

Byzantine Catholic Metropolitan Archdiocesan 75th Anniversary

Twenty-five years ago a number of you assembled here for the Golden Jubilee of the establishment of the Eparchy under the spiritual guidance of the great and holy Bishop Basil Takach. At that event, when the clergy gathered around Archbishop Stephen J. Kocisko of happy memory, I remember a question posed by one of the guests, "Who here present was on hand 50 years ago when Bishop Takach was installed as 'the first eparch'." There was silence, and then the questioner acknowledged that he had been here, representing the then Apostolic Delegate, Archbishop Pietro Fumasoni-Biondi.

He was Bishop George L. Leech, Bishop of Harrisburg from 1935 to 1971 and then Titular Bishop of Allegheny. Back in the 1920's he served as Secretary to the Apostolic Delegate in Washington and in 1974 he was here, an eager witness to the historic establishment of this particular church and a convinced witness also to the holiness and great abilities of her first bishop. I accompanied Bishop Leech twenty-five years ago for your celebration and that was one reason why I immediately accepted the invitation extended by Archbishop Judson Procyk to be with you this evening.

Other memories of associations through the years remain with me in a most positive way: there was the ordination as bishop in 1968 of a dear friend, Bishop Michael Dudick, as Bishop of Passaic, and my subsequent collaboration with him through the years when I served as a Latin Rite Bishop here in Pennsylvania. In time, as Bishop of Harrisburg, I served as President of the Pennsylvania Catholic Conference and there, as also on the Pennsylvania Conference for Inter-Church Cooperation, I had the opportunity to work closely with the bishops of the Eastern Catholic Churches, including Bishop Pataki, and to esteem their judgment, commitment and deep faith.

This evening I wish to say a word about relationships between the Eastern Catholic and Latin Rite Churches, a word about the larger setting of ecumenical relationships on the eve of the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000, and a word about a challenge and a hope which links all these together.

The positive relationships between the Eastern Catholic Churches and the Western Church have grown exponentially in recent years. As many of you know, a century ago this was not true. It was a sad period of history. The Latin Catholics, coming to this country largely from Western and Central Europe (Ireland, Germany, Italy, the Austro-Hungarian Empire and then from Slovakia, Lithuania, and Poland) faced the resistance most immigrants have found. In the United States, from the 1840's on, anti-Catholicism was an integral part of a nativist opposition to the strangers arriving in our land and it put the Church, her people and her leaders in a defensive mode.

When the first priests and people came from the Carpathian Mountain region of Central Europe, with their different liturgical language and way of worship, their canonical practices at variance with the Latin Church, many of the Latin Rite, clergy and laity both, were confused and also fearful. Among other things, they were afraid that the new ways – really very old ways sanctioned by Sts. Cyril and Methodius and the Apostolic See – would give the anti-Catholics more ammunition for the discrimination already practiced with such bitterness and abandon. The un-Christian reaction of the Latin leaders and people of a century ago must be on our minds today as, in the spirit of the Great Jubilee, Latin Catholics ask for pardon as we recall the suffering, pain and loss experienced by our brothers and sisters from Eastern Catholic Churches Catholics during those years.

With the Second Vatican Council came a fresh appreciation of the richness and depth of the faith preserved at great cost in the Eastern Catholic Churches. I can remember vividly an intervention of Bishop Elko during the Council. I mused at the time that perhaps he was prac