

Related Reflection for 1 August 2010

The West?

In today's bulletin I have written that the Basilica of St. Mary Major in Rome (the feast of the dedication of this church will be this Thursday August 5) was the first major church erected "in the West" in honor of Mary after the Council of Ephesus in 431 AD. What the heck is meant by "the West"?

Center of Gravity

God is the center of gravity, and the Triune God has revealed Himself to us in Jesus. Jesus is the visible center of gravity. Jesus, having ascended to the Father's right hand and having sent us God the Holy Spirit, is visible to us in his Body, the Church. The visible center of the Body of Christ which is the Church is Rome. So, if I am standing with my head oriented northward (which is not the only vantage point), what lies to the left of Rome is "the West" and what lies to the right of Rome is "the East".

The Roman Catholic Church

The **Roman** (particular location) **Catholic** (universal; everywhere) Church is comprised of many Ritual Churches. While these Ritual Churches differ somewhat in their laws, rituals, customs, and local bishops; each of these Ritual Churches recognize the **Bishop of Rome**, as the successor of Peter to be the perpetual and visible principle and foundation of unity of both the bishops and of the faithful.

Two Traditions, Twenty-Two Ritual Churches

There are two large traditions that make up the Catholic Tradition, namely: 1) the Eastern Tradition with twenty-one Ritual Churches, and 2) the Western Tradition with one Ritual Church.

The Ritual Church comprising the Western Tradition is called the **Latin** Ritual Church, and historically our Eastern friends in the faith refer to us as “**the Latins**”. We “Latins”, in turn, often refer to our neighbors in the Eastern Tradition as “**the Greeks**”. I find it interesting that whenever there is a canonization Mass in Rome (that is, whenever someone is declared to be a saint), the Gospel during that Mass is read twice: once in Latin and again in Greek. Pope John Paul II used to say that the Eastern and Western Traditions of Catholicism are the two lungs of the one Body of Christ.

Not the Blob

Although our town is frequently associated with a certain shapeless-ness (“The Blob”), this is not the case with the local expressions of the richness and breadth of the Catholic Faith in our midst.

In our neck of the woods both lungs of Catholicism breathe through our **six (!)** Roman Catholic Parishes:

- 1) St. Michael the Archangel Byzantine **Ruthenian** Catholic Parish in Mont Clare, and then in Phoenixville...
- 2) Saints Peter and Paul Byzantine **Ukrainian** Catholic Parish
- 3) St. Mary of the Assumption Parish
- 4) Sacred Heart Parish
- 5) Holy Trinity Parish

6) St. Ann Parish

Orthodoxy and Catholicism

Holy Ghost Orthodox Parish stands at the intersection of Bridge and Starr Streets in our borough. It looks like a Catholic Church, especially like the Eastern Catholic Churches (St. Michael's in Mont Clare and Saints Peter & Paul in Phoenixville). Is it a Catholic parish? What is the Orthodox Church?

A quick and un-nuanced response is that there are great similarities in beliefs, liturgy and tradition between the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church, there are also some significant differences. One significant difference is that the Orthodox Churches do not accept the Bishop of Rome as the earthly leader of their religion.