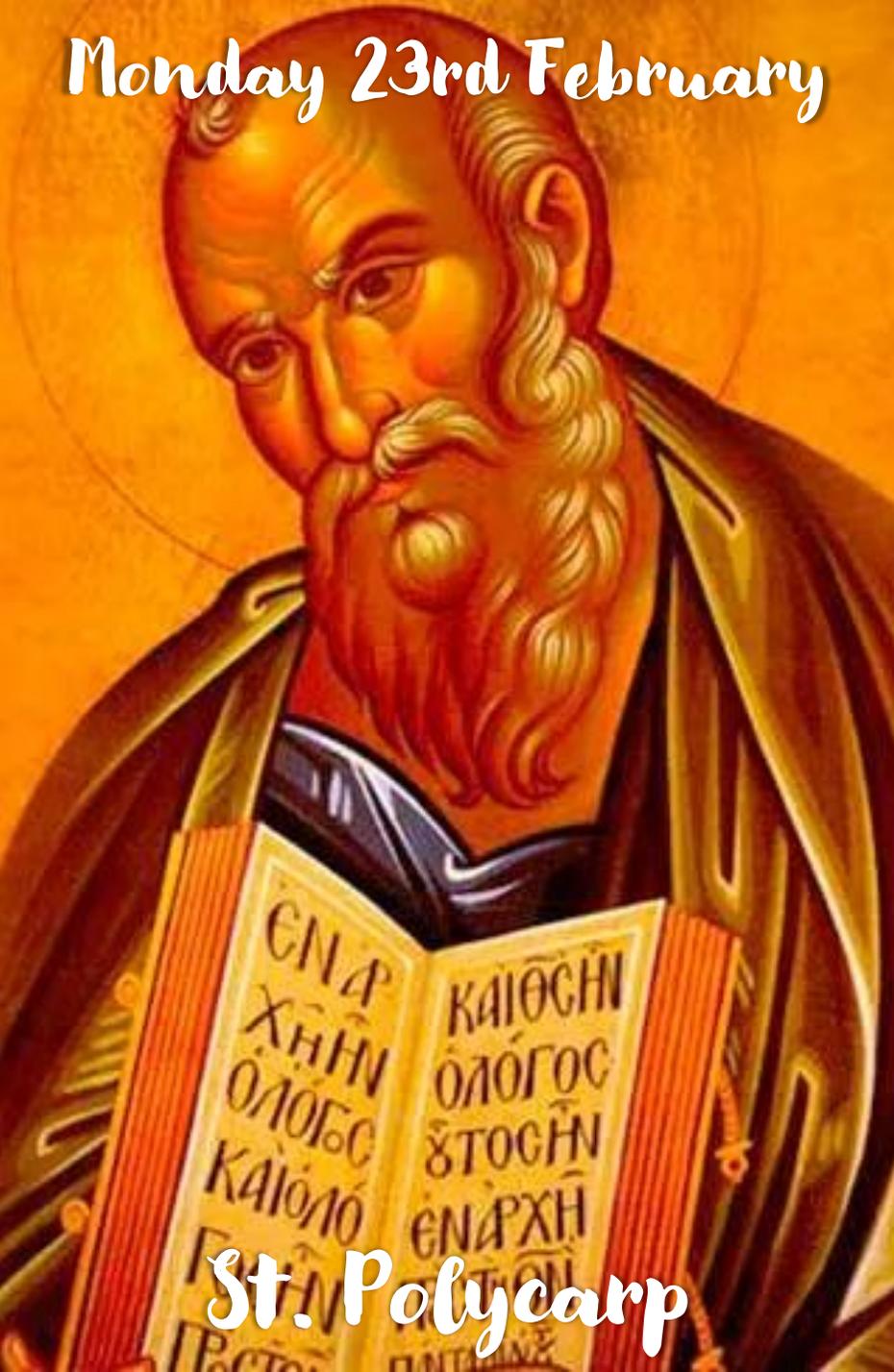




Prayers for the Week Ahead

WEEK BEGINNING 23RD FEBRUARY

Monday 23rd February



St. Polycarp

OFFICIAL

Polycarp (AD 69 - 155) was a Christian bishop of Smyrna. According to the 'Martyrdom of Polycarp', he died a martyr, bound and burned at the stake, then stabbed when the fire failed to consume his body.

Both Irenaeus and Tertullian say that Polycarp had been a disciple of John the Apostle, one of Jesus' disciples. In 'On Illustrious Men', Jerome writes that Polycarp was a disciple of John the Apostle and that John had ordained him as a bishop of Smyrna. Polycarp is regarded as one of three chief Apostolic Fathers, along with Clement of Rome and Ignatius of Antioch.

Prayer in honour of St. Polycarp:

God of all creation,

You gave your bishop Polycarp the privilege of being counted among the saints who gave their lives in faithful witness to the gospel. May his prayers give us the courage to share with him the cup of suffering and to rise to eternal glory. We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.

Amen.

Tuesday 24th
February

OFFICIAL

We often paint an idyllic picture of the early Christians. That for them, Christianity was a lifestyle. Their faith was the center of their lives; it affected everything they did. The first deacons were chosen because the Gentile widows were not being cared for by the Jewish members of the Church. (Acts 6:1) Paul had to take Peter to task because he refused to eat with the Gentile converts. (Galatians 2:11-14) Paul severely criticized the Corinthian community letting the poor go hungry while the rich ate with their friends. (1 Corinthians 11:17-34)

Nevertheless, the first Christians had a commitment to the truth that is rarely found in modern society. And perhaps the reason they catch our imagination is that they often went beyond seeking to live the truth. Many of them were willing to die for it. Such was the case with the Martyrs of Carthage. There had been a local uprising against the governor, Solon, and instead of conducting an investigation, he quickly blamed the Christians. Eight Christians were sentenced to death: Saints Montanus, Lucius, Flavian, Julian, Victorinus, Primolus, Rhenus, and Donatian. The story of their martyrdom, and what they endured, is harrowing to read. They themselves wrote the account of their imprisonment, and eye-witnesses wrote the account of their deaths. The early Christians were not perfect, but as a community, they possessed a rigorous commitment to the truth that is beyond inspiring. It is chilling in the best way. It calls us to a life so committed to the truth that we will give everything for it.

We may not be sentenced to death like the Martyrs of Carthage, but we're all called to a rigorous commitment to the truth. We're all called to seek the best way to live the Christian life. Are you and I rigorously seeking the best way to live the Christian life? What would happen if we did?



The Martyrs of Carthage

Wednesday 23rd
February



OFFICIAL

We all need a fresh start from time to time. The beautiful thing is that our God is a God of new beginnings. He is a God of fresh starts, second chances, and new possibilities. God is always inviting us to a new beginning. When something in our lives becomes full of tiredness, frustration, or stagnation, our reaction is to feel disoriented and uncertain about the next step. Often, this is exactly when God is inviting us to a new beginning.

Blessed Sebastian De Aparicio was a man of new beginnings. Each time he encountered a period of restlessness or uncertainty in his life, he sought out God for a new beginning and followed God's lead. Sebastian was born in Spain, but around the age of thirty-one, he began to feel restless. He felt God calling him to the New World, so he sailed to Mexico and played a pivotal role in spreading Christianity there while working as a farmer.

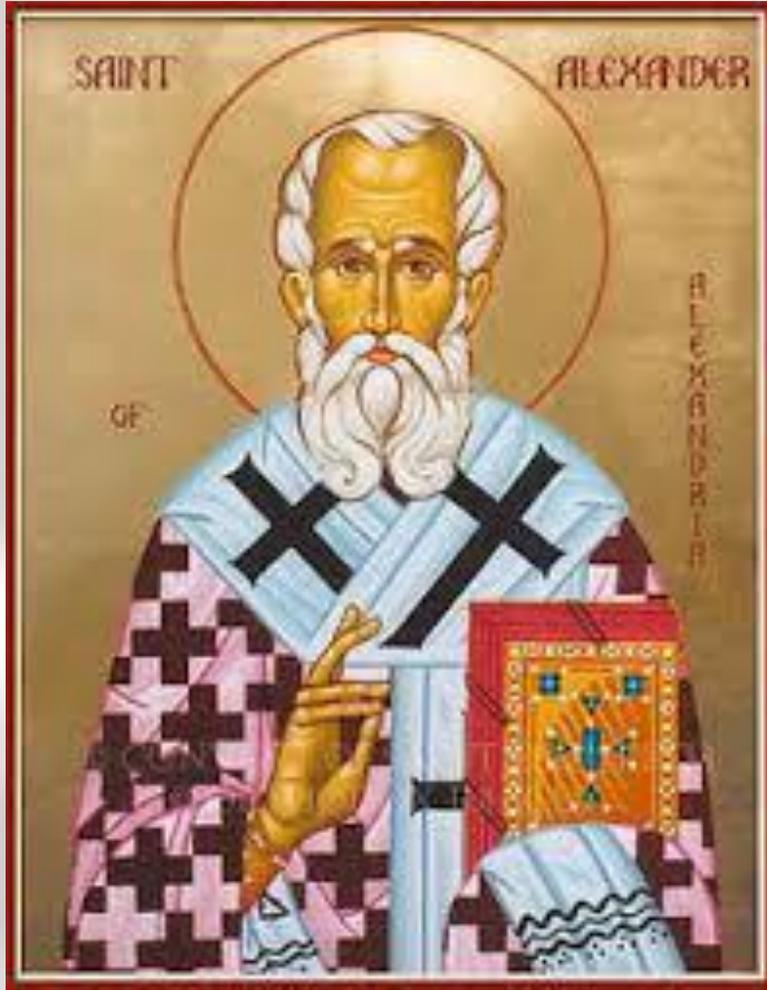
When he was seventy-two years old, his life filled with uncertainty again after his second wife died. So he asked God what he should do. And God gave him his answer: become a Franciscan. So that is what Blessed Sebastian De Aparicio did. He didn't let age stop him. He simply followed God's calling, and eagerly entered a new beginning.

Our God is a God of new beginnings. When things stop making sense, ask him what his plan is. And when you discern the answer, get ready for a fresh start.

Blessed Sebastian De Aparicio

Thursday 26th February

OFFICIAL



St. Alexander of Alexandria

The renowned business theorist Peter Drucker once said, "Meetings are by definition a concession to a deficient organization. For one either meets or one works. One cannot do both at the same time." Saint Alexander of Alexandria lived in a time when the Church was in desperate need of a meeting.

In the 300s, there was a major schism over whether Jesus was truly God. Saint Alexander wasn't confused—he affirmed the full divinity of Jesus. But Alexander didn't just announce his position and leave it at that. He organized the First Council of Nicaea in 325 AD, from which we have the Nicene Creed. He encouraged active participation from all Church members gathered there, whether they agreed with him or not. In the end, the meeting was successful, and the Church moved forward with the firm belief that Jesus was both truly God and truly man.

Saint Alexander of Alexandria recognized the need to step back from the usual work of the Church in order to work on the actual organization of the Church herself. And he knew this council, arguably the most important in Church history, would fail unless members on both sides actively participated. Meetings happen in many forms. They happen in professional life, of course. But they can also be family meetings, or meetings in your community or at your parish. Resolve today to actively pay attention and participate in your next meeting, whatever it may be. It will go a long way toward improving the health of your business, your family, your neighbourhood, or even the Church herself.

Friday 27th February

OFFICIAL



Gregor was born in a village on the shores of Lake Van between 945 and 950. When his parents died, Gregor and his older brother were raised by a scholarly uncle who had them educated at the Narek monastery where he was a monk. The monastery was a prominent center of learning located in what is now Turkey. Gregor too entered the monastery and was ordained in 977. A professor of theology, Gregor wrote a mystical interpretation of the Song of Songs, and a long mystical poem called the Book of Prayer or the Book of Lamentations. He described his poem as “an encyclopedia of prayer for all nations.” This classic of Armenian literature has been translated into 30 languages. The Russian text of the Book of Lamentations was set to music in 1985. Little else is known about Gregor, other than he died in the early 11th century and was buried within the walls of the Narek monastery where he had spent his life. In 2015 as the world observed the 100th anniversary of the Armenian genocide in the Ottoman Empire, Pope Francis concelebrated a Mass at the Vatican with Patriarch Nerses Bedros XIX Tarmouni and declared the monk, poet, and saint of the Armenian Apostolic Church, Gregory of Narek, a Doctor of the Church. His liturgical feast is celebrated on February 27.

As opposed to the Armenian Catholic Church that began in the 17th century, the earlier Armenian Apostolic Church did not accept the Council of Chalcedon’s 451 teaching that Christ was fully divine and fully human. In 1996, St. John Paul II and Apostolic Catholicos Karekin I signed a declaration confirming the common faith of their two Churches. Prayer often unites groups of people who have seen themselves as very distinct—even enemies.

St Gregory of Narek