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St. Josaphat: Martyr for Christian Unity

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We have to keep a scorecard for St. Josaphat, because when you're speaking about the Catholic and the Orthodox Churches, you need a scorecard.

St. Josaphat was born at the end of the 16th century in present-day Poland, and he was raised in the Ukrainian Orthodox faith. As he grew up, he became attracted to Catholicism, so he became a Basilian monk—a monk following the Rule of St. Basil. With that, he entered the Ruthenian Catholic Church.

So now he's a Catholic. He has gone from being Eastern Orthodox—Ukrainian Orthodox—to a Catholic of the Ruthenian rite. By the way, there are 23 Eastern Rite Catholic Churches; the Ruthenian rite is one of them, as is the Ukrainian.

The Roots of the East-West Divide

After coming into the Catholic Church, Josaphat became a bishop. He was in favor of inviting other Orthodox Christians to come into the Catholic Church, though many were violently opposed to that.

The reasons—at that time and even today—why some Orthodox Christians do not want to come into communion with Catholicism include several deep theological and historical hurdles:

- **The *Filioque* Clause:** *Filioque* means "and the Son." The Orthodox believe that the Holy Spirit proceeds only from the Father, whereas in our faith, we believe the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son.
- **Papal Primacy and Infallibility:** The Orthodox do not believe that the Pope has primacy, viewing him as merely one among other equal bishops. He may be considered the "first among equals," but they do not believe the Pope has supreme jurisdiction over the universal Church, nor that he enjoys the charism of infallibility under certain circumstances.
- **Historical Wounds (1453):** At that time, there were still very hard feelings about what happened in 1453 when the Ottoman Muslims conquered Constantinople, and Rome offered no unified resistance, help, or response to their need. That's when the Hagia Sophia—then the world's largest Christian church—was taken over by the Muslims and became a mosque.
- **Fear of "Westernization":** There was a real fear that coming into union with Rome meant the Pope would start bossing them around, causing them to lose their liturgical language or have to change the Mass itself. In the Orthodox Church, it's called the Divine Liturgy, and it looks very different from what we do here daily or on Sundays. They wondered, *"Is the Pope going to Westernize our Eastern Church?"*

A Martyr for Unity

Because of all of these issues, many people were fiercely opposed to coming into communion with the Catholic Church. So, they killed Josaphat.

Today, forensic investigators would certainly call it overkill: they hit him first with a halberd, then they hit him with an axe, then they shot him, and finally, they threw him into a river. It was truly a crime of passion. Yet he willingly handed himself over. He lived under the threat of assassination for many years of his life, and so he is rightly called a "martyr for unity"—the unity of the Orthodox with the Catholic Church.

Even today, in our own time, St. John Paul II, Pope Francis, and already Pope Leo have made overtures to the Orthodox, trying to reconcile and bring them into communion with the Catholic Church.

Eastern Catholics in Our Own Backyard

Close to home, we have a Ruthenian Greek Catholic Church over in Harrisburg—St. Ann's. Maybe you've been to their food festival; they are known for their delicious food festivals.

And in Lancaster, the Ukrainian Catholic Church has bought the old Dominican Monastery on Route 501. If you're driving south on 501 into Lancaster, right before you get to Route 30, off to the right, the old monastery has been purchased and is being converted by the Ukrainian Catholic Church.

They are as Catholic as we are, even though they have a different canon law and a different liturgy. They're not under the direction of Bishop Senior, but under the Archeparchy of Philadelphia (and the neighboring Byzantine Catholics are under the Eparch of Passaic, New Jersey).

Breathing with Both Lungs

It was Pope St. John Paul II who said that the Church needs to learn to "breathe with both lungs," meaning both the Western and the Eastern traditions of Christianity.

So with our own hearts, let us continue to pray for that unity. May we be respectful of these other traditions, just as we pray that they will be respectful of ours, and may our common oneness in Christ draw us to the union that Christ himself prayed about in his High Priestly Prayer.