

St. Josaphat Kuncevych's Quatercentenary 400th Martyrdom:

November 12, 1623—Josaphat's Youth

(PART 1)

When John (St. Josaphat) grew up to boyhood, his parents sent him to school where he learned Polish and Slavonic languages. His fantastic natural intelligence helped him finish school quickly and with honors. The Holy Spirit helped him to memorize the entire service of the mass. When he was 10 years old, John knew all the monastic rules of the Basilian Brotherhood, the morning and evening office prayers, and would recite them from memory daily. He never once missed praying them until death closed his lips, a period of thirty years.

John was then sent by his parents from his small town of Volodymyr to work for a wealthy clothing merchant, Yakinta Popovich, in the capital city Vilno, Lithuania (today called Vilnius). The large, corrupt city was filled with moral depravity and heresies that flowed through this hub of commerce. God himself both protected St. Josaphat and counseled him to stay pure and unswayed by the worldliness around him. During this time, his greatest pleasure was to go to the Church and adore Our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament. In his free time, he poured over books of the lives of the saints and of Church Literature.

When John was 14, in 1596, an outbreak of revolt against the church united to Rome broke out and many were led astray from the true Catholic faith. This revolt was led by a faction of heretics under the rich Prince Ostrowsky, under the Byzantine Church. Prince Ostrowsky financed the operation to spread lies about the Catholic Church, misleading people under the guise of liberty and religious piety. The heretical church grew in both numbers of persons and of churches. Those faithful to Rome became small and retained only one single church, the church of the Holy Trinity and were referred to as Uniates. Growing up during these controversies required John to have strength and exercise prudence to keep peace in his soul and preserve the balance of kindness and justice with those he was in daily contact with.

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November 12, 1623—Josaphat's Youth (PART 2)

There were no counselors for John to guide him in what was happening between the churches. Where could he find the truth in this situation? He sought out the higher truth that he dedicated himself to; and as all saints do, he followed the narrow and straight path.

According to Theodosia Boresky, "In all earnestness he got down on his knees before the favorite ikon of the Crucified Lord and asked God, the unfailing guide, for enlightenment in the direction he should take; 'O send out thy light and thy truth, let them lead me, let them bring me into Thy holy hill and thy tabernacles.' (Psalm 43:3) And God did not forsake His chosen one but revealed to him His divine will. Almost instantly he became aware of the newly revealed truth and at the same time felt in his heart such doubt and skepticism for the Schismatic, Byzantine Church that he unconsciously repeated with the psalmist 'Show me Thy ways, O Lord; teach me Thy paths. Lead me in Thy truth and teach me: for Thou art the God of my salvation: on Thee I wait all the day.'" (Life of St. Josaphat: Martyr of the Union) With a renewed spirit, inward joy, and determination, St. Josaphat joined the Uniate Church.

At the Uniate Church of the Holy Trinity, he attended daily mass, sang in the choir (high soprano), decorated the altars, rang the bells, and prayed to Almighty God that those who had been led astray would return to the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church.

It was clear that this disease of spiritual ignorance demanded a desperate remedy. What would happen to those who were ignorant of the basics of their faith on which their salvation depends on? St. Josaphat became aware of his vocation and the one thing he had to do on earth.

The purpose of John's worldly life had been accomplished. He had reached the height of Christian piety, yet God was calling him to an even higher order of sanctity, that of the monastic brotherhood, as a monk. This great soul would deny himself in order to possess all. Worldly treasures lost their value, and his heart desired to follow Christ who said in Matthew Chapter 19, verse 21 "Jesus said to him, 'if you wish to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to the poor and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.'" John gave up being a merchant of worldly goods to become a merchant of heavenly treasures.

Nothing could dissuade his decision to become a monk, not even being offered the hand of the Yakinta's only daughter in marriage, together with all his possessions, he declined all of it. God's voice was stronger than any threats or harsh treatment. Nothing could shake his resilience. John had made up his mind to leave the world, become a monk and live for God.