The Annual Lambing Lecture

Rev. Thomas Wilson,
will speak on St. Bernard Church,
the subject of his recent book.

Sunday April 13, 1997
2:30 PM
St. Bernard Church, Mount Lebanon
Open to the public.
(Directions on page 4.)

Spiritual Counsel of Catholic Homilists in Eighteenth Century Pennsylvania and Maryland

By Rev. Joseph Linck, C.O., Ph.D.

[Editor's note: What follows is condensed from a lecture given to the society by Oratorian Father Linck on October 6, 1996. An historian, Father Linck serves in campus ministry at several Pittsburgh schools.]

Peter Bayley has written: "Preaching is a littérature engagée: it aims to convince men of certain ideas and move them to act in accordance with certain principles. It is a record of temperament, taste, and conviction, and an especially valuable record at a time when church-going is widespread, and mass-media unknown."

If this was true of the period which Bayley treated (France of the seventeenth century), it is equally true of the Catholic community of eighteenth-century Anglo-colonial America. Unfortunately, there is a scarcity of surviving material on which to base an account of life in this community. Yet the over 400 homiletic manuscripts which comprise the American Catholic Sermon Collection at Georgetown University provide the researcher with many insights into not only the spiritual but also the social lives of Catholics of colonial Maryland and Pennsylvania. Here, we will consider only the "spiritual counsel" or religious advice which the homilists offered to their flocks.

The sermons span the eighteenth century, and represent the labors of over forty priests on the Maryland and Pennsylvania mission, the majority of whom were members of the Society of Jesus. The sermons were typically eight pages in length, written out in entirety. They can be described as having a "plain style," using unadorned language with the aim of educating in the truths of faith.

The sermons were practical. The Jesuits in particular stressed that a "direct struggle and direct effort" were needed to "overcome defects and acquire virtues," and the regimen they prescribed to accomplish this was founded on the notion of the imitation of Christ and the saints, and included such practices as prayer, spiritual reading, pence, the sacraments, and concrete acts of charity.

The notion of "imitation" was foundational in colonial homiletics. We see this in Bernard Diderich's exhortation to "Follow then... the example of your crucified Savior. If we are like to Christ by penance, by crosses and afflictions, we may be sure to be in the way as to a happy eternity." Bishop John Carroll would comment that "The life of Jesus, and the instructions contained in it, are the most useful book, and the most advantageous for meditation... There are to be found the most perfect models of Christian virtue, and the best encouragements to practice them."

The preachers also considered the saints, especially the Virgin Mary, as worthy of imitation. Father William Hunter pointed out to his flock, "Thus you see, Dear Christians, the means by which the Blessed Virgin Mary mounted to the happiness which she now enjoys. No other way is open to us. The same path which conducted her to glory, will also lead us thither. We shall be partners in her reward, if we copy her witness."
Gathered Fragments

Frequent prayer was urged upon the colonial Catholics. Arnold Livers asks of those who protest that they have not the time: “What reasonable pretense can hinder them from daily saying the short office to our Blessed Lady, and the penitential psalms, with the long Litanies, besides a short half-hour devoted to their evening prayers?” One prayer warmly advocated was the rosary, perhaps because it was seen to be, in Father Lewis’ words: “a devotion suited to all capacities and states: for a traveler may perform it on the road, a laborer at his work, a tradesman in his shop, a gentleman in his walks ... and a sick man confined to his bed.” John Bolton saw the excellence of the rosary to be its ability to lead one’s mind “through all the mysteries of man’s redemption,” and discounted any ideas that Marian prayer represented a greater confidence in Mary than in God, exclaiming, “no, God forbid, this is what we utterly abhor as blasphemy itself ... [rather it shows] we have a greater confidence in her prayers than in our own.”

The homilists also advocated spiritual exercise in common, John Bolton encouraging his audience to imitate the disciples in the Cenacle at Pentecost by “setting an example of it in your families, praying together like apostles: father, mother, and children, all with one voice and heart.”

The preachers insisted that the individual should periodically find respite from the pressures of the world. Augustine Jenkins called upon his flock to: “set apart some little time in the year, wherein renouncing all worldly distractions as much as possible, we might with more than ordinary recollection, employ ourselves wholly in heavenly travel.” John Bolton saw the excellence of the rosary to be its ability to lead one’s mind “through all the mysteries of man’s redemption,” and discounted any ideas that Marian prayer represented a greater confidence in Mary than in God, exclaiming, “no, God forbid, this is what we utterly abhor as blasphemy itself ... [rather it shows] we have a greater confidence in her prayers than in our own.”

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The homilists also recommended penitential practices, especially during Lent. Henry Neale told his Philadelphia congregation on Ash Wednesday 1748: “By pampering the flesh, we only fatten a victim for death, and prepare a greater trophy for the grave ... Moderate your body by fasting, with praying, with watching, with hair cloth, and with other pious artifices of self-denial and abnegation.”

Sacraments were an obvious component of the life of any Catholic, and the homilists emphasized their importance. Confession was usually presented as the necessary preparation for reception of holy communion. A great concern was the rapidity with which their people seemed to relapse into sin. The Eucharist, of course, was the great remedy for spiritual maladies, if properly received. Yet here, too, the missioners were concerned with the abuses they saw, not least of which was laxity in fulfilling the Easter Duty. Bernard Diderich said: “those who communicate very seldom or never are the worst portion of the church of God.”

Finally, the colonial sermons emphasized social justice. Wealthy Catholics were told they must “find work enough to manage your estate, to support your family, to defend the oppressed, to protect orphans and widows, to relieve the poor.” James Walton asked: “Shall we never try whether God will not prove more faithful, and whether our liberalities to the poor will not render him more favorable to our designs? I know not whether my eyes deceive me: I see on all sides ample fortunes ruined, families disgraced ... and that by gaming, ambition, idleness, debauchery and prodigality. But I see nobody that is reduced to these deplorable circumstances by alms.”

One will note how practical was the catechesis offered by these missioners. The ideal of the imitatio Christi, lived out in a regimen of prayer, asceticism, frequenting of the sacraments, and charity provided a solid foundation for the colonial Catholic, and indeed was not only preached but practiced by those who ministered to them.
The 350th Anniversary of the Union of Uzhorod
By Msgr. Russell A. Duker, S.E.O.D.

The year 1996 was significant in the Ruthenian Catholic Church. Throughout the year, celebrations were held in the United States and in the ancestral homelands of Central and Eastern Europe, marking the 350th anniversary of the Union of Uzhorod. This ecclesiastical act established full communion and solidified the bond of unity between the Ruthenian Church and the Church of Rome and thus created the Ruthenian Catholic Church.

On April 24, 1646, sixty-three Ruthenian priests convened in the chapel on the grounds of the Uzhorod Castle, and there they signed a profession of the Catholic faith, the Union of Uzhorod. At the time, the city of Uzhorod was capital of Carpatho-Ruthenia. Today, it is in Western Ukraine, and the Ruthenian homelands are divided geographically, listed as ethnographic territories within other political entities: Ukraine, Slovakia, Poland, Hungary, and Serbia.

With the waves of immigration from Eastern Europe — from the late 19th century until just after World War I — thousands of Ruthenians left their homeland for the United States. Attracted by the promise of jobs in steel mills and coal mines, several thousand journeyed to Western Pennsylvania. These pioneers found their adopted homeland, with its hills and valleys, strikingly similar to their native region.

Their first priority was to establish one of their own churches. The parochial community was to serve as the focal point of their lives. They were Catholics, but of the Byzantine Rite, and their spirituality reflected the rich patrimony of Eastern Christianity that their forebears had received from the missionary apostles Saints Cyril and Methodius in the ninth century. The Ruthenian immigrants were to become religious pioneers, for it was through their tenacity of faith and unshakable loyalty to their beloved Byzantine Catholic Church and to the Eastern form of Christianity that they would — against seemingly insuperable obstacles — plant within the soil of this new homeland the seeds of what today is the American Byzantine Catholic Church, which spans beyond the limited parameters of any specific ethnic group and embraces all peoples.

The Byzantine Catholic Church in the United States traces its roots to the Union of Uzhorod. The city of Pittsburgh, because of the dense concentration of the original immigrants to Western Pennsylvania, is the center of this particular Church in America. The Metropolitan See of Pittsburgh is presided over by Archbishop Judson M. Procyk, the Metropolitan Archbishop of Byzantine Catholics in the United States. Saints Cyril and Methodius Seminary, on Pittsburgh’s North Side, is the major seminary for the Byzantine-Ruthenian Church.

Highlighting the 350th anniversary were two major events. First was the magnificent celebration in the city of Uzhorod on April 24. Five separate pilgrimages set out from America, including one from Pittsburgh with about 100 priests and faithful. Around forty hierarchs concelebrated the outdoor Divine Liturgy on the grounds of Uzhorod Castle, attended by several thousand faithful. Principal celebrant was the Secretary for the Congregation for Eastern Churches in Rome, who served as the Holy Father’s personal legate. The homilist was Pittsburgh’s Metropolitan Archbishop Judson Procyk.

Emotions were both bitter and sweet, reflecting the sorrow of this former “Church of silence” during nearly five decades of suppression by an atheistic regime that specifically sought the annihilation of the Byzantine Catholic Church. Yet there was now ecstatic joy — hope brought about by a renewal of the Church. On the horizon is a new evangelization of myriads of people formerly under the yoke of communism, who are now flocking to the arms of their comforting mother, the Church.

The second major observance of the 350th jubilee took place October 25-27 in Rome, at the request of the Holy Father. Once again, several thousand Byzantine Catholics came on pilgrimage to Rome from the Ruthenian territories. They were joined by a large delegation from the United States. On October 25 a Solemn Pontifical Divine Liturgy was celebrated before an overflow throng in the Basilica of St. Mary Major. In this basilica, in the year 869 A.D., Saints Cyril and Methodius celebrated the Divine Liturgy in the Slavonic language before Pope Adrian II, and thus received papal approbation for their mission among the Slavs. They also received approval for the celebration of the liturgy in the Slavonic language rather than Greek or Latin. The Ruthenian Church traces its origin to the efforts of Saints Cyril and Methodius, and the custom of using the language of the people in liturgy emanates from this particular event in Rome.

The Russian Church of St. Anthony the Great in Rome was the setting for a Pontifical Divine Liturgy on October 26, again before an overflow crowd. Prayers were offered for the beatification and eventual sainthood of Bishop Theodore George Romza of Uzhorod, who was only thirty-three when he was murdered in 1947 by communists for his refusal to take the Ruthenian Catholic Church into schism, joining the government-controlled Russian Orthodox Church. While a seminarian in Rome in the 1930s, Theodore Romza worshiped daily in the Church of St. Anthony the Great.

The Papal Divine Liturgy took place in St. Peter’s Basilica on Sunday, October 27. Pope John Paul II, recuperating from...
an appendectomy, was present in his first public appearance after his surgery. The Pope was principal celebrant of the Liturgy of the Word, bestowing the blessings throughout the Divine Liturgy, and he also preached the homily. Metropolitan Archbishop Judson Procyk was the principal concelebrant for the Liturgy of the Eucharist and addressed the Holy Father on behalf of the assembly.

In his homily the Pope praised the faithful for their exemplary fidelity through these 350 years. He remembered with visible emotion that Ruthenian Catholics “have paid dearly for this Union,” adding that this particular Church has “never been without the experience of the cross.” He challenged the Church to a “new era of evangelization and growth” with the advent of the third millennium. He noted the special mission that Ruthenian Catholics have in working for unity with their Eastern brethren. This must be accomplished “first of all by prayer, then by the example of your lives, by a scrupulous fidelity to the ancient traditions of the East, by better knowledge of each other, by working together, and by a brotherly attitude.”

Canon law classifies the Ruthenian Byzantine Catholic Church as an ecclesia sui juris, that is a particular Church within the Universal Church. The 350th anniversary has given this Church occasion to reflect upon its history, to appreciate its present, and to set goals for the future. The Roman Pontiff, who is Patriarch of the West, has given his approbation and paternal solicitude. As Vicar of Christ on earth who shepherds the Universal Church, John Paul II has most vividly displayed his respect and admiration for the Ruthenian Byzantine Catholic Church. All those who filled St. Peter’s for this occasion were uplifted spiritually. They will have fond recollections for many years to come.

Msgr. Duker, Vicar General and Chancellor of the Byzantine Catholic Archdiocese of Pittsburgh, served as master of ceremonies for the October 27 Papal Liturgy. He holds a doctorate in historical theology from the Gregorian University’s Pontifical Institute for Eastern Studies in Rome.

RECENTLY PUBLISHED BOOKS

*Figther With A Heart — Writings of Msgr. Charles O. Rice, Pittsburgh Labor Priest*, edited by Charles McCollester (University of Pittsburgh Press, 1996). A stimulating collection of newspaper columns (with photos) covering the past 50 years. Known as the Labor Priest, Rice has also been active in the struggles for civil rights, race relations, peace and justice, and the homeless poor . . . *A Transfer Please: Memories of Riding the Streetcar*, by Rev. James W. Garvey (J. Pohl Assoc., 1706 Berkwood Dr., Pittsburgh, PA 15243; $7 includes shipping and handling; 1996). The Catholic Historical Society’s president, Father Garvey recalls a time when there were fewer autos and families depended on streetcars for shopping, getting to work, and visiting with extended family. This slim volume includes a number of photos . . . *Weapons of the Spirit: How to Live a Holy Life in Unholy Times*, edited by Mike Aquilina and David Scott (Our Sunday Visitor, 1-800-348-2440; 1997). A hefty anthology of the writings of Pittsburgh’s Father John Hugo, who was a renowned retreat master as well as spiritual director to Dorothy Day. Father Hugo was a spiritual guide to the peace movement as well as the nascent Charismatic Renewal. This is the first time his writings have been collected for publication . . . *The History of St. Joseph Church, O’Hara Twp.* A look back, on the occasion of the parish’s sesquicentennial, 1995.

Directions to the 1997 Lambing Lecture: From Downtown, proceed through Liberty Tubes, straight on W. Liberty Ave. for about 1.5 miles. St. Bernard Church is on the left at the intersection of Washington Rd. and Bower Hill Rd.