

Reflection on the Excursion to St. Mark's Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church

The excursion to St. Mark's Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church was a insightful experience that helped the class gain a better appreciation for different branches of Catholicism. The person who spoke to us at the church was John Reaves, a deacon at St. Mark's. Originally from the United States, Mr. Reaves now lives in Salzburg. He is married and has children. Mr. Reaves spoke about the formation of Ukrainian Greek-Catholicism, various beliefs of Ukrainian Greek-Catholicism, and the history of St. Mark's church.

Mr. Reaves explained that there were several contributing factors for the division in practices of the Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church to Roman Catholicism. One of these factors is the rapid spread of faith which led to five centers of Christianity, each of which had a different liturgical tradition. Ukrainian Catholicism today follows the liturgy derived in Constantinople, or Istanbul today. A formal division occurred in 1054 when Byzantine Catholicism broke from the Roman for political reasons. Over the course of several centuries, Ukraine fell victim to several different empires and their influences. As such, the popular religion changed between Greek-Catholic and Orthodox. In modern day Ukraine, Greek-Catholicism is most prevalent in Western Ukraine.

In addition to the basic summary of the history of Ukrainian Greek Catholicism, Mr. Reaves provided us with a brief insight into how the UGCC (Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church) community in Salzburg practices their faith in an old Roman Catholic monastery. St. Mark's Church was built by Fischer von Erlach, and was originally used by nuns to take care of children. The Ukrainian population in Salzburg expanded following World War II, when many people fled Ukraine to escape the Soviet Union. At its formation, the UGCC community did not have a place of worship in Salzburg, which made it difficult to practice because the decorations that are vital to the Ukrainian Greek-Catholic faith took time to set up every week. Eventually the community persuaded the Roman Catholic church to allow the Ukrainian Greek-Catholics in Salzburg to worship at the abandoned church of St. Mark.

Two of the aspects of Ukrainian Greek-Catholicism that Mr. Reaves spoke about were the importance of movement during the service and the use of decoration in the church. He stressed that their religion required both the mind and body to worship. As such, there is lots of

movement involved in the process of worship. For example, the members must remain standing for the whole service. This can also be seen through the focus on community and promotion of unity and closeness between the members of the UGCC. In addition, the importance of decoration is extremely important in the Byzantine faith. The decoration in the church portrays idols in order to help maintain focus during prayers and worship. Mr. Reaves made sure to emphasize that this veneration of idols is the veneration of the person depicted, not the wood or other material that the idol is portrayed on.

The main message I took away from this excursion was what Mr. Reaves said about the vilification of people and evil in the world. He communicated to the class the importance of focusing on the root of the problem, rather than vilifying people. He related this to the problems today regarding terrorism and the division between people throughout the world. Rather than work to solve this division, people have vilified those of other religions and backgrounds, inciting ignorance and discord. As such, he urged us all to focus on being accepting of all people in order to promote unity throughout the world. Using a metaphor for a tree, we must focus on eradicating the root of the problem and not its leaves, for then they will simply regrow and the problem will not be solved.

Overall, the excursion to St. Mark's Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church was extremely beneficial due to the information presented and the way this information was communicated. John Reaves was an excellent speaker who communicated his ideas well and connected them in ways that made it relevant to the class. Since most of the class has a Roman Catholic or Protestant background, the excursion provided us with the opportunity to gain an alternate perspective and way of thinking.