

## **St Josaphat, the apostle of unity and the Kyiv Cave Monastery**

In 1614, Josaphat Kuntsevych, as an archimandrite of the Holy Trinity Monastery in Vilnius, agreed to accompany Metropolitan Joseph Veliamyn Rutsky to Kyiv in order to assist the Metropolitan in the conversion of the Orthodox to the Holy Union. While he was in Kyiv he visited the glorious Kyiv Cave Monastery, the heart of Rus' monasticism.

At that time, the monastery in Kyiv was surrounded by a forest that reached the city itself. While making his way through this forest to visit the Lavra, Josaphat encountered a hunting party accompanied by many dogs. An imposing man with an aristocratic demeanour ordered the Vilnius' monk to go no further and he demanded that Josaphat identify himself. Josaphat willingly gave his name and his rank, and he informed the man that he was a pilgrim who planned to venerate the holy relics in the monastery. The aristocrat began to verbally assault Josaphat accusing him of being a traitor who deserved to die. This rude Ukrainian nobleman who interrogated Josaphat was Joseph Kurtsevych, who bore the monastic name of Ezekiel – a non-Union archimandrite of the Lavra.

During this heated conversation, Josaphat finally recognized Ezekiel, and he exclaimed: "It surprised me that I did not recall reading that the Rules of St. Basil allowed monks to participate in hunting ventures." Archimandrite Ezekiel then silently rode off toward the Lavra. Upon Kuntsevych's arrival the bells rang, and the monks ran to the refectory but they did not welcome him. Instead they accused him of being a traitor and they threatened to drown him in the Dnipro River. Archimandrite Ezekiel came forward and ordered his monks to bring bread and salt to their guest. Josaphat then insisted upon a dispute involving church documents which soon became a heated dispute.

The angry monks then pulled the saint from the pulpit and they assaulted him... In response to this display of discontent God's servant spoke boldly: "I have no evil intentions, for I wish you well. I rejoice with all my heart to see so many monks here. I will gladly remain here among you if you show me the way to the truth based on the Holy Scripture, the writings of the Holy Fathers and from our liturgical books." Josaphat continued to reason with them; then he provided them with evidence of the truth of the Catholic faith from these very same written sources that they had just disputed. He demonstrated the supremacy of the Apostolic See and the need for unity amongst all Christians in the world.

With these lengthy deliberations coming to an end, Archimandrite Ezekiel invited all to share a meal together, after which Kuntsevych informed all who were present of the ministry of the Apostle Peter and his primacy. And further, and of great significance, he went on to provide proof that on the basis of the Kyivan Rus'

chronicles, a long-standing unity of the Kyivan metropolitans had existed with the Pope of Rome.

Although it was impossible to fully convince the monks of the Lavra, their hostility eventually subsided. Then they sent him on to the Metropolitan Joseph Veliamyn Rutsky palace in Sophia in Kyiv.

*Prepared by Fr. Mykolaj Mykosovskyy, OSBM*