

Reflection Monday Week 13 St Irenaeus 2021

St Irenaeus (130 - 202) born in Smyrna, Asia Minor (now Izmir, Turkey), emigrated to Lyons, in France, where he became bishop. It is uncertain whether he died a martyr or a natural death. He played a decisive role in fixing the canon of the New Testament since the Church had to agree, early on, what was scriptural and what was not.

Before Irenaeus, as people meditated on the Redemption, dissensions and heresies arose, and reference to scripture was the obvious way to settle what the truth really was. The absence of an agreed canon of scripture made this impossible.

So, Irenaeus went through all the books of the New Testament, and others such as the magical pseudo-Gospels, and the entertaining and uplifting novel *The Shepherd of Hermas*. He did not simply accept or reject each book; he gave reasons for and against the canonicity of each. Irenaeus's canon of scripture is very nearly the modern one (it excluded the three short universal epistles). He was the founder of biblical scholarship.

Irenaeus fought the Gnostics, who believed the world was irredeemably wicked, and the Valentinians, who claimed to possess a secret unwritten oral tradition passed from master to disciple through the ages. This pessimism and arcane elitism remain with us even today. Each generation must renew the fight against them.

In speaking to his disciples at the Last Supper and to us today, Jesus makes it clear that he is intricately entwined in everything we are, everything we say and everything we do. He adds that wherever he is, the Father is too, and, wherever the Father is, his love is present in all its richness. Wherever we look, whatever we do, whatever we think, whatever we say, God is present in all his fulness suggesting that we are swimming gently and reassuringly in a sea of love. It was this loving presence of the Father that inspired and guided Irenaeus in his choice of Biblical books. What will the Father's love inspire in you??