

Day 11

## Greek Our Father, Pater Imon

### Melkite Catholics

The Melkites, or Byzantine rite Catholics of Middle Eastern origin, are the descendants of the early Christians of Antioch (Syria). Christianity was established in this area of the Middle East by St. Peter before he traveled on to the imperial city of Rome. In the 5th century, there arose some teachers who said that Christ was not truly God and truly man as well. They would not accept the teaching of the Catholic Church as defined by the Council of Chalcedon (451 A.D.) Those in the Middle East who did accept the decision of Chalcedon followed the lead of the Byzantine emperor and were dubbed Melkites or King's Men from the Aramaic word "melek" meaning King. So, Melkites are the present-day Catholics who follow the Byzantine (Greek) worship, theology, and spirituality whose tradition is in the Middle East. The Melkites are not members of the Orthodox Church.

Antioch was one of the first cities to become a center of the Christian faith. It was in Antioch that St. Paul started his first apostolic journey, and before Peter was in Rome, he was the head of the Church of Antioch.. One of the most important Antiocheans of the earlier church was St. John Chrysostom

In 325 A.D. at the Council of Nicaea the patriarchates of Alexandria and Antioch were established. Like the patriarchate of Jerusalem (Council of Chalcedon 451 A.D.) Antioch was both a territorial and juridical entity. The government of the church was held by the Sees of Rome, Alexandria, Antioch, and Jerusalem. The bishops of these sees were given the title of Patriarch. After the capitol of the Roman empire was moved to Constantinople, that city was also elevated to a Patriarchal see (381 A.D.) and given the ranking of "second only to the See of Peter" (Rome).

With the seventh century onslaught of the Islamic conquest of the Middle East, the Melkites found themselves under non-Christian domination. During most of this first Islamic period the Melkites were well treated as a "protected people, but they were frequently denied all civic and social responsibilities. When the Byzantine Empire re-conquered the Middle East, the fashions of Constantinople were incorporated into the







liturgical life of the Melkite Church. Between 960 and 1085 A.D. much of the imperial style of Constantinople became a part of the Melkite ritual. Despite the now close ties to Constantinople, the Melkite peoples never broke off relations with Rome and with the Pope.

The great strain between the Melkite Church and Rome happened because of the Crusades. When the Western Catholics came into the Holy Land, they did not recognize the legitimacy of the Eastern methods of worship. In the worst cases marauding Crusaders ransacked orthodox churches, and at best cases they simply installed Latin patriarchs and bishops usurping the local control of the church. By the end of the Crusades there was an estrangement between the churches, but the Melkites never actually broke off relations with Rome.

Since the formal declaration of Roman/Melkite union in 1724, the Melkite Catholics have worked steady to be a “voice for the East within the Western Church.” Melkite Patriarch Gregory Joseph spent his thirty-three years working for union of the Churches while striving to maintain the Eastern traditions and rituals. His was a significant voice during the deliberations of the first Vatican Council and he was an important influence on Pope Leo XIII’s *Orientalium Dignit.* During Vatican II, it was Melkite Patriarch Maximos IV who spoke on behalf of the “absent brother”, the great Orthodox Church. And so, today, the Melkite Catholics are a small but vibrant voice within the Catholic Church; a voice calling upon the dignity of the orthodox faith and praying for the unity of the church of Christ.

<https://melkite.org/faith/faith-worship/melkite-identity/the-melkites>

