

## Reflection Tuesday Week 13 St Irenaeus 2022

**St Irenaeus (130 - 202)** was born in Smyrna, Asia Minor (now Izmir in Turkey) and emigrated to Lyons, in France, where he became bishop. He played a decisive role in fixing the canon of the New Testament. We need to remember that it was the Church that agreed, early on, what was scriptural and what was not. Before Irenaeus, there was vague general agreement on what scripture was but this was too weak. As people meditated on Redemption, dissensions and heresies inevitably arose. Reference to scripture was the obvious way to settle what the truth really was. Irenaeus went through all the books of the New Testament and all the candidates 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 almost the modern one (he does not quote from three universal epistles). He started the tradition of biblical scholarship. Irenaeus fought against the Gnostics, who believed the world was irredeemably wicked, and against the Valentinians, who claimed to possess a secret unwritten tradition passed on from master to disciple through the ages. This pessimism and arcane elitism remain with us today. Each generation must renew the fight against them. It is easy to see how the love of God and the love of Jesus inspired and guided the work of Irenaeus who we need to thank for leading us to the scripture through which God wishes to speak to us today. It is less easy to see that the same love of God and of Jesus is alive in us too guiding and leading us into a fuller understanding of the truth. May their love inspire us to be preachers of Good News and not lead people astray.