

## Prayer of the Month, June 2012

O Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world, look upon and have mercy upon us; you who are yourself both victim and priest, yourself both reward and redeemer, keep safe from all evil those whom you have redeemed, O Saviour of the world.

Irenaeus of Lyons, c.130–200

Jesus is the victor, and he is also the victim; he is the priest but also the sacrifice. This prayer of Irenaeus focuses on what Christ has brought about by his sacrifice. He has taken away not only our sin but the sin of the whole world, in echo of the liturgy. He has the power to redeem and to keep safe. Therefore we can claim his protection and benefit from his victory. What Christ has achieved for the world he has also achieved for each one of us. May we live under his protection and without fear because of what he has done for us.

Irenaeus (*circa* 130–200) was a pupil of Polycarp, and so probably came from Smyrna. It seems that he was sent by Polycarp to Gaul, where he set about combating heresy and upholding apostolic teaching. He was the first great Catholic theologian. He wrote in Greek, but sadly his greatest work, *Against the Heresies*, only survives in a rough Latin translation. He was the first writer to appeal to the New Testament as scripture in its own right. He claimed that we come closest to God in love, and not in knowledge. He taught that the history of man is a process of education by God. Man was imperfect originally, in the sense of immature, and has had to learn through divine education. Church historians of every age have praised the work and character of Irenaeus. He was reserved, but a hard worker, and a good preacher, using the language of the common people rather than Greek or Latin, so as to communicate more effectively. It is not known whether he was martyred. If so, then he may have perished in the persecution under Severus of 202. In any case, he is not likely to have lived much beyond the early years of the third century, seeing as he had much writing still to do when he died. His feast day is 28 June.

