

Byzantine Rite Offered at the University of Mary

University students participate in a form of Catholic Mass they had never seen before.

Bismark, ND- On Feb 1, the University of Mary brought in Fr. Martin Nagy from Belfield, North Dakota, to celebrate the Byzantine Rite on campus. This is a part of the new Katholikos, which is Greek for Catholic, program at the university, inviting priests who perform different Catholic rites so to introduce students to the many different forms the liturgy takes.

Before the Mass at 4:30 p.m., Fr. Dominic Bouck, the UMary chaplain, said, “This is the same Mass offered throughout the world... There are different ways of expressing tradition.”

The Byzantine Rite dates back to the Apostle St. James the Just in Antioch, now in present-day Turkey. The Rite would be modified by St. Basil and later by St. John Chrysostom around the fourth century. The name comes from the city of Byzantium, also known as Constantinople or modern-day Istanbul, where Constantine moved the center of the Catholic Church from Rome. As the Rite spread, different cultures would modify the Rite again, such as the Ukrainian Rite practiced for this event.

Our Lady of Annunciation chapel was decorated as how a Byzantine church would look. Icons of Jesus and the Virgin Mary were placed to the right and left of the altar respectively, the altar was covered in the proper cloths and garments according to the rite and an icon of the Presentation of the Child Jesus in the Temple was placed in between the choir stalls to be venerated.

“I had been to a Ukrainian Rite before...,” said Caleb Cash, a nursing student at the university, “I was expecting it to be long... when I first got the sheet I thought ‘Oh man this is going to be a lot.’ I was excited for it.”

The clergy and the congregation filled the church with the chant of prayers. The entire Mass, hymns, prayers and readings, were sung. The deacon would walk back and forth between icons, altar, clergy, and the congregation dispersing incense on them because, as Nagy said, “We incense the holy things. We incense you because you are holy.”

As the congregation made their way up to receive the Eucharist, the clergy gave the body and blood of Christ in an unfamiliar way for most students. After dipping the body into the blood, the clergy placed the Eucharist into the recipient's mouth on a golden spoon. This practice is called intinction, dating back to the seventh century in the Eastern church because it was easier for the sick to consume, it would eventually gain universal favor.

Much of the liturgy itself is similar to the Latin Rite, the most commonly known and practiced rite in the West. While certain phrasing may have be different, the meaning and the context are very similar to the Latin Rite. The Byzantine Rite has a large focus on repetition, not seen as prominently in the Latin Rite. Throughout the Mass, the clergy offered prayers for their pope, bishop, country and congregation throughout the service.

Reflecting on the Mass after he left Cash said, “I was thinking about how many people wouldn’t experience something like this in their life.”