

## GREEK CATHOLICS IN AMERICA

By 1865 the United States had suffered tremendous casualties at the end of the American Civil War at the time when it began to develop as an industrial nation. As a result, laborers were recruited from various nations of Europe including the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Serfdom was abolished in the revolutionary year of 1848 in the Dual Monarchy but after the liberation the populace labored for the same landlords as poorly paid laborers. Greek Catholics began to depart for America in the 1880's for the coal mines and steel mills of the industrial northeast and for work in the urban regions.

The Greek Catholic faithful wanted to have their churches in this new land of opportunity and worked diligently to make that possible. Father John Volansky, a priest from Galicia, had established Saint Michael Church in Shenandoah, Pennsylvania in 1884 for the faithful of Galicia. From there he established the first Ruthenian Greek Catholic Church in the United States, Saint Mary Church, Freeland, Pennsylvania, in 1886. In succession other parishes followed in Hazelton, Kingston, Wilkes-Barre, and Olyphant, Pennsylvania and in Jersey City, Passaic, and Trenton, New Jersey, and in Minneapolis, Minnesota, and Whiting, Indiana. By 1894 there were 100,000 Greek Catholics in the United States.

Unfortunately, they were not well received by most of their Roman Catholic brothers and sisters. The Latin Catholic hierarchs lacked knowledge about the eastern Catholic Churches. In addition, there was still a strong sense of anti-Catholic feeling in the United States and the bishops thought a united front of standardized ritual was required. The Greek Catholics had arrived at the time of the Americanization movement and they were seen as threat to the creation of what some hoped to be the American Catholic Church. Finally, their priests were married and this was to become the main issue of disputation.

After the Holy See attempted a compromise between the Latin Catholic bishops and the Greek Catholics by enforcing celibacy, tens of thousands of faithful as well as priests left the Catholic Church and joined the Russian Orthodox Metropolia, following the example and invitation of Father Alexis Toth after his famous meeting with Archbishop John Ireland who refused to grant the widower priest faculties to celebrate the Divine Liturgy and hear confessions.



**Bishop Sotor Stephen  
Ortinsky, O.S.B.M.**

The Holy See attempted to stop the loss of faithful by finally allowing a bishop for Galician and Sub-Carpathian Greek Catholics in 1907 but although Bishop Sotor Stephen Ortinsky from Galicia at first was not granted any ordinary jurisdiction he labored to bring order until his untimely death in 1916.

After World War I, the Holy See divided the pastoral care of Greek Catholics and in 1924 appointed Bishop Constantine Bohachevsky to the Exarchate of Philadelphia for the care of those from Galicia and Bishop Basil Takach to New York for those who now numbered 300,000 from the Eparchies of Mukachevo and Prešov. Bishop

Takach moved his Episcopal see to Homestead, Pennsylvania and the Holy See recognized the mission eparchy as the Exarchate of Pittsburgh. Unfortunately, the Vatican decree *Cum data fuerit* issued in 1929 renewed the issue of celibacy and more faithful and priests departed. The ecumenical patriarch of Constantinople established the Carpatho-Russian Orthodox Diocese of Johnstown for these people.



**Bishop Basil Takach**

Despite the difficulties the faithful of the Exarchate experienced, new parishes were established and in time, in 1950, a seminary was built in Pittsburgh, Ss. Cyril and Methodius Byzantine Catholic Seminary. This was the occasion of a change of name from Greek Catholic to Byzantine Catholic Church. From the Exarchate of Pittsburgh, the Metropolitan Church of Pittsburgh, *sui iuris*, with Eparchies of Passaic, NJ, Parma, OH and Phoenix, AZ, was established.

In Europe, the Eparchies of Mukachevo and Prešov underwent their own Calvary as the atheistic communist governments of the Soviet Union and Czechoslovakia outlawed the eparchies and killed and imprisoned the bishops and some priests. At present, those nations and their governments have ceased while the eparchies have renewed their spiritual lives, while the Eparchy of Prešov was created an archeparchy and new eparchies have been established.

Saint Pope John Paul II beatified Blessed Bishop Theodore Romzha, Blessed Bishop Paul Gojdich, and Blessed Bishop Basil Hopko. The process for beatification has begun for the Servants of God Peter Oros and Alexander Chira.



**Blessed Bishop  
Theodore Romzha  
of Mukachevo**



**Blessed Bishop  
Paul Gojdich  
of Prešov**



**Blessed Bishop  
Basil Hopko  
of Prešov**

Although the narrative of the Byzantine Ruthenian Catholic Church in the United States evidences tragic elements, here as well a constant joyful and triumphal element is the strong enduring desire of the Faithful and their priests from one hundred twenty-five years ago to the present to have their own parish homes to meet God and worship Him and have Him speak to them and act in the sacraments according to the Byzantine synthesis. This heritage, the Byzantine patristic synthesis, is the glory of the universal Catholic Church and the eparchies have a duty to know and share this with the other members of the Catholic Churches and with others who would like to know God.



Blessed Sister  
Miriam Teresa  
Demjanovich

As a sign of the outpouring of God's grace, an American Byzantine Ruthenian Catholic woman, Sister Miriam Teresa Demjanovich, was beatified by Pope Francis in 2014 and is the first American Byzantine Catholic saint. Teresa Demjanovich was born in Bayonne, New Jersey in 1907 and baptized at Saint John the Baptist Byzantine Catholic Church in that city. After her graduation *summa cum laude* from the College of Saint Elizabeth she entered the religious order of the sisters of Charity of Saint Elizabeth and was given the name Miriam Teresa. She is regarded as an example of sanctity in a modern twentieth century woman, and, as a Byzantine Catholic who entered a Roman Catholic order of sisters, a spiritual heir of the brothers Ss. Cyril and Methodius. Among her books, *Greater Perfection* and *The Seventieth Week* are published.

There are new challenges in the new millennium but the promise made to the apostles at the mountain in Galilee two thousand years ago by the risen Lord remains with us: "I am with you always, until the end of the world."