

September 15 – Cyprian, *Bishop and Martyr of Carthage*, 258

Cyprian was a rich, aristocratic, and cultivated rhetorician in North Africa. He was converted to Christianity about 246, and by 248 was chosen Bishop of Carthage. A year later, in the persecution under the Emperor Decius, Cyprian went into hiding. For this he was severely criticized. Nonetheless, he kept in touch with his Church by letter, and directed it with wisdom and compassion. In the controversy over what to do with those who had lapsed during the persecution, Cyprian held that they could be reconciled to the Church after suitable periods of penance. His moderate position was the one that generally prevailed in the Church, over that of the rigorist Novatian, who led a group into schism at Rome and Antioch over this question. In another persecution, under the Emperor Valerian, Cyprian was placed under house arrest in Carthage, and on September 14, 258, he was beheaded.

Many of Cyprian's writings have been preserved. His Letter No. 63 contains one of the earliest affirmations that the priest, in offering the Eucharist ("the sacrifice") acts in the place of Christ, imitating his actions. In his treatise, *On the Lord's Prayer*, he wrote: "We say 'Hallowed by thy Name,' not that we want God to be made holy by our prayers, but because we seek from the Lord that his Name may be made holy in us, ...so that we who have been made holy in Baptism may persevere in what we have begun to be."

Although there is some question whether his book, *On the Unity of the Catholic Church*, affirms papal primacy, there is no question about the clarity of his statements on the unity of the college of bishops and the sin of schism. "The episcopate is a single whole," he wrote, "in which each bishop's share gives him a right to, and a responsibility for, the whole. So is the Church a single whole, though she spreads far and wide into a multitude of Churches...If you leave the Church of Christ, you will not come to Christ's rewards, you will be an alien, an outcast, an enemy. You cannot have God for your Father unless you have the Church for your Mother."

Collect: Almighty God, who gave to your servant Cyprian boldness to confess the Name of our Savior Jesus Christ before the rulers of this world, and courage to die for this faith: Grant that we may always be ready to give a reason for the hope that is in us, and to suffer gladly for the sake of our Lord Jesus Christ; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Reading: A reading from the letter of James (4:11-17) Do not speak evil against one another, brothers and sisters.* Whoever speaks evil against another or judges another, speaks evil against the law and judges the law; but if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge. There is one lawgiver and judge who is able to save and to destroy. So who, then, are you to judge your neighbour? Come now, you who say, 'Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a town and spend a year there, doing business and making money.' Yet you do not even know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. Instead you ought to say, 'If the Lord wishes, we will live and do this or that.' As it is, you boast in your arrogance; all such boasting is evil. Anyone, then, who knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, commits sin.

Psalm: 116:10-17 (page 759)

10 How shall I repay the Lord *
for all the good things he has done for me?

11 I will lift up the cup of salvation *
and call upon the Name of the Lord.

12 I will fulfill my vows to the Lord *
in the presence of all his people.

13 Precious in the sight of the Lord *
is the death of his servants.

14 O Lord, I am your servant; *
I am your servant and the child of your handmaid;
you have freed me from my bonds.

15 I will offer you the sacrifice of thanksgiving *
and call upon the Name of the Lord.

16 I will fulfill my vows to the Lord *
in the presence of all his people,

17 In the courts of the Lord's house, *
in the midst of you, O Jerusalem.
Hallelujah!

Gospel: John 10:11-16 'I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. The hired hand, who is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and runs away—and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. The hired hand runs away because a hired hand does not care for the sheep. I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father. And I lay down my life for the sheep. I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd.