



Podcast: Saint Josaphat: Martyr for Unity, 12th November 2021
Mgr Daniel McHugh

Journey of Faith - Life from Holy Mass - with Monsignor Daniel McHugh

I was very blessed in the mid-90s to go to the Ukraine with Archbishop Couve de Murville, to begin a collaboration with the Catechetical Centre of the Greek Catholic Church in Lviv on behalf of Maryvale Institute. It was the time when the “underground Church” was emerging from the oppression of the Soviet Union. This was an opportunity for Maryvale to share its resources with the Catholics of the Ukraine and to learn more about the Church that celebrates its Liturgy according to the Byzantine Rite of the East.

The memorial of St Josaphat is especially significant as it was this Martyr for the Unity of the Church who played such an important role in the return of part of the Orthodox Church to union with Rome and the leadership of the successor of St Peter. Furthermore, he played a key part in ensuring that the Byzantine Rite would be part of the Liturgy of the wider Church.

Today in the Archdiocese of Birmingham we are enriched through the presence of Ukrainian Catholics who celebrate the Byzantine Rite and are one with the people of many different ethnic and cultural backgrounds and Rites in the great Mission of the Church. Recently the Ukrainians were part of our Annual Intercultural Mass marking One World Week and highlighting the communion in the Mission of the Church of people of many cultures on the occasion of Coventry being European City of Culture.

When we celebrate St Josaphat’s life and contribution to the Mission of the Church, we are reminded of the division in the Church – East and West – that came about in the 11th Century. The immediate problems included an insistence on the Byzantine Rite, married clergy and whether the Holy Spirit proceeded from the Father and the Son. The split only grew worse from there, centering mostly on whether to accept the authority of the Pope and Rome. More than five centuries later in what is now known Byelorussia and the Ukraine, but what was then part of Poland – Lithuania, an Orthodox Metropolitan of Kiev (today’s capital of Ukraine) and five Orthodox Bishops decided to commit the millions of Orthodox Christians under their pastoral care to reunion with Rome. Many of the millions of Christians did not agree with the Bishops. Both sides tried to resolve the matter; Josaphat who was working hard on Communion with Rome and reform of monastic life was a voice of peace in the dissent. However, the disagreements were not only in words but with violence. When Josaphat became Bishop of Vitebsk and Polotsk in 1617, he set about reform and had rebuilt the Church within 3 years by holding synods, publishing a catechism and enforcing rules for the conduct of clergy. The most important witness in all of this was the life of Josaphat itself which he spent in preaching, instructing others in Faith and visiting needy towns.

Monsignor Daniel McHugh

Co-ordinator for Ethnic Chaplaincies in the Archdiocese



The Separatists sought opportunities to discredit him and stirred up his own people to strike the first blow. As usual violence had the opposite effect. Regret and horror at how far the violence had gone and the loss of their Archbishop swung public opinion over towards Catholics and unity. Even Archbishop Smotrisky, Josaphat's rival, was reconciled with Rome. In 1867 Josaphat became the first Saint of the Eastern Church to be formally Canonised by Rome.

Celebrating the Feast of St Josaphat we are particularly aware of the riches of East and West in the life of the Church, sometimes called the "two lungs that the Church needs to breathe". (c.f. Pope St John Paul II UT UNUM SINT) Let us make that unity for which St Josaphat gave his life our prayer with this memorial. I conclude with 2 verses of the hymn based on St John's Gospel Chapter 17:

*O thou, who at thy Eucharist didst pray
that all thy church might be for ever one,
grant us at every Eucharist to say
with longing heart and soul, "thy will be
done."*

*O may we all one bread, one body be,
one through this sacrament of unity.*

*So, Lord, at length when sacraments shall
cease,
may we be one with all thy Church above,
one with thy saints in one unbroken peace,
one with thy saints in unbounded love;
more blessed still, in peace and love to be
one with the Trinity in unity.*

I am indebted to 'Catholic Online' for some of the factual detail of St Josaphat's life.

Thank you for listening. You can find more Podcasts from the Archdiocese of Birmingham on www.birminghamdiocese.org.uk/podcasts

Monsignor Daniel McHugh

Co-ordinator for Ethnic Chaplaincies in the Archdiocese