

**Text of remarks by Bishop John Kudrick
Bishop Gojdic and Holy Forerunner Celebration
Cathedral of St. John, June 22, 2008:**

We gather today to express our appreciation for the recognition of our Bishop Paul Peter Gojdic for his defense of his Jewish brothers and sisters during the Nazi occupation and to consider how this must affect our lives.

It is appropriate that, as we remember Bishop Gojdic, we not forget all the millions of individual victims. This horrific moment of modern history must be always remembered and properly named. And, as Pope John Paul II acknowledged, misguided Catholics were among those who perpetrated this crime against humanity and expressed his sorrow for “the hatred, acts of persecution and displays of anti-Semitism directed against the Jews by Christians at any time and in any place.”

There are, however, many Catholics, Byzantine and Roman, among the “Righteous among the Nations.” To our understanding, Bishop Gojdic is the first bishop. Others like Cardinal Stepinac of Croatia and Metropolitan Sheptytsky of Ukraine have been proposed for consideration. Bishop Gojdic may stand alone in his very public denouncing of the Nazis’ attack on Judaism.

What could have given him the courage to stand up to the demonic Nazis and later to the atheistic communists?

Surely Bishop would have noted the similarities between the two peoples: the Jews and the Rusyns – and the Slavs in general. His people were a small minority who knew no political power. He vigorously defended the Rusyn identity within a Nazi-puppet Slovak state. His close relatives to the east, the Ukrainians, had just endured a genocide through famine. He could empathize.

Surely Bishop would have noted the common patrimony of faith, how his Byzantine liturgy embraces the Hebrew scriptures, especially the psalms and the prophets and many of the liturgical practices of Judaism. He could empathize.

Bishop Gojdic knew of the privileged position of the Jewish people as the chosen people of God, into whom he understood we gentiles had been grafted. These are the people to whom God had formed an intimate union, a relationship that could never end, a relationship that he understood to have been created anew by Jesus Christ.

Rabbi Jossi Steiner of Košice, in proposing Bishop Gojdic as a “Righteous Among the Nations,” recounted that Bishop publicly protested against the deportation of Jews.... But he was not only active on the verbal level, but also personally helped the Jews. He baptized and hid them in a Greek-Catholic monastery. This way he rescued 27 Jews, at least. He also ordered priests in the Prešov Greek-Catholic eparchy to help those persecuted within their abilities.

“Some of them hesitated,” said Steiner. “But Gojdič said that it is the duty of the priest to help those persecuted avoid transports and that this stems from the commandment to love your neighbour.”

Clearly Bishop Gojdic was a man of God. Known as the ‘*man with a heart of gold*’, his motto “*God is love, let us love Him!*” (set the path he was to walk.)

Although he could empathize with the plight of the Jews, his heroism came from God.

As we remember the holocaust, the Shoah, so that such will not happen again, so we remember Bishop Gojdic and others like him so that their actions will not have gone in vain and that their actions will be perpetuated through our lives.

We Eastern Christians in many times have been the victims of genocide: Ukraine, Armenia, Darfur, Iraq. We have known our martyrs but we can not hope to know fully the persecution of the Jews, just because they are a people, a people with a special relationship with God.

Only our relationship with God will form a proper unity with them and with others. At the foot of the Temple's Western Wall Pope John Paul II turned this over to God when he prayed for forgiveness and for the conversion of hearts and minds. Only built on a relationship with God can there be true unity. Every other form of unity creates disunity on another front. We Christians may regret that in our effort to create a unity with other Christians, we have injured unity with the Jewish people. We Byzantine Catholics realize this in our effort to be united with the Roman Church has produced a level of disunity with the other Eastern Churches.

We are pleased to have a representative of our sister church, the American Carpatho-Russian Orthodox Diocese of the Patriarchate of Constantinople. We are reminded of how much we share, in particular that Bishop Gojdic was bishop to many of the founders of both of our parishes in this country. We pray that as we grow in our relationship with God, we will grow in a true Christian unity with each other.

Many will say we can't do anything. Let the politicians do it. Let the armies assure peace. We are encouraged by the saying of the Talmud used in the recognizing of Bishop Gojdic and other "Righteous Among the nations": "Whosoever saves a single life, saves an entire universe."

Much time, resources and other energies went into this event. This must be seen as an investment, a springboard to a future in which we work for justice, for true unity.

We pledge to better relationships with Jewish people, to Christians of other communities, to the world at large, especially those who don't know the blessings of a relationship with God. This will be possible if we are based on the spirituality of Blessed Paul Peter Gojdic, "God is love, let us love Him," and if we accept our calling to be, like the Holy Baptist John, Forerunners of the Lord, humbly directing attention to Him who is the source of life "There is the Lamb of God ... He must increase while I must decrease."
