

false preachers Valentine and Marcion, who were attempting to corrupt the faith in the capital of the empire.

An interesting disciplinary decree is attributed to Saint Anicetus by the Liber Pontificalis. He forbade the clergy to grow long hair after the precept of Saint Paul (I Cor. 11: 14). He established the tonsure for the clergy as a practice of ecclesiastical discipline. A letter to this purpose, which he wrote to the bishops of the churches of Gaul (France), is still extant.

Another distinguished visitor to Rome in the time of Saint Anicetus was Hegesippus. He is perhaps the earliest Church historian outside of the sacred authors.

Saint Anicetus died a martyr in 161, but the dates vary between April 16, 17 or 20. He was buried on the Vatican. His feast day is kept on April 17.

\*(excerpted from: [www.magnificat.ca](http://www.magnificat.ca); [www.cfpeople.org](http://www.cfpeople.org))

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## *Saint Anicetus, Pope and Martyr*

**Feast Day: April 17**



**DEFENDER OF THE FAITH.**

## Saint Anicetus

\*Saint Anicetus was a Syrian from Emesa. His father's name was John. He was the eleventh successor of Saint Peter, and succeeded to Saint Pius I and reigned for eleven years. His pontificate is interesting because during it the controversy over the date for celebrating Easter appears for the first (but by no means the last) time. At this period the Eastern Christians, following the tradition of Saints John and Philip, celebrated the feast of the Lord's resurrection on the fourteenth day of the Jewish month Nisan, the day on which Jesus ate the Paschal Supper. The Western Christians, on the other hand, celebrated the feast of the resurrection on the Sunday following the fourteenth Nisan. This seemed proper because although it would not always be the actual date of the Lord's resurrection, it would be the day. This is the reason that Sunday was already considered holy in Christian tradition. Against the authority of Saints John and Philip, the West urged the tradition of Saints Peter and Paul.

Now one of the most venerated figures in the mid-second century church was saint Polycarp, the bishop of Smyrna. This old man, at the time in his eighties, was a

disciple of the apostle Saint John. (By the fifties of the second century he must have been one of the last.) Saint Polycarp, naturally devoted to the practices he had learned from the apostle, wished to have the whole church celebrate Easter on the fourteenth Nisan. Accordingly, he came to Rome to confer with Pope Anicetus. The Pope was not convinced, but in turn he failed to convince Polycarp of the value of the Western date. Since this was not a question of doctrine but only of discipline, The Pope graciously allowed the venerable old saint to return to Smyrna and go on celebrating Easter on the date he had learned from Saint John. As Saint Irenaeus (Polycarp's disciple) relates a solution to the question was later settled by Pope Saint Victor.

Also during that time, Saint Anicetus had to combat in particular the dangerous errors of Gnosticism, Christ's ancient enemy, already rampant in the days when Saint John the Apostle wrote his letters to the churches of Asia. Saint Anicetus' vigilance protected his flock from the wiles of the