

Old Catholicism, the Nature and Promise of the Union of Scranton

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Old Catholicism – A Gift

You have already heard a short history of the path that was taken in the formation of the Old Catholic Churches and so I will not restate those facts as a part of this discussion. But rather we will take a step back and consider the nature of each of the phases within the formulations of Old Catholicism and see how they add to the totality of the nature of Old Catholicism.

First, I want to begin by stating that the Polish National Catholic Church, which I serve as Prime Bishop, has always considered Old Catholicism and these Churches desire to join together within the original Union of Utrecht as a great gift within Western Catholicism. The Polish National Catholic Church was organized within the United States in the later part of the 19th century. It grew out of local conflicts between Polish immigrants (or East European immigrants more widely) and the American hierarchy which had no Eastern European representation. While this is often described as a conflict between the immigrant laity and the native clergy this is not entirely the case. A real aspect of the conflict was one between different expressions of the Catholic faith, different ways in which the Catholic faith was actually lived among the people of God. A particular expression of Catholic life was lived out for these immigrants when they were in their native country. It was denied them in America and they were forced to accept a different relationship with the native clergy, a different governance structure, and not only a different language, but an entirely different expression of the faith that they held.

Father Hodur railed against this pressure that was placed upon the relative few Polish immigrant priests and especially the entire Polish immigrant laity. Realizing that there was no support within the native clergy at any level, he went to Rome to see if they would support this cause of the people. It became clear that it would not as he was sent home and told to submit to the American bishops, and especially to their way of governance. As a result, this fledgling movement had two choices, either submit to this new expression of the catholic faith or be excommunicated for following the way they worshiped and lived in their native country.

Holding fast to the concept that their own expression of the faith was a valid one, especially as it had been lived for centuries within Poland, these immigrants continued to worship in the catholic fashion and they, together with Fr. Hodur, set up a church governance which modeled what they knew from Poland. For this and his refusal to submit to the bishop, Father Francis Hodur was excommunicated from the Roman Catholic Church on September 29, 1898. (This action followed only 3 months after the excommunication of Bishop Anthony Kozlowski in Chicago, IL, for much the same reasons and also that he was consecrated an Old Catholic Bishop) Although this action certainly did intimidate and scare the less hearty of his fold, most knew that they were no less faithful Catholic Christians then they were in Poland.

In holding fast to their Catholic faith, these immigrants and especially Father Hodur realized that apostolic succession was a vital and necessary part of the catholic faith and expression. In response, Father Hodur was elected candidate for Bishop at the first Synod of the fledging church held in 1904, but this election was only a first step, consecration by valid bishops in apostolic succession had to be a part of this movement in order that it would remain truly Catholic.

Even at this time within the United States there were a variety of those who claimed to be bishops and to hold apostolic succession. Father Hodur would not turn to any of these, as their succession was questionable. He turned to the surest expression of the catholic faith, which was apart from Rome, the Union of Utrecht and especially the Church of Utrecht which was separate from Rome since 1724. It would happen that Father Hodur would have to wait until 1907 because of the Union of Utrecht's policy that there should only be one bishop within a governmental boundary. Upon the death of Bishop Kozlowski in Chicago in 1907, Bishop Hodur traveled to Utrecht and after meeting with the Church of Utrecht bishops, he was consecrated on September 29, 1907 in Utrecht by the three bishops of the Church of Utrecht.

It is in this sense that we consider Old Catholicism as a great gift, it allowed the Polish National Catholic Church within the United States and Canada to fulfill what it acknowledged about itself, that it was a Catholic Church that fully expressed the Catholic faith, although not in the way of the predominate culture of the United States did at the time.

Full Reflection on the Gift

But as it sometimes is with a gift, it may take time for the full appreciation of it to be revealed. Just as if someone gives a beautiful painting, it can certainly be appreciated for itself, as a beautiful picture. That appreciation would also certainly deepen if it is later discovered that the painting was from the collection of a well-known master.

After the Polish National Catholic Church received consecration of its Bishop from the bishops of the Church of Utrecht and was accepted into the Union of Utrecht, it then began to further reflect on the nature of Old Catholicism and to cherish this gift in an ever deeper way. While we will not follow the entire path of this discovery of the nature of the gifts of Old Catholicism within the Polish National Catholic Church, we can consider the three stages of its history to examine it as a part of what Old Catholicism is.

We begin with the organization of the Church of Utrecht. This Church was begun as a mission opportunity through the work of St. Willibrord and grew as an expression of northern Catholicism. In particular, a part of this catholic life was their self-governance as well as understanding of the local clerical life of the Church. In the history of the Church of Utrecht that is presented to us, this is expressed most strongly in the ancient rights of this Church for the Cathedral Chapter of Utrecht to select its own bishops. This bishop would then be consecrated by other bishops in apostolic succession either from the local area or even farther afield.

This aspect of Old Catholicism speaks of the nationalism, or expression, of a particular church and also to its self-determination or to use the more common ecclesial term, its autocephaly. This expression of their catholic faith can be seen as much more than simply a church demanding its rights on matter such as electing bishops. We see that this action of fulfilling the rights of a local Church can be seen to embody that the Cathedral Chapter of priests would be those who were well immersed and knowledgeable concerning the worship life and piety of the local communities. It is they who would also have some understanding of the needs of the local community at the time of the election. It would then be with this knowledge and with this understanding that the local episcopal leadership would be chosen.

Let me at this point also comment concerning the nationalism that is spoken of above. This concept was later codified within Old Catholicism to mean, one bishop for one country. This rule was certainly well applied in the earliest areas of Old Catholicism within Western Europe. But of course, it can be seen as a little short-sighted as well. We can also look at this concept within the context of a bishop for a certain cultural expression, a certain local

expression. Both of these terms “local” and “expression” are important. They were applied as the Polish National Catholic Church sought to serve its laity in the United States and Canada. The expression of the Catholic faith was the same for those immigrants who lived in either Canada or within the United States during the latter part of the 1900s. For this reason, it was not seen to be imperative for the Polish National Catholic Church to originally have a separate bishop for the very few Canadian congregations of Polish immigrants. On the other hand, this view of Catholic expression was the reason for granting the Lithuanian National Catholics and Slovak National Catholic their own bishops when these Churches grew to a significant size. In a separate issue, as America and Canada are much larger land masses than any European country the idea of “local” was a difficult one to keep constant. As the Polish National Catholic Church grew in numbers and congregations and continued to spread through the country, it was difficult to administer all of America as one large “local” diocese. For this reason, the Polish National Catholic Church was split into several dioceses beginning in the 1920s.

The second period of the growth of Old Catholicism was in response to the First Vatican Council which defined the Infallibility and Universal Jurisdiction of the Pope. This was a movement which was led by the professors of several German universities. This brought to the fore two concepts which are a part of the gift of Old Catholicism. First, we see the importance of the professors and theologians within the life of the Church as well as a footing for the use of all academic tools to shed light on the faith. The issues of the First Vatican Council can be cast as a clash between those who looked to history as a foundation of the faith and those who looked to dogmatic definitions to counter problems.

The outcome of this, in the Roman Catholic definitions of the First Vatican Council, has been a loss of the balance between the theologians and the magisterium in the Roman Catholic Church. There are still seminaries and universities which teach theology, but most only work to educate diocesan clergy under the watchful eye of the local ordinary. In fact, at present all those who teach within Roman Catholic universities must have a mandate from a bishop allowing them to teach. No longer are the theological faculties of universities brought to bear on a topic of some dispute. Now all look to the Vatican for answers.

The second issue is that of the increased centralization of the Roman Catholic Church into what the German professors referred to as the Roman system. This includes many different items and has certainly continued to intensify over the years. We certainly know that decisions

regarding the placement of bishops are dealt with at the Vatican and there has been much consternation within the United States regarding the English translations of Holy Mass that came from the Vatican. Another aspect of this is the growing sense of the infallibility attached to the office of the Papacy that has occurred. While we can certainly admit that there have been few official infallible definitions, there has been much that has come from the Vatican with an “infallible edge” to it. It is interesting to see recently that some, even some highly placed individuals with the Roman Church, have recently questioned some papal statements. Time will tell what the response will be.

If we look a bit forward, we can also examine the view of the papacy during the earliest formation of the Polish National Catholic Church. The unrest of the immigrants in America and Canada which led to the forming of many independent parishes which ultimately coalesced into the Polish National Catholic Church occurred in the timeframe immediately after the First Vatican Council. In 1900 when Fr. Hodur went to Rome, the Polish immigrants did not look for the Vatican to issue any infallible or irrefutable statement on the issue of their plight. Rather they looked for support to an elder brother, especially as there were several influential Poles residing at the Vatican, such as Cardinal Ledochowski. The Catholics within Poland have a rather complicated history with the papacy, one which cannot be dealt with here.

The last phase of the formation of the Old Catholicism is that of the entrance of the Polish National Catholic Church and possibly the Polish Catholic Church in Chicago a few years before it. A reflection on this part of the gift gives a fuller understanding of the expression of the faith of the laity of the Church and not only those within the clergy of a local church. During this time in the Catholic Church, a prevailing, even if not an official view, was that the Church was made up of the clergy, who dispensed their works on the laity. This was much less true among the Polish immigrants who desired a substantial role within the workings and life of the Church.

Throughout the United States and Canada, the Polish National Catholic Church was generally a movement of the laity. They understood their catholic faith, even if in rudimentary terms, and would not allow others to alter its expression or take away its position within their common lives. In what was originally termed the “National Church Program” by Father Hodur, the point of allowing congregations to have a say in their pastoral care and in having authority in the care of their parish properties fulfilled the same cultural role as the Cathedral Chapter did in

Utrecht. In this case it was the lay leaders that had knowledge of the faith expression of the community and an understanding of its needs and therefore desired to share in the selection of pastors when the local bishop or other local clergy did not have, or desired to attain, this understanding. The last point of the Program also sought to have a “Polish” bishop in American for exactly these same reasons.

With an understanding of these gifts as an initial reflection on Old Catholicism we move forward knowing that these gifts must be preserved and shared. They are not a possession of the Polish National Catholic Church, or the Nordic Catholic Church, or even the Union of Scranton, but rather they are gifts of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ when He said of Peter’s confession, “On this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it.” (Matthew 16:18b) and further in the great commission, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember I am with you always, to the end of the age.” (Matthew 28:17-20)

The Nature of the Union of Scranton

The Union of Scranton, following the Union of Utrecht from which it came, is a union of local churches, each governed by its own bishop. These can be an individual diocese, such as the Nordic Catholic Church, or a collection of dioceses gathered into a national church, such as the Polish National Catholic Church. The Union of Scranton foundations are also open to other similar models of governance being a part of the union as well.

In seeking to live out the prayer of our Lord that “all may be one” and also to share the gift that we have received, an important aspect of the Union of Scranton is to seek to join with other local Churches that desire to unite with us in sharing this gift in union. Of course this can be easily stated as a goal, knowing full well that it may be a long and difficult journey to attain and, at times, a concrete way forward may not be apparent. But this lack of full knowledge and realization of difficulties does not deter us from moving forward.

This work has begun on a very parochial level, especially as the Nordic Catholic Church has started administrations in Germany and now in England. It is also expressed in the Polish National Catholic Church reaching out to the Hispanics within the United States. But another

aspect of this reaching out must be to seek out other established churches, not just congregations, which share the catholic faith and a desire to work for unity as it is understood within Old Catholicism. In this, we desire to work with Anglicans, especially because of the long history of ties between the Old Catholics and Anglicans going back to the Bonn Agreement and even before. The Polish National Catholic Church shared a close agreement of Intercommunion with the Episcopal Church in the USA and the Anglican Church of Canada from 1946 to 1976. It was the Episcopal Church's decision to attempt to ordain women that brought this relationship to an end. Likewise, we are very cognizant that the Old Catholic Churches had close relationship with the Orthodox from quite early in its history. The Orthodox were present at the Bonn Reunion Conferences which led to the formal formations of the Old Catholic Churches and more recently a collection of agreed statements of the Old Catholic / Orthodox Theological Commissions in the "Road to Unity" is acknowledged within the Union of Scranton as a way forward in seeking unity with other churches.

Looking Ahead

The Union of Scranton is governed by the document known as the "Statutes." While this document serves as a guide for the gathering of the bishops of the Union of Scranton, it also serves as a document for some reflection on the nature of it. The very first sentence tells us, "The Union of Scranton is a union of Churches and their bishops governing them that is determined to maintain and pass on the Catholic faith, worship and essential structure of the Undivided Church of the first millennium." We see within this one statement much that needs to be reflected on concerning the foundations underlying the unity of the Churches of the Union of Scranton and its view of the positions concerning its members. It is also important to note that this definition speaks of the essential equality of all local Churches and also the equality of their bishops in stating first and foremost that the Union of Scranton is a union of these Churches and their bishops.

But then we must also look at deeper items for reflection: What exactly is the nature of the Catholic faith we maintain and pass on? What type of worship is it that must be passed on? What is the essential structure of the Undivided Church? And likewise, also in connection with these items, Catholic Faith, worship and essential structure, we can also ask what does it mean to maintain and pass on these things?

The Catholic Faith

The Statutes of the Union of Scranton state quite explicitly what we are concerned with in terms of the Catholic faith. It states, “The Union of Scranton confesses the Catholic faith as articulated by the first seven Ecumenical Councils and expressed throughout the Undivided Church.” In this context we also look to the statement well known to Old Catholics and found within both the original Declaration of Utrecht and also the Declaration of Scranton, the Vincentian Canon: “We hold that which has been believed everywhere, always and of all people: for that is truly and properly Catholic.” (Commonitory for the Antiquity of the Catholic Faith Against the Profane Novelties of All Heresies, ch. 2, par. 6)

We also see within the document “Requirements for Communion” of the Polish National Catholic Church and used within the Union of Scranton, where it states that these Churches “must be in conformity with and profess faithfulness to: the authentic teaching handed down to the Apostles as found within Holy Scripture and Sacred Tradition, a common celebration of the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass during which our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ is truly and substantially present in the Holy Eucharist and demonstration of an identifiable, valid and licit Apostolic Succession.” Specifically listed are some normative items for the Union of Scranton Churches: The Apostles Creed, the Nicene Creed, the Decisions of the first seven Ecumenical Councils, the Declaration of Utrecht and the Declaration of Scranton.

Of course, these specific items are but a beginning of considerations of the faith. We certainly know that there are different interpretations of some, if not many, of the articles of faith that are found within them. It is here that dialogue between Churches is so necessary. It is within these discussions that the Churches will come to see whether or not we truly do hold the same faith. It is here that we must dig deeper into the writing of St. Vincent of Lerins in the Commonitory. He speaks there of teachings and doctrines that go beyond that of the earliest centuries. To see if these teachings are “truly and properly catholic,” he says, “Yet it must be an advance [*profectus*] in the proper sense of the word and not an alteration [*permutatio*] in faith. For progress means that each thing is enlarged within itself [*res amplificteur*], while alteration implies that one thing is transformed into something else [*aliquid ex alio in aliud*].” (Commonitory) While it may be easy to see where some Churches differ, it is only through dialogue that we can truly understand the difference between an ‘advance’ or an ‘alteration’ in

the teachings of a particular Church. We must sit with each other and discuss how our Churches understand and live out these principles of faith. We must see, not only theological descriptions, but also the very life of the Churches to truly know each other.

It is in this sense we can consider the first principle of the Bonn Agreement of 1931 which is also stated within our “Requirements for Communion.” “Each Church recognizes the catholicity and independence of the other, and maintains its own.” It is through the engagement we share in dialogue that we can begin to “recognize the catholicity of each other.” This is something that cannot just merely be stated through a signed document, or a statement of one church to another. We must engage each other, if we are to “recognize the catholicity” we hold within another Church. As an aside, we must also have a continued engagement even after this recognition is reached. It is for this reason that the Union of Scranton bishops meet within the International Catholic Bishops Conference. The Statutes state that: “The bishops of the Union of Scranton: a) uphold the catholicity of the Church by maintaining its Apostolic Faith and Sacred Traditions; b) respond to issues and challenges as they arise; c) make decisions concerning relationships with other Churches.” (Statutes B:2) The lack of such a body may be seen as one problem which was found within the Intercommunion between the Episcopal Church and the Polish National Catholic Church. Although this intercommunion was reached between these Churches in 1946, a few years after the original Bonn Agreement in 1931, there was very little meaningful engagement between the Churches, at least on any official level. We cannot say that any such engagement would have changed the direction that the Episcopal Church took, but it is also true that such engagement did not occur.

Worship

The Statutes of the Union of Scranton also say that worship is a part of the union. More explicitly they state: “Each local Church is gathered around its bishop with the Eucharist as its center.” (Statutes B:1.1) The Eucharist is the central point of focus for the Churches of the Union of Scranton. The largest section of the Declaration of Scranton, following the Declaration of Utrecht, is concerning the Eucharist. It begins: “Considering that the Holy Eucharist (Holy Mass) has always been the true central point of Catholic worship, we consider it our duty to declare that we maintain with perfect fidelity the ancient Catholic doctrine concerning the Sacrament of the Altar, by believing that we receive the Body and Blood of our Savior Jesus

Christ under the species of bread and wine.” (Declaration of Scranton, par. 6) This declaration points to nothing new but rather reaffirms the ancient belief. Also by its prominent place within the Declaration it reminds us that among all of our worship of God, the Eucharist is the center, it is the focal point. Of course, even here we recognize that there are significant differences in worship style. There may be numerous texts for the celebration of Mass within each Church and among our Churches. This multiplicity does not mean a difference in belief or even in emphasis. Again, dialogue and examination is what will show the way. We must ask, what does a Church seek to convey in the ways in which it prays? What do certain actions and ceremonies mean and convey? How does each Church understand its own celebrations? To use the image above, “Can I see my own catholicity in the prayer life and especially the Eucharistic worship of the other?”

And we also know that there is much beyond just the Eucharistic worship of the Church. While we hold the Eucharist as the center of catholic worship, there is also much more that surrounds it. This worship ranges from those which cross the boundaries of many different Churches such as the celebration of the sacraments and the liturgy of the hours, to devotions such as Bitter Lamentations which are found only within one particular liturgical expression. While these celebrations and devotions are not found within the center of worship, dialogue and engagement is still needed to ensure that catholic faith is maintained and passed on.

Essential Structure

The last portion of the first statement of the Statutes concerns the “Essential Structure” of the Undivided Church. Here again we look to other sections of the Statutes to gain a fuller understanding of this concept. “Each local Church is a communion of people.” “Each local Church is gathered around its bishop.” “Each local Church is a complete Church that carries out its tasks autonomously in that given place.” And also “Apostolic Succession is fundamental to the catholicity of the Church. Apostolic Succession is imparted when a synodically-elected candidate for bishop is validly consecrated.”

These statements begin to show us the essential structure of the local Church. The Church is of course the Body of Christ as described in Scripture, but it must be so in a community of people. Lone bishops, let alone lone clergy, cannot be members of the Union of

Scranton. Churches, either individual dioceses or national churches, are members of the Union of Scranton and represented by their bishops.

These Churches are governed by their bishops who possess Apostolic Succession. Besides the voluntary union that we enter into via the Union of Scranton, and the fact that I, as head of the International Catholic Bishops Conference, sit as chairman of this body, there is no structure for a universal church. The Church is a local reality and the International Catholic Bishops Conference is an entity to maintain and pass on the catholicity that exists among us as well as an entity to sustain our unity. The Statutes say: “Each local Church is a complete Church that carries out its tasks autonomously in that given place.” (Statutes B:1.1) Certainly some dioceses may have chosen to unite in a National Church, such as the Polish National Catholic Church and even given themselves a governmental structure as such, but this does not destroy the equality of bishops or their churches.

National Church

As was brought out earlier within this paper, I would like to describe the concept of a National Church as it is understood by the Polish National Catholic Church. This has been the cause of much misunderstanding, especially with the word “National” being in the name of the Church. In the original Polish, this word, “narodowy,” has a much more subtle meaning and is not primarily dealing with the government or any national boundaries. It has the sense of “being a part of the people.” The Polish National Catholic Church has always understood this word to express that the lived faith of the people of the Church is something that is a vital part of what must be “maintained and passed on.” It shows that within the Church, even if it is not supported by the wider culture, there must be a Christian culture which is lived by its members.

We are certainly aware that this local Christian Catholic culture can be differently expressed for people of different backgrounds and in different localities. Within the United States and Canada at one point there existed a “Lithuanian National Catholic Church,” a “Slovak National Catholic Church,” a “Czech National Catholic Church,” and even an “Italian National Catholic Church.” Each had their own religious culture. Some had their own bishop and so became a local Church, while others operated under the governance structure of the Polish National Catholic Church but all were united and in communion with one another. Over time when all of the members of these Churches became “Americanized” and because their Christian

Catholic culture did not differ in many ways following this, the need for separate Churches was not necessary. As the Polish National Catholic Church was always the largest of these bodies, it became the one Church.

This point is brought out to remind us that uniformity, in worship styles, in understanding and in expression of Christian cultural, is not necessary. What is needed is that we can “see” the catholicity within each Church.

Some Points of Difficulty

We must also remind ourselves that when we speak of the culture we must be very careful. We must be sure that in the concept of a Christian Catholic culture, it is our faith and our churches that must drive the narrative and the practices of the people. It must not be the wider culture which influences the Church. We must each be knowledgeable about the cultural around us in order that we can measure it against the standard of our Christian Catholic faith seen through the lens of the Vincentian Canon.

While certainly many different points of Catholic faith and belief could be touched upon here, it is in the areas of Catholic life and ethics which have caught our attention more recently. One of the major reasons that the Union of Scranton exists is that the former Union of Utrecht, while still claiming to hold unto the concepts of worship and church structure as we have described, decided to follow the wider culture which is continuing to drift away from the Catholic, Orthodox and Apostolic praxis of the Church throughout the centuries. These are the matter of women priests and same-sex unions.

In both the matter of women clergy and same-sex unions, the culture takes the view of social justice and claims that because of issues of equality, these things must be allowed. But in looking at these matters through the lens of the faith of the Undivided Church and the Vincentian Canon this is a denial of Scriptural Christian anthropology and rather it implements a social justice placing human desires as the ultimate virtue. Certainly these theological issues are much more complex than alluded to here, but it is through the application of our understanding of Catholic faith and belief that will show us the way to proceed.

Although this discussion can be seen as a diversion to the topic at hand, these issues are of pressing concern to the Churches of today and we must keep before our eyes all three principles of the first mentioned statement: Catholic faith, worship and essential structure. If we

do not we may find ourselves choosing to emphasize one and abandoning another. As an example we have the instance of the Anglican Ordinariate as a different choice among the three principles. While holding on to the sacramental (worship) and ethical issues of the Catholic faith regarding women priests and especially same-sex unions, the Ordinariate has abandoned the goal of keeping the essential structure of the Church by uniting with Rome and its papal monarchical institution.

Maintain and Pass On

Along with the questions of what makes up the understanding of the Catholic Christian faith, we must also concern ourselves with the point of how the Church is called to “maintain and pass on” these essentials of the Catholic faith.

A first point which must not be overlooked is that of being a witness of these issues in the world. One small example of this is something that the Polish National Catholic Church has experienced within the American ecumenical group known as “Christian Churches Together [CCT].” This ecumenical group is broken up into a number of ‘families,’ such as Roman Catholic, Orthodox, Mainline Protestant, Ethnic Church, etc. One issue that has arisen is where exactly does the Polish National Catholic Church fit into this scheme. The Polish National Catholic Church is not truly an ethnic church, but also the Roman Catholics do not wish us to be with them either. The group has admitted they do not quite know how we fit in. This challenges the Catholic and also the other Christian Churches to reevaluate their own position and definitions of what it means to be Catholic. Our presence in organizations and situations such as these challenge other Christians to realize that there can be a Western Catholic Church apart from Rome and especially apart from the Roman system. We must continue to demand a place to belong as Catholic communities, Catholic Churches that are non-papal.

Another way in which we maintain and pass on this Western Catholic understanding is to continue to frame what we and others have done in a correct historical light. As was mentioned in the description of the organization of the Old Catholic Church in Germany, the issue can be seen as a conflict between those who look to the history and organic growth of the Church and those who seek to define dogma for political reasons and expediency. This distinction is no longer emphasized and the centralization of the Roman system continues to grow. We must strive to continue to spread this Western Catholic understanding seen in the light of the

Vincentian Canon. We realize that these ways of maintaining and passing on the faith are primarily local ones and something more is also called for in working with other established Churches.

The Promise

This finally brings to the last and also, for our discussion here, a vital way in which we can continue to maintain and pass on this Catholic faith, worship and essential structure. We seek to share the gift that we have received with others, especially those who already have an understanding of the importance of traditional Catholicism in the spirit of the Vincentian Canon. Through our dialogue and ecumenical endeavors, both within the United States as well as throughout Europe, and even beyond, we know that there are many who confess faith and practice as the Union of Scranton does. As the means of communication continues to make worldwide connections easier, this knowledge continues to grow and spread.

Armed with these connections and recognizing that the gift of Old Catholicism that has been given to us is not something that is intended to be hoarded, we desire to share it. But we also acknowledge that this sharing must be something that is born of sincere dialogue and a striving to grow together in Catholic faith. The Union of Scranton cherishes the place that it holds within the Western Catholic world. Although we certainly know that we are small in numbers, we cherish the Catholic faith we hold in the spirit of the Vincentian Canon, we cherish the Apostolic Succession we maintain, especially as it is acknowledged by others, we cherish the theological understanding that we have come to with the Orthodox Churches within the context of the “Road to Unity.” And we also cherish that God has given us the opportunity to share these gifts with others.

We desire to enter into a journey together with those who seek to confess and live in the Catholic faith, worship and essential church structure that was handed to the Apostles by our Lord and has been handed unto us today.