Portraits of American Saints

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Introduction

This book relates events in the lives of five luminaries who presently make up the cloud of American witnesses of Orthodox Christianity: Saint Innocent, Enlightener of the Aleuts and Apostle to America; Saint Tikhon, Confessor of Moscow and Enlightener of North America; Saint Juvenaly, Proto-martyr of America; Saint Herman, Elder and Wonderworker of Alaska; and Saint Peter the Aleut, Proto-martyr of California.

Brief biographies are included of six noteworthy persons who labored for the Gospel in America: Archpriest James (Yakov) Netsvetov, Alaskan missionary assistant to Saint Innocent; Mitred Archpriest Alexis Toth, the “Father of American Orthodoxy”; Bishop Raphael (Hawaweeny), the first Orthodox hierarch consecrated on American soil; Archpriest Alexander Hotovitsky, builder of the Russian Orthodox cathedral in New York City and martyr in the Soviet gulag; Archpriest John Kochurov, missionary to America and first priest-martyr of the Russian Revolution; and Bishop Nicholai (Velimirovich), beloved scholar, teacher, spiritual father and confessor of the Faith.

There are undoubtedly many more worthy persons who will, during the next 200 years of our Church’s history, be proclaimed and glorified as saints. However, the 11 persons represented here presently stand out as the brightest-shining precious stones in the crown of glory for America.
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St. Innocent

Pastor, theologian, educator, carpenter, clock maker, navigator and explorer, natural scientist and anthropologist, St. Innocent of Moscow became a missionary to Alaska in 1824 and eventually became the first resident bishop in America. He traveled to California in 1836, and in 1867 was elected Metropolitan of Moscow. He fell asleep in the Lord in 1879 and was glorified by the Russian Orthodox Church in 1977.

John Veniaminov

John Popov was born August 27, 1797, into a very poor family in Anginskoe in Siberia. When John’s father died, the boy was adopted by his uncle, Deacon Dmitry Popov. Young John was enrolled in the church boarding school at nearby Irkutsk. From then on, he proved to be a voracious reader.

When John was 17, the principal of his school got the wild idea (following the example of many other principals) of legally changing the surnames of his students. Since Popov was a very common name (meaning son of the priest), and there were a good many Popovs enrolled in the school, the principal told all the Popov boys to take as a surname the name the village from which each happened to have come. So, John Popov was to become John Popov-Anginsky.
But young John had spent much time visiting Bishop Benjamin of Irkutsk, so the principal chose to give the gifted pupil the name Veniaminov (which means “son of Benjamin”).

Soon afterward, John Popov-Veniaminov spent all his free time with the clock maker who had been commissioned to build a tower clock on the cathedral. He not only watched the progress on the clock but he did some of the work himself, learning how wheels, springs, and hands all fit together.

In 1817, when John was 20 years old, he married his fiancée, Elizabeth. John was soon ordained to the diaconate and in 1821, he was ordained a priest and given charge of Holy Annunciation Parish in Irkutsk, near Lake Baykal in Siberia.

The Church administration in St. Petersburg wrote to the bishop of Irkutsk, ordering that a priest be sent from his diocese to the colony of the Russian-American Company on Unalaska Island. None of the clergy wanted to accept this assignment because they all had heard stories that it was a wild country, full of savages. The bishop cast lots, and the deacon who was selected said he’d rather join the army than to go to America. Father John then reconsidered the matter and finally volunteered. He later recalled: “Neither my acquaintances’ advice, nor any description of the long journey and the privations I was likely to encounter on the way could make me change my mind.” Father John’s wife was unable to reverse his decision, and his bishop was very grateful.

**Missionary to America**

With his mother, brother, wife and little son Innocent (there would eventually be two sons and four daughters), Father John traveled on horseback through wide rivers, deep forests, boggy marshes and steep mountains. The Veniaminovs boarded ship at Okhotsk, and set sail for the chain of Aleutian Islands.
After a harsh, 2,200-mile journey, the Veniaminov family arrived in America in July 1824. They landed on the treeless, foggy, windswept, volcanic Unalaska Island, where they began their frontier life. Father John was 26 years old.

At first the family lived in an underground hut, common among the natives. As soon as he arrived, Father John established a school for children and adults, incorporating Aleutian ideas and culture into his teaching of the basics of Christianity. Using his skills in carpentry, masonry and metalworking to teach the Aleuts, he began the construction of a church and a house built of pine wood brought from Sitka. In June 1826, they had completed the Church of the Ascension of the Savior in Harbor Village on Unalaska. Father John spent the next 10 years traveling among the many islands in the Aleutian chain, planting the seed of the Orthodox Faith.

Father John's flock was scattered among 10 settlements along this chain of islands, and his "parish" consisted of more than 1,750 Russians, Aleuts and Creoles. Traveling by ship, kayak, reindeer and dog sled, Father John ministered among the Aleuts. He also studied the Aleutian culture and language. The Aleuts had no written language, and so Father John developed a written alphabet for them. He also wrote the first book in the Aleutian tongue: *An Indication if the Pathway into the Kingdom of Heaven*. Father John also translated portions of the Bible, a catechism and the Liturgy into Aleut language so that the people would not have to worship in Slavonic.

During the little spare time he had, Father John eventually built all the furniture for his house, clocks for many of the rooms, musical instruments for his family and friends, and he also made candles for the churches.

Father John wrote to St. Petersburg that it would be very helpful if the Church were to set up a missionary diocese centered in Alaska itself, rather than having to administer the work from Irkutsk in Siberia.

In 1834, after 10 years among the Aleuts, Father John was awarded the gold pectoral cross in recognition of his labors. He was then transferred to New Archangel (or Sitka) — the administrative center of Russian America — where the conditions were less harsh than they had been on the Aleutian chain. While based in Sitka, Father John spent the next five years as pastor among the Tlingit Indians: once again teaching and translating the Gospel and the Liturgy into the local language. In January of 1836 a smallpox epidemic broke out in Sitka. The Russians there were not affected, because they had been vaccinated, but the Tlingits were attacked fiercely, and many died. Father John — with great difficulty because of opposition from the Tlingit shamans (that is, medicine men) who blamed the epidemic on Father John and his religion — was able to persuade them to receive vaccination against the plague.

**A Journey to California**

In summer 1836, Father John visited California — sailing to Fort Ross and then traveling by land to the Roman Catholic missions of San Rafael, San Jose, Santa Clara and San Francisco. He went to California to deliver roll-organs (like player-pianos) and other musical instruments, which he had made at the request of the Franciscan missionaries. It was a way to raise funds for the Orthodox missionary work in the North. Father John and the Roman Catholic clergy both understood Latin, so they were able to communicate with ease. He later recalled that he had made one such organ with a Church music roll and a Russian folk song roll. The Roman priests were not much impressed with the Russian Church music, but when they heard the folk songs, they shook his hand and immediately placed the
organ in the mission church. Years later, the Russian missionary wrote: “I presume those Jesuits are still praying to the tune of Russian song and dance!”

Besides being a pastor, theologian, and educator, Father John was a carpenter, a clock maker, a navigator, a natural scientist (astronomy, meteorology, geology, botany, biology, etc.), and an anthropologist. Whether he was on the road or in his study, Father John continually wrote books about all these aspects of life in Alaska. His workshop at his home in Sitka was his favorite getaway after his work was done for the day.

In 1837 a British ship docked at Sitka. The ship’s captain, Sir Edward Belcher, attended the Liturgy celebrated by Father John and remarked that he was surprised to find the church’s interior so magnificent in such a wild place. Captain Belcher asked to see Father John’s workshop and was grateful that the priest offered to repair two of the ship’s barometers.

**Bishop Innocent**

In 1838-9, Father John and his youngest daughter Thekla traveled around the world by ship. Their destination: St. Petersburg. His purpose was twofold: 1) to apply in person to the Church authorities for more missionaries to assist in evangelizing America, and 2) to see if he could get his books published both in Aleut and Russian. Before setting sail, he had sent his wife and four children back home to Irkutsk to join the two older sons, who had been studying in the seminary there. En route, Father John and his daughter visited Honolulu and Tahiti, and rounding Cape Horn at the tip of South America, they stopped at the Falkland Islands, Rio de Janeiro, then up to Copenhagen and Kronstadt before finally arriving in St. Petersburg on June 22, 1839, after a journey of seven and one-half months.

By this time, Father John had attracted the attention of the colonial administration and the Imperial government. While he was in St. Petersburg, on Christmas, 1839, he was promoted to the rank of archpriest in recognition of his faithful apostolic labors and outstanding service.

He soon received the terrible news that his wife Elizabeth had died in Irkutsk on November 25, just one month prior to his elevation to archpriest. Father John wanted to leave immediately for Irkutsk to be with his children. But Metropolitan Philaret of Moscow urged Father John to enter the monastic life. Father John was 45 years old and had six children; he said no. Not to be dissuaded, the authorities made arrangements to assure the care of the Veniaminov children at boarding schools in St. Petersburg.

So in November 1840, a year after his wife’s death, Father John accepted the obedience of the metropolitan and took monastic tonsure. He received the name Innocent, after St. Innocent, the 18th-century missionary bishop of Siberia. The next day he was promoted to the rank of archimandrite.

Tsar Nicholas I summoned Archimandrite Innocent to the palace and confirmed his election as bishop of the new Diocese of Kamchatka, the Kurile and Aleutian Islands. His diocese, centered at Sitka, was to include not only the Pacific rim of Asia, but Canada and Alaska and what would become the lower 48 United States. On September 27, 1841, just 100 years after Nicholas Bering had found Alaska and 47 years after the first mission, America met its first Orthodox bishop.

Bishop Innocent spent his archpastorate continually traveling from isolated village to isolated village, teaching and preaching the Gospel. In 1843, he founded a pastoral school in Sitka that would train young students of many tribes, who could
then return to their villages and teach the Gospel to their families.

In 1848 a new cathedral was built in Sitka — St. Michael’s. Bishop Innocent constructed the clock in the cathedral’s clock tower much the same way that he had worked on the cathedral clock back in Irkutsk when he was a student.

Because of his work in spreading Christianity on the distant boarders of Asia and America, he was elevated to archbishop in 1850. Siberian Yakutsk was added to his missionary territory, and he was ordered to reside in and administer the diocese from that city. Once settled there, he again began the task of translating and preaching in the local tongue so that the Siberians would not have to learn Russian or Slavonic in order to worship God. The archbishop was assisted in his missionary tasks by his son, Father Gabriel Veniaminov.

The Meeting with St. Nicholas of Japan

In 1857 Archbishop Innocent was summoned to St. Petersburg for a meeting of the Holy Synod. While on his journey, he met the young Hieromonk Nicholas Kasatkin. This missionary was on his way from St. Petersburg to his new assignment in Japan. The archbishop advised Father Nicholas that if he wanted to be a proper missionary, he should give up the French theology books he so loved and immediately learn Japanese so that the people of Japan could come to know and worship God in their native tongue. Because of his own missionary efforts, Father Nicholas (who later became Archbishop Nicholas) was eventually glorified by the Church and is known today as St. Nicholas of Japan.

Upon his arrival in St. Petersburg, Archbishop Innocent asked the Holy Synod to send two auxiliary bishops to help with his vast diocese: one for Yakutsk in Asia and one for Sitka. This request was granted. Eventually near-blindness (perhaps due to his constant travel over bright, snowy wastes) threatened to make him a burden to his flock (or so he felt). So he then made plans to retire quietly to a monastery in St. Petersburg.

Metropolitan of Moscow

In 1867 (the same year that the United States purchased Alaska from Russia) the highest-ranking prelate of the Russian Orthodox Church, Metropolitan Philaret (Drozdev) of Moscow, died. Archbishop Innocent was immediately elected to fill his office, which he did in the year 1868. It was 46 years after his ordination to the priesthood, and he was more than 70 years old.

In the following year, the members of the Russian Geographical Society gathered at the University of Moscow to honor Metropolitan Innocent and his scientific and linguistic work in Alaska. But it wasn’t just this work that won him acclaim. In addition to his academic pursuits, Metropolitan Innocent had by this time established homes for orphans and widows, built schools, catechized and baptized literally thousands of faithful, trained and ordained native clergy throughout the North Pacific rim and Siberia, and he was now the chief pastor of all Russia.

As the Metropolitan of Moscow and All-Russia, and with jurisdiction over the colonies and missionary territories, he was able to care no less for his beloved American Church. Metropolitan Innocent suggested to the Holy Synod that the American Vicariate be moved from Sitka to San Francisco; that the bishop and clergy there be fluent in English; that American citizens be encouraged to enter the priesthood; and that the Divine Liturgy and other services be translated into the English tongue. He supervised and guided a missionary diocese that would grow
100 years later into an autocephalous, autonomous church in the New World: the Orthodox Church in America.

**St. Innocent’s Death**

At age 82, after a prolonged illness and by then nearly blind, Metropolitan Innocent peacefully fell asleep in the Lord at 2 a.m. on Holy Saturday, March 31, 1879. He was laid to rest beside his beloved friend, Metropolitan Filaret of Moscow, and also beside St. Maximus the Greek in the church of the Holy Spirit at the Holy Trinity–St. Sergius Monastery, in present-day Zagorsk, about 50 miles from Moscow. He had earlier asked that no eulogy be given at his funeral: “If a sermon is to be said,” he declared, “let this be your text: ‘The steps of a man are ordered by the Lord’” (Psalm 37:32).

Ninety-eight years later, in 1977, the Holy Synod of the Church of Russia formally proclaimed, glorified, and designated this missionary and metropolitan “St. Innocent of Moscow, Enlightener of the Aleuts and Apostle to America.” His feast day is commemorated March 31.

**St. Tikhon**

During what turned out to be the closing of the Communist chapter of Russian history, the Russian Orthodox Church acknowledged the sainthood of the man who was patriarch at the beginning of that chapter. St. Tikhon of Moscow and North America, as he is known, was missionary bishop to the vast numbers of Orthodox immigrants pouring into North America from all over the world at the turn of this century. He became Patriarch of Moscow in 1917, and he stood against the atheism and atrocities of the new Soviet government. In a death that was either caused or hastened by the Communist authorities, St. Tikhon fell asleep in the Lord in 1925.

**Early Years**

Vassily (Basil) Ivanovich Belavin was born January 19, 1865, into a priest’s family in the village of Toropets, near Pskov. When he was old enough, he was sent to study at the local catechetical school (corresponding to high school) and then the seminary (junior college) in Pskov, in preparation for the priesthood. He was a bright and eager student, and fellow students often asked him to help them with their studies. At age 19, Vassily enrolled in the Theological Academy at St. Petersburg. His classmates saw at once that he was very serious about his studies and his love for the Church. They fondly nicknamed
him “the patriarch.” He graduated in 1888, at age 23, and immediately took a position as teacher at his old alma mater, the seminary in Pskov.

In 1891 he was tonsured a monk and took the name Tikhon after St. Tikhon of Zadonsk, the 18th-century hierarch and monastic. He was soon ordained to the priesthood. Hierom­-monk Tikhon spent the next years teaching at the seminaries in Kholm and Kazan.

He was elevated to the rank of archimandrite, and by October 1897 (at age 32) Tikhon was consecrated Bishop of Liublin (Poland), the vicar of the Diocese of Kholm. (Poland was then part of the Russian Empire.) He served there less than a year before he was appointed Bishop of the Aleutians and Alaska. He arrived in New York on December 12, 1898. This diocese was made up of more than Alaska — it also encompassed the entire United States and Canada.

America

Bishop Tikhon was the only Orthodox bishop on the con­-tinent. According to the canons of the Church, all Orthodox Christians on this continent came under his omophor. As such, his flock was made up of indigenous Americans (Eskimos, Aleuts and Indians), Russians, Ukrainians, Belorussians, Greeks, Antiochians, Bulgarians, Serbs, Macedonians, Albanians, Galicians, Carpatho-Russians, Romanians, and other Americans not belonging to any of these ethnic groups. This period in American history — the turn of this century — was a time when immigration reached its peak. Bishop Tikhon’s flock, then, was made up of a growing number of diverse groups. He knew immediately that he had to maintain the canonical norm of unity among the faithful and at the same time allow for ethnic and cultural variations. The faithful wor-
shiped in Slavonic, Arabic, Greek, English and the Alaskan native languages. Bishop Tikhon’s archpastorate would be characterized by his extraordinary vision of Orthodox mission in the New World.

Bishop Tikhon traveled throughout North America during his nine-year archpastorate here. He opened up many new parishes in America. He strengthened the bond among the various groups of Orthodox faithful, encouraging them to think of themselves as one (which was a new concept for these far-flung and varied congregations throughout North America). It was in this vein that he said once, “The closer the unity among the Orthodox of various nationalities, the stronger will the Orthodox be in this land.”

Bishop Tikhon soon came to understand that the American mission could not be only an extension of the Church in Russia. He devoted his efforts to directing the faithful in America to become a local, self-sustaining and autonomous Orthodox Church. He opened the first American seminary in Minneapolis. He established the first American monastery in South Canaan, Pennsylvania. He requested the Holy Synod of Russia to send a bishop to be the Auxiliary Bishop of Alaska. They sent Bishop Innocent (Pustynsky). Bishop Tikhon then saw to the consecration in 1904 of a bishop here in America — the Antiochian Raphael Hawaweeny, who became the Auxiliary Bishop of Brooklyn.

Bishop Tikhon did not let the various languages of his diverse flock become a barrier to their unity. As early as 1904, services at the cathedral in San Francisco were held in English. In 1906, he published the work of Isabel F. Hapgood, an Episcopalian who was fluent in Russian and Slavonic. Mrs. Hapgood had been commissioned to compile, translate and arrange many of the services of the Orthodox Church into one volume.

Bishop Tikhon was elevated to the rank of Archbishop that same year. He called for the First General Council of the Church in America at Mayfield, Pennsylvania, just after New Year, 1907.

In 1905, the see of the diocese was moved from San Francisco to New York. The groundwork for this move had been made earlier by Father Alexander Hotovitsky, in response to the great wave of immigration from Europe and the Middle East to the East Coast of America. Interestingly enough, in 1900, Bishop Tikhon and Father John Kochurov attended — with the blessing of the Holy Synod — the consecration of Episcopalian bishop Charles C. Grafton at Fond du Lac, Wisconsin. In 1905, Bishop Tikhon was granted a doctor of divinity degree by the Episcopalian Nashotah House Seminary.

Return to Russia

In February 1907, after Archbishop Tikhon had served nine years as the chief hierarch in America, he was transferred to the ancient and important Diocese of Yaroslavl, where he served for seven years. In 1914, just before the outbreak of World War I, he was appointed to the Diocese of Vilnius, in Poland (now Lithuania). There he remained for three years, traveling to the front lines of the fighting and ministering personally to the sick and wounded soldiers. In 1917, Archbishop Tikhon was elected Metropolitan of Moscow (the vote was almost unanimous — 407 to 33).

The Patriarch

As Metropolitan of Moscow, he presided as the Chairman at the Church’s All-Russia Council of 1917-1918. One of the actions of the council was to restore the Patriarchate of Moscow. (Tsar Peter the Great had abolished that position in
1700.) It was decided that three candidates would be elected by a general vote. Then, in order to discern the will of God, lots were cast to determine which one of the three nominees would be the new patriarch. The name “Metropolitan Tikhon” was announced by the one who drew the lots.

Of the three candidates, Metropolitan Tikhon had received the fewest votes in the popular election. Although he was the chairman of the council and very popular in western Russia, he was not as well known throughout the Church as the other two candidates: Metropolitans Anthony of Kharkov and Arseny of Novgorod.

All those present at the council knew that the leader of the Russian Orthodox Church would soon face tremendous difficulties and a growing persecution from the Bolsheviks, who were gaining more power and control every day.

As soon as Metropolitan Tikhon’s name was drawn from the lots, and following a service of thanksgiving, the patriarch-elect said, “From now on, my duty shall be to take care of all the churches of Russia and to die for their sake every day. May He Who has called upon me grant me His divine help and His all-powerful blessings.”

A committee of the council quickly researched and readied for the long-forgotten ritual for the elevation of a patriarch. The service took place on November 21, 1917, in the Kremlin’s Cathedral of the Dormition, where no one had held the patriarchal throne for 217 years.

The Bolsheviks and Persecution

The communist Bolsheviks were not yet in control of the country, but they were a powerful and disturbing force. They terrorized all of Moscow with their gunfire. They eventually gained enough power to disrupt the All-Russia Church Council and dismissed its proceedings.

From the beginning, Patriarch Tikhon ardently defended the Orthodox Church (and all Russian people) against the terrors of the Bolsheviks. He denounced their political abuses, intrigues, and violence. Yet he also appealed to the Russian people to obey the legitimate decrees of the Soviet state — that is, those decrees that did not compel violations against the Faith or the Church.

After horrible crimes and murders had become the normal action of the Bolsheviks against the faithful, Patriarch Tikhon’s steadfastness showed forth brilliantly. When he received news from all over Russia that censers, chalices, tabernacles and silver icon-covers were confiscated in order to be sold for hard foreign currency or melted down for coin (so as to “feed the starving Russian population”), Patriarch Tikhon stood firm against the atheists.

When he received the news that innocent monks and nuns, priests, church councils, and parishioners were arrested, exiled or tortured as “counterrevolutionaries,” Patriarch Tikhon rallied against the persecution. He called upon the faithful to unite for the defence of the Faith and the holy places.

When he learned that the tsar and his family had been murdered, Patriarch Tikhon boldly spoke out. With the fall of the monarchy, and thus with the sudden loss of a national “father” (as the tsar had been considered), the Patriarch of Moscow would be the obvious person to fulfil that role, becoming the leader of all the Russian people. He saw himself as archpastor not only to the Orthodox, but also to the Soviets: He knew that he was the shepherd of the faithful flock and the lost sheep as well. He had to provide a strong, stable figure amid the tempest of revolution and upheaval.
He wrote to the Bolsheviks: “Recover your senses, madmen, and bring to an end your bloody strife. You are not merely committing cruel deeds, but truly the deeds of Satan, which are condemning you to the flames of Gehenna in the next world, and leaving a dreadful curse upon your descendents in the present world.”

He wrote to the faithful: “If we must suffer martyrdom for the sake of Christ’s truth, we are calling upon you, beloved children of the Church, to bear this martyrdom together with us.” Yet Vladimir Lenin, then-Soviet premier, did not want to have the patriarch harmed in any way, for fear that the Orthodox faithful would immediately proclaim him a martyr. That would be very damaging for the Communists.

Many of the bishops, priests, and laity left Russia for the safety of Western Europe and America. They formed a Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia. These people urged Patriarch Tikhon to flee the country and live abroad until things cooled down. “The flight of the patriarch,” he said “would cause the enemies of the Church to rejoice, and they would use that action for their own evil purposes.” These same emigré church people had also declared their desire to restore the Russian monarchy — yet Patriarch Tikhon rejected this scheme, and eventually he rejected the continuation of their “church abroad.”

**Confessor of Moscow**

Patriarch Tikhon attempted many times to negotiate with the Communists, so that innocent lives would be spared. Yet they made promises that they immediately broke, doing everything they could to discredit him among his faithful and in the eyes of the whole world.

The Communists organized a new ecclesiastical administration, the so-called Renovated or Living Church. This was nothing more than a puppet group formed to undermine and destroy the authentic Church and cause further confusion among the Orthodox faithful. They worked intrigue after intrigue to demoralize the patriarch.

In May 1922, the Communist Party placed Patriarch Tikhon under house arrest and charged him with the crime of opposing the “requisition” of the Church’s treasures for famine “relief.” This so-called requisition was an out-and-out theft of sacred and consecrated items. The patriarch was eventually released from his arrest for a time. Nonetheless, despite his so-called freedom, the Communist government saw to it that much of Patriarch Tikhon’s work was either challenged or disregarded. He often felt that he was prevented from doing anything, no matter which direction he turned. He declared that it was almost better to sit in prison than to be “free” and yet unable to do anything.

**Death**

In January 1925, Patriarch Tikhon was admitted to a private hospital as “Patient Belavin.” There he remained for three months, suffering continually from heart attacks, inflammation of the kidneys, sclerosis and asthma.

As soon as his health improved a little, the patriarch began once again to serve Liturgy in the churches of Moscow that were still allowed to remain open. But by the spring of 1925, his health was very bad. He recently had had two teeth removed, which resulted in an infection that spread to his throat. Late in the night of March 25th (April 7th on the new calendar), after a particularly heated argument with a bishop
who was an agent of the Soviets, Patriarch Tikhon began to have serious attacks.

He was given an injection of morphine “to ease his attacks.” The dose proved to be lethal. He fell asleep in the Lord at 11:45 p.m. on the Feast of the Annunciation, 1925. He was 60 years old.

In October 1989, the Russian Orthodox Church proclaimed Patriarch Tikhon a saint, designating him as “Enlightener of North America and Confessor of Moscow.”

The term “enlightener” refers to his role in evangelizing the American people. St. Tikhon once said, “The Light of Orthodoxy is not lit for a small circle of people . . . . It is our obligation to share our spiritual treasures, our truth, our light, and our joy with those who do not have these gifts. This duty lies not only on pastors and missionaries, but also on lay people, for the Church of Christ, in the wise comparison of St. Paul, is a body, and in the life of the body, every member takes part” (farewell homily before leaving America for Russia in 1907). The title “confessor” refers to his suffering on behalf of the Faith. During the horrible years following the Communist Revolution, St. Tikhon suffered greatly because of his steadfast witness to Christ. Like the martyrs of whom St. John the Theologian wrote, St. Tikhon loved not his own life, even unto death (see Apocalypse 12:11).

St. Juvenaly

For nearly 200 years, the true story of the martyrdom of the missionary Hieromonk Juvenaly has been clouded over by error, misinformation, and anticlerical slander. The oral tradition of the native Alaskans, together with convincing circumstantial evidence, conflicts with some reports that are more widely circulated. What is certain is that Father Juvenaly died as a martyr of the Faith at the hands of natives in western Alaska around 1796. He was glorified by the Alaskan Church as a saint in 1977.

Early Life

Jacob Govoruchkin was born in 1761 of a middle-class family in Ekaterinburg, located in the Ural Mountains of Russia. His father Theodore was the manager of a factory. Jacob served as an engineering officer in the military. In 1791 he received an honorable discharge from the service and entered the St. Alexander Nevsky Lavra (monastery) in St. Petersburg. When he was tonsured a monk, he took the name Juvenaly, after St. Juvenal, the fifth-century Patriarch of Jerusalem.

He was ordained to the priesthood, and thus became a hieromonk (or priest-monk). Soon after that, Father Juvenal moved to Konyavesky Monastery on Lake Ladoga in Russian Finland.
The Valaam Mission

In December 1793, Father Juvenaly, his younger brother Stephen and eight other monks (including St. Herman) set out on what was called the “Valaamo Mission to Kodiak.” Their assignment was to be missionaries from the Diocese of Irkutsk in Siberia. The North America Trading Company in Alaska was to assume responsibility for support of the mission. Their nine-month journey took them 8,000 miles across Russia, Siberia (where they were joined by 29 families of exiles bound for Alaska), and the Pacific Ocean. They arrived on Kodiak Island on September 24, 1794.

Immediately after the monks’ arrival, Father Juvenaly began traveling around the island. By all reports, he was well suited for missionary work, with great energy and enthusiasm. By God’s grace and through Father Juvenaly’s apostolic teaching, pastoral care, and his personal example, these Alaskans came to understand the Savior’s Good News and to embrace the Faith as their own.

The mission eventually expanded, and the monks divided up territory for their expeditions. Within two years, more than 12,000 Alaskans had embraced the Gospel.

St. Herman’s Account

St. Herman related this story: “On one occasion I happened to be with the hieromonks [Juvenaly and Macarius] as they developed their ideas. We were walking about our harbor and went up on the hill facing south; we sat down facing the ocean and began to discuss who should go in which direction to preach because the time was approaching when the ships we would have to travel on would depart. An argument then arose between them which I, in my humble way, found cheering and
amusing. On Cook’s charts, there is one location marked to the north showing that Russians live along one of the rivers. We had heard various tales about them, and these were referred to during this conversation; we all expressed the desire to meet them.

“Father Macarius began by saying, ‘I intend, God-willing, when I am on the Aleutian Islands, to make my way to Alyaska [the Alaskan Peninsula], where I have been invited by the Alyaskans, and as this is near to where the Russians are supposed to live, I shall seek ways to find out more about them.’

“But Father Juvenaly, having heard the word Alyaska, in his eagerness to speak, interrupted with, ‘Alyaska really belongs to my area, so I would ask you not to interfere there. When the next vessel leaves for Yakutat, I shall begin preaching from the south. Then I shall go north along the coast, cross Kenai Bay [Cook Inlet], and from the port there I shall, of course, cross to Alyaska.’

“When he heard this, Father Macarius was very much saddened and, looking glum, said pleadingly: ‘No, Batyushka, do not press me; you know yourself that the Aleutian chain is linked to Alyaska, therefore it must obviously be in my area, and the whole shore to the north also. You may have the whole southern [shore of] America if you like. There’s enough there for the rest of your life.’

“I was overjoyed listening discretely to such an argument. Hieromonks Macarius and Juvenaly are always so energetic, almost like madmen wanting to rush off in all directions . . . .”

Father Juvenaly’s Mission to the Mainland

Father Juvenaly left Kodiak during the summer of the following year (1796) and headed for mainland Alaska. At Nuchek, on the coast, Father Juvenaly baptized more than 700 Chugach Sugpiaq Indians. He then traveled northwest across the Kenai Peninsula to Cook Inlet (near present-day Anchorage), and spent the winter evangelizing and baptizing faithful from among the Athabaskan Indians who lived there. As he told Father Macarius earlier, his plans were to continue his missionary activities west toward Lake Iliamna and then further northwest toward the shores of the Bering Sea where a Russian settlement was rumored to exist. After making his westward crossing of the mountains near Lake Iliamna, Hieromonk Juvenaly was never heard from again.

Local oral traditions among the Alaskan peoples today relate the location and events of the martyrdom of Father Juvenaly and his guide. The elders of the Kuskokwim Delta tell of a priest who was martyred by a hunting party of coastal Yup’iks:

The priest arrived by boat at Quinhagak, near the mouth of the Kuskokwim River. He had a companion with him, very likely an Athabaskan or Tanaina Indian from the Iliamna or Kenai area. The companion, who was apparently a Reader in the Church, assisted Father Juvenaly as a translator and guide. The local Yupiat Eskimos were frightened by the arrival of these outsiders. As Father Juvenaly stood up in the boat to speak to the Eskimos and “waved his arm as if he were chasing away flies” (that is, he blessed his murderers with the sign of the Cross), the Yupiat shaman ordered that the intruders be killed immediately. A shower of spears and arrows flew at Father Juvenaly. His companion quickly jumped from the boat and dove down deep into the current. He was able to remain underwater, swimming and diving for long periods. This ability to “swim like a seal” seemed remarkable to the Eskimos, but with their kayaks, they eventually outlasted their prey, captured and killed him as well. Father Juvenaly’s body was then taken up the Kuskokwim River into the mountains and buried.
Now, Alaskan shamans were responsible among their people for such things as maintaining order and harmony between the tribe and the whole world, communicating with the spiritual realm, curing illness, invoking blessings (especially in relation to hunting) and curses, and prophesying the future.

The story continues that the shaman who was a member of this hunting party was very interested in the cross that Father Juvenaly wore. After Father Juvenaly had been killed, the shaman removed the cross from the body and put it around his own neck. He performed his rituals, but he became frustrated in the attempt — for he found that he could do nothing. He remarked that each time he tried to work his magic, he found himself being lifted several feet above the ground. He quickly took this “brass” cross off and warned others not to harm anyone else who might come dressed like this alien shaman. He told his companions that these people undoubtedly possessed great power, and it would be best to treat them very well.

Other Reports

After 1796, there were other references to the martyrdom of Father Juvenaly, scattered here and there.

On July 24, 1800, Alexander Baranov, manager of the Russian-American Company (formerly the North America Trading Company) wrote a letter to E. Larinov, the foreman of the Russian-American Company’s Unalaska settlement. The letter stated in a passing reference (ambiguously and in a grammatical style that could easily be interpreted much differently) that Hieromonk Juvenaly had apparently perished somewhere in the direction of the Lake Iliamna region (or possibly on the coast to the northwest).

“Count” Nicholai Rezanov, a notoriously wicked person whose noble birth was highly suspect, was appointed inspector for the Russian-American Company. In a private letter to the company’s board of directors, dated November 6, 1805, Rezanov attempted to defame the work of the Kodiak missionaries, whom he considered to be rivals of the company. He wrote, “Sometimes, unknown to the Company manager, they would set off uselessly to make converts . . . . At Lake Iliamna, the monk Juvenaly went there immediately to propagate the faith. He baptized them forcibly, married them, took girls away from some and gave them to others. The Americans endured his rough ways and even beatings for a long time, but finally held council, decided to get rid of the Reverend and killed him. He does not deserve pity . . . .”

St. Herman’s testimony has never been known to be incorrect. In December 1819, he wrote a letter to the new manager of the Russian-American Company, Simeon Yanovsky. In this letter, St. Herman simply said that little was known about the circumstances, the tribesmen involved, the motives or the location of the martyrdom of Father Juvenaly. St. Herman said that everything reliable concerning Father Juvenaly’s end was very unclear, rumors were contradictory, and there was no real information available at that time.

St. Innocent, writing about 50 years after Father Juvenaly’s disappearance, based his account on uncertain sources that appear to contradict any other reliable accounts. One source seems to have been the defamatory letter quoted above, written by Nicholas Rezanov. Another source was the correspondence and reports of company manager Baranov, who also had no love for the monks. Although St. Innocent probably had additional sources of information, by the time he wrote his account of St. Juvenaly’s martyrdom, rumor had become fact and conflicting stories had been glossed over. Nonetheless, nobody was known to have visited the scene of the crime to confirm the details with
recollections of members of local tribes. So using the information that was available to him, St. Innocent wrote that Father Juvenaly ended his life at Lake Iliamna.

St. Innocent describes the death this way: Father Juvenaly surrendered himself without any resistance but asked for the safety of his companions. After he had been killed (according to the report of his surviving guides), he rose up from the ground and followed the Eskimos, trying to speak with them. They beat him down again and again and finally hacked his body into small pieces. A pillar of cloud or smoke miraculously marked the place where he met his death.

About 100 years after Father Juvenaly’s disappearance, a bogus diary appeared, purporting to have been written by the missionary. This diary was “discovered” and “translated” by an impostor named Ivan Petrov. A note attached to the “original” diary states that the manuscript was saved by an Indian named Nikita, and that “Father Juvenaly was stabbed to death on the same night during which the last lines of his journal were written.” Petrov claimed that Father Juvenaly’s original manuscript had somehow disappeared after he (that is, Petrov) made the translation. For nearly 100 years, American historians have believed the manuscript to be authentic. These historians were simply ignorant of the customs, calendar, liturgical rites and services of Orthodox Christianity. Anybody at all familiar with the Orthodox Church would realize from the gross errors on every page that the “diary” was a fraud. It has recently been discredited by several competent scholars and is now considered nothing more than a forgery.

In 1885, noted historian Hubert Bancroft published his History of Alaska. In this book, he discusses the death of Father Juvenaly. Unfortunately, he based his account on Ivan Petrov’s “discovery”: the counterfeit diary of Father Juvenaly. Bancroft’s book became so universally accepted by historians interested in Russian America that the confusion and misinformation continued to spread.

**A Mystery?**

It is likely that Father Juvenaly actually reached the area of his hoped-for destination near the Bearing Sea. Remember that was the location of the “Russian settlement” he mentioned in his conversation with Father Macarius on Kodiak Island in 1794. Throughout the last half of the 1800s, when Orthodox missionaries and Russian explorers visited areas north and west of Lake Iliamna, they recorded in their journals that they found evidence there of earlier Orthodox evangelization. Eskimos were seen wearing copper or bronze crosses and were even vaguely familiar with the rites of the Orthodox Church.

As late as 1885, residents of the Kuskokwim Delta region recalled the exact spot at Quinhagak where their elders (who would have been alive at the end of the 1700s) had told them Father Juvenaly was mercilessly killed.

At the end of the final decade of the 19th century, the Eskimos of Quinhagak told a Protestant missionary named John Kilbuck that their ancestors had murdered a Russian priest. Kilbuck wrote in his journal that, at the instigation of shamans, the Yup’iks had forbidden this priest from holding any service. He would not give up, and even though he was not allowed to land, he attempted to preach from his boat. As he stood up, he was instantly killed by a shower of spears and arrows, as were all the interpreters and servants, except one. This survivor jumped into the water, swam and dove. The Eskimos boarded their kayaks, followed him and killed him. They later said that he had made a better chase than a seal.
Glorified a Saint

Father Juvenaly's missionary activity was brief, but it covered hundreds of square miles. His tremendous success in bringing the Gospel to the Native Americans was due to his God-given sensitivity to their own culture, beliefs, and individual humanity as being created in the image of the Holy One. He, like other noteworthy missionaries of all ages, was able to interpret the Faith to hosts of spiritual children in such a way that they not only understood it, but they embraced it with a devotion that has fervently lasted ever since.

Father Juvenaly was glorified and canonized as a martyr by the Diocese of Alaska in 1977. His feast is commemorated on September 24th each year, which marks the date of the arrival of the Valaamo monks at Kodiak Island in 1794.

St. Herman

In 1970, representatives of the Church from throughout the world gathered together in solemn assembly at Kodiak, Alaska, to proclaim that a simple, unsophisticated lay monk and missionary from a Moscow suburb was to be glorified as the first saint of America. From the moment he set foot upon the soil of the New World, he has been beloved by all the faithful. The light of St. Herman's holy life and great deeds have ever since shone forth with the Light of God's Love upon our land.

Early Life

Herman was born into a merchant-class family in Serpukhov, just outside of Moscow, around 1758. As a teenager, in 1772, he entered monasticism at the Holy Trinity-St. Sergius Skete, about 10 miles from St. Petersburg — near the Gulf of Finland. We do not know the name his family gave him; he was tonsured a monk with the name Herman.

While Herman was at the Trinity-Sergius Skete, an infection on the right side of his throat began to abscess. His swelling grew, causing a putrid disfigurement. He was unable to swallow, and his condition worsened, bringing him close to death. One night as he lay in pain, he turned to his icon of the Theotokos and asked her to pray for his health. He then took a moist towel, and with it he wiped the face of the Virgin
depicted in the icon. He covered his swollen face with this towel. Continuing to pray, in exhaustion and pain, he finally fell asleep on the floor. In a dream that night, he beheld a vision of the Theotokos healing his infection. Herman woke up in the morning with the swelling gone down and the abscess completely healed.

In 1779 (when he was about 21 years old) Herman transferred to the ancient and famous Valaam Monastery. The monastery was located on an island in Lake Ladoga, in Russian Finland; Valaam is the largest of a group of islands scattered on the lake. The Monastery of Valaam was founded by two Greek monks (Ss. Sergius and Herman) in the 12th century. At the end of the 18th century, the igumen (abbot) of Valaam was Father Nazarii, who was greatly admired by his monastic community. Father Herman had a very close attachment to this spiritual elder. (In the Orthodox tradition, a monk is called “Father” whether he is ordained or not. Father Herman was a layman all his life.)

Contemporary accounts from 18th-century Valaam relate that Father Herman was very popular with his monastic brothers. Despite his popularity, he preferred to live in a hermitage deep in the forests of the island. He came back to the monastery for brief visits on Sundays and feasts. The accounts say that he had a pleasant tenor voice and sang the services with deep devotion.

In 1793 Metropolitan Gabriel of Novgorod and St. Petersburg asked Igumen Nazarii to choose a band of monks from Valaam Monastery who would form a missionary team. The task of this mission was to travel across Russia and Siberia and begin the evangelization of Russian America (that is, Alaska). The members of the Valaam Mission (later called the Kodiak Mission) were Archimandrite Joasaph, who was the priest-in-

They journeyed east for nearly a year (it was the longest missionary journey in Christian history) and landed on Kodiak Island on September 24, 1794. It was from Kodiak that the missionary team based their evangelization. Most of the monks remained near Kodiak, where they also initiated a bilingual (Russian and Aleut) school for the natives. Eventually, Fathers Macarius and Juvenaly traveled to the mainland to take the Gospel to the people who lived there.

When it was necessary to do so (for example, in the absence of Archimandrite Joasaph, and later Father Gideon) Father Herman was assigned to keep charge of the Kodiak Mission and to administer the school.

In addition to their missionary duties, the monks also saw the need to protect the native Americans from the harsh treatment by the employees of the Russian-American Company which controlled the colony under the leadership of Alexander Baranov. Baranov was a self-serving tyrant who considered the Aleuts and other Americans to be little more than slave laborers. Because the monks continually stood up for the Alaskans, they themselves were the subjects of persecution and slander. In fact in 1800 Baranov had placed the monks under house arrest. He forbade them any contact with their Christian flock.

To bypass Baranov, the monks attempted to place the natives under imperial protection. So the monks tried to administer an oath of allegiance on the part of the natives to the tsar. Baranov threatened to beat the monks if they did not cease their actions. In protest, the monks withdrew to their skete on Kodiak and refused for a time to serve any of the Orthodox faithful of the colony — Russian or American.

In a fashion typical of his character, Baranov once wrote that Father Herman “is a great talker and likes to write. Even though he keeps to his cell most of the time, not even attending services here out of fear of worldly temptations, he knows nevertheless everything we think and do, not only during the day, but also at night. By means of pious cajoling, he extracts the information he wants from students, servants, and sometimes even from our own men.”

Father Herman, on the other hand, did not have a very glowing report of the tyrannical Baranov. He complained about the lack of supplies that were supposed to come from the company; the very harsh treatment of the native population, especially the women; the opposition to the Faith and ethics; the complete lack of justice; and the despotic reign of terror that Baranov maintained.

Between 1808 and 1818, Father Herman chose Spruce Island as his home, calling it New Yalaam. Spruce Island is separated from Kodiak by a strait of water just over a mile wide. Father Herman, who still preferred the life of a hermit, lived in a hut near a fresh-water spring on this heavily forested island retreat. He knew, though, that as a missionary, he needed to venture often into the world and society. Nevertheless, he based his missionary efforts on Spruce Island for more than 40 years. When asked how he could live alone in the forest and how he overcame loneliness, Father Herman responded, “I am not alone. God is here, just as He is everywhere. The holy angels are here...” Father Herman also had many companions from the animal world. Flocks of birds gathered near his dwelling to be fed, and his special pets were a family of wild mink. The elder was often heard singing and chanting the monastic offices from inside his hut at Monk’s Lagoon. He worked in his garden, harvesting turnips, horseradish, potatoes, garlic, cabbage,
and other vegetables. He caught fish and stored them for the winter months.

Father Herman was of medium to short stature, with a pale, wrinkled face. His grayish-blue eyes gleamed and twinkled brightly. He wore a deerskin smock and canvas breeches under his monastic cassock. He always wore the same garments, and over the years they became threadbare and full of patches and darning. He slept little, spending most of each night in prayer. For his bed, Father Herman slept on a bench covered with a deerskin, and used two bricks, also covered with deerskin, for a pillow. He ate very little, usually the monastic diet of vegetables or fish, but due to the extreme poverty and food shortages on the Aleutian chain of islands, the Holy Synod permitted him to eat meat occasionally. Nonetheless, he would not eat meat itself, but he only consumed the broth made from the meat. As an extra means of ascetical effort, he wore upon his shoulders a set of chains weighing nearly 16 pounds.

It is said that Father Herman was occasionally gifted with the ability to discern the future, foretelling various events years in advance. One day an earthquake in the area caused a tidal wave. The flood tide threatened to devastate the island, and the Aleuts came to Father Herman for help. He took an icon of the Theotokos from the orphanage, went to the beach, placed the icon upon the sand, and held a Service of Prayer. Following the prayers, Father Herman told the people not to fear: The water would not rise any higher than the place where the icon had been placed. And it was so.

Father Herman was very fond of children. He loved to carry them in his arms and comfort them. He spent lots of time with the young people, telling them stories and teaching them about the Lord. He usually had little cookies that he baked for them. Of course, they often sought him out on their own because they adored their beloved elder.

In 1817, a ship from the United States brought a fatal disease to the Kodiak natives. Its symptoms began with a fever, then a heavy cold, labored breathing, shortness of breath, choking and finally the chills. Usually it took three days for the victim to die. This plague crossed to the other islands in the area. Hundreds of Aleuts perished in the epidemic. Since there was no doctor on the island, Father Herman remained with them constantly, caring for them, comforting them and praying with them. The epidemic lasted for about a month. When it had ceased, Father Herman took the orphans back with him to Spruce Island, where he built a school house and orphanage for them. He also built a small chapel where the Spruce Islanders gathered with him for prayer.

In 1817, Simeon Yanovsky was sent to replace Alexander Baranov as the manager of the Russian-American Company. Although Yanovsky had heard what amounted to horror stories about Father Herman, when they met, there was an immediate mutual magnetism that eventually developed into a long, fulfilling friendship. Yanovsky, writing years after his tour of duty in Alaska, continued to mention Father Herman with warmth and fondness. It is to Yanovsky that we owe much of the information we now have of Father Herman’s life.

A ship from St. Petersburg landed at Kodiak in 1818. Captain Vasily Golovnin had been sent by the government in order to make an inspection of the Russian American Company’s colonies. Father Herman was invited aboard for a visit. The captain was an intelligent, well-educated gentleman. That evening he was surrounded by many of the best officers in the Imperial Navy. Into this awe-inspiring gathering walked the slight, unsophisticated little old man garbed in threadbare clothing.
During the course of the evening’s conversation, the elder, who despite his limited schooling possessed a natural intellect and common sense, asked the members of the crew what it was that would bring them the most happiness. Some wanted wealth, others wanted a top ranking position in the Imperial Navy, others wanted a beautiful wife, etc. “What could be better, higher, more worthy of love and more splendid than Our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, Who created the world, adorns, gives life, sustains, nourishes and loves everything — Who is Himself love. Should you not love God above all things, and wish for and seek Him?” The reply came, “Why that’s obvious, how can we not love God?” He responded, “I, a poor sinner, have been trying to learn how to love God for more than 40 years, and I cannot say that I yet love Him properly. If we love someone, we always remember them, we try to please them continually. Day or night we are concerned about them. Our mind and our heart is concerned with the object of our love. How do you love God? Do you turn to Him often? Do you always remember Him? Do you always pray to Him and keep His commandments?” The crew admitted that they did not. “Then, for our good and for our happiness, let us all make a vow: at least from this day, this hour, this very minute, we should try to love God above all else and carry out His teachings.”

By 1819, 25 years after the beginning of the Kodiak Mission, only three of the original missionary team were still living in the area of Kodiak. All the other monks were either dead or transferred back to Russia. The remaining missionaries were Father Herman on Spruce Island, Father Athanasius on the island of Afognak and Father Joasaph on Kodiak itself.

At about this time a young woman named Sophia Vlasova came to Father Herman and asked if she could live nearby as a disciple. The elder granted her request, and she helped by teaching at the school. Father Herman said that after his death, Sophia was to remain on the island, carrying on his work. He also entrusted to her care the icon that had been placed on the beach when Spruce Island was threatened by the tidal wave.

In 1825, a young trouble maker from Siberia was sent to assist Father Herman. The Kodiak mission, as such, no longer existed, but Father Herman (now semi-retired on Spruce Island) continued to collect donations in the hope of restoring the work. This new Siberian “missionary” plundered Father Herman’s hermitage and arranged for the elder to spend three long years in exile on Kodiak. He also saw to it that another of the monks, old Father Athanasius, was sent back to Valaam. Father Herman was eventually allowed to return to his island, and the Siberian was sent home in 1834, giving Father Herman peace at last.

Father Herman told his beloved flock that there would be no priest nearby to perform his funeral when he died. The people would have to bury him themselves. He wanted to be placed immediately in the earth near his fellow-missionary, Father Joasaph. “Bury me yourselves, and do not wait for the priest. Do not wash my body. Lay it on a board, clasp my hands over my chest, wrap me in my outer cloak, and cover my face. Place my klobuk on my head. If anyone wishes to bid farewell to me, let them kiss the Cross that I wear. Do not show my face to anyone.”

Just before he died, Father Herman asked one of his spiritual children to light the candles and read from the Acts of the Apostles. The cell filled with a wonderful, fresh, floral scent. The face of the elder glowed, and in this blessedness, Father Herman fell asleep in the Lord on December 13, 1837, at the age of about 80.
His spiritual children kept his body lying in state at the orphanage for a number of weeks, and his body did not begin to corrupt. His face remained serene, and a wonderful fresh, floral fragrance lingered in the air. Eventually, they buried him on the island, and placed a wooden marker above his grave.

Almost immediately, the local faithful considered their elder to have been a saint. His memory was continually kept in Alaska, then eventually in Finland and Russia. Finally, devotion to Father Herman spread among the Orthodox across all of North America. Many miraculous occurrences throughout the world have taken place through his intercessions.

In March of 1969, the Holy Synod of Bishops of what was then called the Russian Orthodox Greek Catholic Church of America (soon after to be granted autocephaly and given the name The Orthodox Church in America) gathered together. At their meeting they proclaimed that Father Herman would be glorified as a saint for having faithfully toiled in the “spiritual work of apostolic service among the natives whom he illumined by the light of the truth of the Gospel.” The bishops continued: “In a short encyclical it is impossible to describe in detail all the deeds of his holy life in Alaska. Those who met him once, those who had contact with him could never forget him. He is remembered by hierarchs. Priests and believers living in America today remember him as an intercessor before God.”

On August 7, 1970, bishops, priests, and faithful from the entire Orthodox world assembled at the Church of the Resurrection in Kodiak, where the elder’s relics lay and began the process of the glorification. For three days services were chanted in English, Church Slavonic, Aleut, Greek, and Finnish. The Divine Liturgy and final acts of canonization took place on August 9. St. Herman, Elder and Wonderworker of Alaska, had become the first of the saints to be glorified on this continent.

St. Peter the Aleut

In the early 1800s, a young native of Kodiak Island became the third martyr for the Orthodox Faith in America when he was tortured and murdered by Spanish colonials in California. His Aleut name was Cungagnaq (pronounced Choong-UGH-noq), but he received the Christian name Peter when he was baptized by the monks of the Kodiak mission years before.

Fort Ross

The Alaskan settlements of the Russian-American Company were not self-supporting. They needed food and other provisions that were not available locally. Items came from Russia, Siberia, California, and even as far away as South America.

The California outpost of Fort Ross (derived from the word for Russia — “Rossiia”) was established in 1812 by the Russian-American Company. It was located on the Pacific coast, just 80 miles north of San Francisco. The climate there was mild: perfect for cultivating crops and raising cattle. The Russian-American Company sent 320 employees to Fort Ross to do the farming and ranching. For 28 years, then, Fort Ross was a primary source of food and other goods necessary for the Russian settlements in Alaska.
Tensions with Spanish California

At the time, Spain owned the territory of Alta (i.e., "Upper") California. Not only had the Spanish colonists and authorities become suspicious of this Russian advance so very close to their own lands, but the Spanish government sent official protests to St. Petersburg, demanding that the colony of Fort Ross be closed. The Spaniards feared that the Russians intended to launch an attack from Fort Ross and take possession of San Francisco. The Spanish officials forbade all foreign trade within California, and they forbade all ships originating from Russian colonies to enter or even approach Spanish colonial ports.

In 1815 the newly appointed Spanish governor, Lieutenant Pablo Vincente de Sola, ordered a sudden halt to Russian trading and trapping. He also ordered the immediate arrest of nearly a hundred Russians and Aleuts who had not obeyed the previous orders to leave. The Spaniards held these captives hostage, refusing to release them to the Russian-American Company except in exchange for Russian supplies that the Californians needed.

Some of these prisoners were kept in San Francisco; others were sent elsewhere in California. The Spaniards treated their captives as slaves: forcing them into hard labor, making them live in abominable conditions, and beating them often and severely.

In 1815 a party of 14 Aleut seal and otter hunters from the Russian-American Company approached the shores of California. They were under the leadership of a Russian named Tarasov. Spanish sailors captured them, pillaged their ship and took the hunters captive to San Francisco for trial.
Kychaly's Eyewitness Account

There is an eyewitness account of this event by one of these Aleut hunters named Kychaly.

The trial had been a mockery. Many of the prisoners were jabbed or cut severely by the soldiers’ sabers. Peter’s head had been badly wounded by the blade of a sword, and the cut bled seriously. The whole group of prisoners was thrown into a locked room for the night. The next morning, a Spanish priest-inquisitor tried to persuade the captives to accept Roman Catholicism, but they all refused. Thirteen of the prisoners were taken to the prison where they remained for a number of days, while Kychaly and Peter were kept separate from their group. At sunrise the next morning, these two were surrounded by a group of California Indians. The Spanish priest gave the order to cut off each finger of Peter’s hands, one joint at a time, eventually cutting his hands off altogether. Finally, he ordered that Peter be disemboweled. Peter soon died of his tortures. Just before it was Kychaly’s turn for torture, the priest received an order to stop the proceedings. Kychaly was then taken back to his cell, and Peter was hastily buried, possibly in one of the mass graves for Indians at the Mission Dolores cemetery.

Eventually the Spaniards released Kychaly and some other captives. In 1817, an American ship rescued them at sea and took them to Fort Ross. Kychaly told the incredible story to Ivan Kushov, the fort’s manager, and Kushov reported the Spanish atrocities to St. Petersburg. Kychaly went home to Alaska in 1819 and continued to tell his story.

Simeon Yanovsky's Account

There is a similar version of the murder of Peter the Aleut in a letter dated November 22, 1865, from Simeon Yanovsky (the chief director of the Russian-American Company in Alaska) to Igumen Damascene of the Valaam Monastery in Russian Finland. (Valaam is the place from which the monks of the 1794 Kodiak Mission came.) Yanovsky writes about a conversation he once had with St. Herman.

In the course of this conversation, Yanovsky told the monk the story of how Roman Catholic priests in California tried to force the Aleut hunters to embrace Roman Catholicism. The prisoners said, “We are Christians; we have been baptized.” They even showed the Latin priests their baptismal crosses.

“No, you are heretics and schismatics,” replied one of the priests. “If you do not agree to take the Catholic Faith, we will torture you.” The captives were then told to “think it over.”

Coming back later that night, the priests found that the Aleuts again refused to renounce Orthodoxy and to embrace the Roman Church. They took a prisoner and cut off one of the toe joints from one of his feet and then from the other. In response to this, the Aleut simply repeated: “I am a Christian; I will not betray my faith.” Next they cut a joint off each finger — first from one hand then from the other. Then they hacked off one foot at the instep and then one hand at the wrist. The Aleut’s wounds were terrible, and he eventually died from the loss of blood. The remaining Aleuts were promised that they would be tortured the next day unless they forsook their false religion.

During the night, an order came, commanding that the remaining prisoners be sent immediately under guard to Monterey, the capital of California. The order was carried out.

After Yanovsky told this all to St. Herman, the elder asked the name of the tortured Aleut. “Peter,” Yanovsky replied, “but I cannot remember his other name.” Then, standing before the
icon, the monk crossed himself, and said, “Holy, newly martyred Peter, pray to God for us!”

Peter the Martyr

Unbelievable as this story may seem to us, we should remember that many terrible tragedies occur because of misunderstanding, ignorance, fear or suspicion of foreigners, resentment, jealousy, general self-centeredness, and wickedness. Whatever the motivations and circumstances lay behind the horrible death suffered by the young Orthodox Aleutian fur hunter in San Francisco (be they political, imperialistic, religious, or just plain evil), the fact remains that God’s grace remained with Peter, who would not give up his belief in God as he had learned it from the monks of the Kodiak mission.

One of those monks, St. Herman, asked for the prayers of Peter the Proto-martyr of California, entreating him to intercede on our behalf before God. Indeed, Peter has done so ever since.

It was not until 1980, however, that Peter the Aleut was glorified as a saint by the Church. His feast day is commemorated September 24, the date of the anniversary of the 1794 arrival in America of Saints Herman and Juvenaly, and their eight companion members of the Kodiak Mission from Valaam Monastery.

Archpriest James (Yakov) Netsvetov

James (Yakov) Netsvetov was born on the island of Atka, Alaska, in 1802. His father, a Russian from Tobolsk named Igor, was an employee of the Russian-American Company. His mother, Maria Alekseva, was a Native American from Atka. Thus, James was what is called a Creole.

Records show that James was chrismated when he was five years old. He lived in Irkutsk, Siberia, where he received his theological education. When he was 23 years old, he married Anna Simeonovna, a Russian woman born in Siberia. The following year, 1826, James was ordained to the diaconate. Two years later, he was ordained a priest and sent from Irkutsk to the newly founded St. Nicholas parish on Atka. He was the first Native American Orthodox Christian ever to be ordained to the priesthood.

Father James’ parish territory consisted of a number of islands, with a combined total distance of 2,000 miles. He visited these islands regularly, ministering to the faithful, dispensing medicine, and serving as an intermediary between the Aleuts and the tyrannical administration of the Russian-American Company. Most of the islanders had earlier been introduced to the very basics of the Faith and had been baptized by
Siberian Orthodox lay missionaries. It was Father James’ task to chrismate these islanders and continue their Christian education. By the end of 1829, Father James recorded that he had baptized 16, chrismated 442, married 53 couples, and buried 8 within St. Nicholas parish. He established a school in order to teach written and spoken Russian and Unangan Aleut.

In addition to his pastoral duties, Father James spent his time preparing specimens of fish and marine animals for museums of natural history in St. Petersburg and Moscow. With the help of St. Innocent (Veniaminov), he also worked on a written form for the Unangan language. He then translated the Scriptures and other writings into the native tongue.

After 15 years of service in the Atka parish, Father James was elevated to the rank of archpriest and awarded the tsar’s Order of St. Anna.

Between 1835 and 1837, Father James’ wife died in Sitka. Father James also lost two other family members. During the same period, his house burned to the ground. He then asked the bishop for permission to return to Irkutsk to enter the monastic life. The permission was granted, on the condition that first a replacement be found for the Atka parish. That replacement priest was never found, so Father James continued as the pastor at Atka until 1844.

During his entire ministry, Father James kept an extensive and fascinating journal full of valuable information about his work, his experiences, and the people with whom he lived. He submitted his journal to the bishop at the end of each year. His entry for November 26, 1842, reads as follows:

“On the occasion of the Feast of St. Innocent of Irkutsk, I held the vigil. In the morning, prior to Liturgy, I baptized an infant born to a local Aleut a week ago. Then all the children, boys and girls, were gathered in the chapel and I spoke to them about God’s love for people, especially for children. . . . Afterwards I celebrated the Divine Liturgy, at which 50 adults who had come to confession were joined to the Holy Mysteries. Later on I visited the cemetery and sang the requiem for all those who had died here since my last visit. The rest of my time was spent performing [eight] weddings. . . . After the ceremonies, I instructed the newlyweds on the meaning of marriage and the duties of husband and wife respectively. Thus I concluded my activities there.”

In 1844 St. Innocent appointed Father James to the Yukon Delta region as missionary priest. The reasoning behind this assignment was that a missionary for this area would need to be completely self-reliant, without family responsibilities. Father James (now a widower) was the obvious choice. So, together with three assistants, Father James settled in on the Yukon tundra. Their life was by no means easy: they were often reduced to the very barest of necessities and subsistence living. These conditions greatly affected Father James’ health. He began to suffer from a number of chronic illnesses. His missionary work was often an ordeal for him — though he never ceased to receive tremendous joy from his vocation. Nonetheless, during the next 20 years while learning new languages and dialects, Father James founded another Orthodox parish, built the church and nurtured the faith in southwest Alaska. He established his missionary headquarters at a Yup’ik Eskimo village that is called Russian Mission today.

Because of the vast territory needing pastoral care, Father James requested additional missionary help. He received it in the form of some highly undesirable assistants. One, the monk Filaret, was obviously sent to Russian America by his abbot in order to be rid of him at the monastery. After only a few weeks in Alaska, this monk attacked Father James first with a pistol.
and then with an ax. He had to be bound hand and foot and locked up until he could be shipped back to his monastic brotherhood. Another of Father James’ monastic assistants, Father Gabriel, was even worse than his predecessor. Convinced that Father James was trying to poison him, he continued to level ridiculous criminal accusations at the missionary. This monk was eventually declared insane and defrocked.

During the 36 difficult years of his missionary activity, Father James had baptized 1,320 persons. He has been called the Apostle to the Yup’ik and Athabaskan Indians.

In 1862 Father James moved to Sitka, where he served briefly as dean of the cathedral clergy; he spent the final year of his life at the Tlingit Chapel of the Holy Trinity. On July 26, 1864, Father James, nearly blind and dwelling in poverty, fell asleep in the Lord at the age of 62. He was buried near his wife Anna at Holy Trinity Chapel.

Mitred Archpriest
Alexis Toth

Alexis Toth (son of Father George and Matushka Cecilia Toth) was born March 14, 1853, near Eperjes, Hungary (Slovakia). He studied in Roman and Byzantine Catholic seminaries, and eventually graduated from the University of Presov with a degree in theology.

Alexis was ordained to the Uniate Greek Catholic priesthood in 1878. He served for two years as a parish priest, before being appointed by his bishop to be the diocesan administrator. In 1881 Father Alexis became the director of the Presov seminary, where he also taught canon law and Church history for the next eight years.

In 1889 Father Alexis was sent to America to serve as a mission priest. He began his American ministry in Minneapolis, at the new St. Mary’s Russian Orthodox Greek Catholic Church.

The parishioners of St. Mary’s were immigrants from the Carpathian Mountains of Austrian Galicia. These immigrants were known as Carpatho-Russians, Urgro-Russians, Galicians, Rusins, and Ruthenians. In the Carpathian villages their ancestors had originally been Orthodox, but the state church of the Austro-Hungarian Empire was the Roman Catholic Church,
and so the people were forced to unite with Rome. As Uniates or Byzantine Catholics, they were permitted to follow the Eastern rather than Latin rites in their church services.

The Roman Catholic Church in America at this time was involved in an internal controversy. Many of its bishops felt that Roman Catholic immigrants should become thoroughly assimilated into the culture of America. Yet Eastern European immigrants desired to retain their “old country” identity. This had a tremendous effect upon Greek Catholics who were forced to live under the jurisdiction of Latin-rite (that is, Roman Catholic) bishops. These bishops considered Greek Catholics to be an alien sect. But the immigrants simply desired to worship in a language and manner they could comprehend.

Upon his arrival in Minneapolis, Father Alexis visited his hierarch, Roman Catholic Archbishop John Ireland. That meeting is described in Father Alexis’ own words:

“I was a Uniate when I came to America. . . . I appeared before Bishop Ireland on December 19, 1889. I kissed his hand according to custom and presented my credentials, failing, however, to kneel before him (which, as I learned later, was my chief mistake). I remember that no sooner did he read that I was a ‘Greek Catholic,’ his hands began to shake. ‘Have you a wife?’ ‘No.’ ‘But you had one?’ ‘Yes, I am a widower.’ At this he threw my papers on the table and loudly exclaimed: ‘I have already written to Rome protesting against this kind of priest being sent to me!’ ‘What kind of priest do you mean?’ ‘Your kind.’ ‘I am a Catholic priest of the Greek rite. I am a Uniate and was ordained by a regular Catholic bishop.’ ‘I do not consider that either you or this bishop of yours is Catholic. . . . I shall grant you no jurisdiction to work here.’”

Archbishop Ireland officially and publicly forbade any Roman Catholics from worshiping at services conducted by Father Alexis. So Father Alexis appealed to his bishop in Eastern Europe and then to Rome, but nothing seemed to get resolved. Other Uniate priests wrote to Father Alexis that they had been treated the same way by Roman Catholic bishops when they arrived in America.

“I made up my mind to do something which I had carried in my heart for a long time, for which my soul longed: that is, to become Orthodox. But how was it to be done? I had to be very cautious. The unfortunate Union [that is, the formation of the Uniate Catholic situation], the source of our decline and all our ills, had been part of our people for too long. We had already borne that yoke upon our shoulders for 250 years. I fervently prayed to God to grant me the power to make all this clear to my unenlightened parishioners.” For the most part, the people needed little persuading. They suggested that he contact the bishop of the Russian Orthodox.

“Some said that he lived in Sitka; others said that he lived in San Francisco. . . . I knew absolutely nothing. I only knew that in San Francisco there lived a Russian Consul. Therefore, using the name Andrew Potochnak, I sent the following inquiry to the Russian Consulate — ‘Is it true that a Russian Orthodox bishop lives in San Francisco? If so, what is his name and where does he live?’ After 10 days a letter arrived addressed to Michael Potochnak, informing him that the name of the ruling prelate was His Grace, Bishop Vladimir, and that he lived at 1715 Powell Street North, San Francisco.”

A representative from Minneapolis went to San Francisco to find out whether this bishop was really an Orthodox hierarch, or whether he was an Old Believer or a member of some Russian heretical sect. Bishop Vladimir (Sokolovsky) invited Father Toth to visit him in order to discuss the possibility of reception into the Orthodox Church. In the end, Bishop
Vladimir traveled to Minneapolis, and in March of 1891, on the Sunday of the Triumph of Orthodoxy, Father Alexis and his community of about 361 Ruthenian immigrants were formally accepted into the Orthodox Diocese of Alaska and the Aleutian Islands. This was officially recognized and sanctioned by the Holy Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church and proclaimed at a special service at the Cathedral of St. Basil the Great (as it was then named) in San Francisco on August 28, 1892.

Naturally, this action angered many of Father Alexis’ Uniate associates. They considered him to be a renegade who caused division. Nevertheless, still other Uniate priests followed his lead and embraced the Orthodox Faith.

Within two years Father Alexis moved from Minneapolis to Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania. The area surrounding Wilkes-Barre had been the major focal point for Carpatho-Russian immigration to America. Father Alexis continued to work with the immigrants. He helped see to the establishment of the Russian Orthodox Mutual Aid Society for the benefit of his people. In order to educate those whom he wanted to reunite with the Church, Father Alexis wrote a basic catechism of Orthodox Christianity, titled *Where to Seek the Truth*. By the end of his life, he alone had received about 15,000 Uniates.

For his efforts, Father Alexis was elevated to the rank of mitred archpriest. He received the Order of St. Anna (for distinguished civil service to the Russian people) from Tsar Nicholas II, and the Orders of St. Vladimir and St. Alexander Nevsky (for distinguished service to the church) from St. Tikhon, then the Archbishop of North America. Father Alexis is considered by many today to be the “Father of American Orthodoxy.”

Father Alexis fell asleep in the Lord at the age of 56 on May 7, 1909. He is buried at St. Tikhon’s Monastery in South Canaan, Pennsylvania.

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Bishop Raphael (Hawaweeny)

Bishop Raphael was born in Damascus, Syria on November 8, 1860. Immediately after he was born, his parents Michael and Miriam fled with their baby to Beirut — just prior to the Druse massacres which left Damascus running with blood and claimed 2,500 Christian lives.

Raphael attended the Greek Orthodox Theological School in Halki from 1879 to 1886. He was ordained to the diaconate and then traveled to Russia where he enrolled at the Kiev Theological Academy. His studies were cut short in 1889 when he was ordained a priest and appointed to serve as the Rector of the Antiochian Patriarchal Embassy in Moscow. By 1894 Father Raphael was canonically accepted into the Russian Orthodox Church, and he soon took a post as professor of Arabic language and literature at the Kazan Theological Academy. This institution specialized in missionary training for work among the Muslim inhabitants of the Russian Empire. It was hoped that Father Raphael’s background and knowledge could help with the evangelization of south-central Asia.

That same year, 1894, the New York based Orthodox Syrian Charitable Organization pleaded with Father Raphael to come to America. In addition, Bishop Nicholas (Ziorov) of the
Diocese of the Aleutians and North America was at the same time traveling throughout Russia in order to recruit missionaries for work among American immigrants. Once he had been assured that the members of the O.S.C.O. had pledged obedience to the Holy Synod of Russia, Father Raphael agreed to join Bishop Nicholas' missionary team. They arrived in America on November 14, 1895.

By 1896 Father Raphael was given the official title “Leader of the Syrian Orthodox Spiritual Mission in North America” and elevated to the rank of archimandrite. He was assigned to New York City, to organize the parish that would eventually become St. Nicholas Cathedral in Brooklyn. Nonetheless, just half a year after his arrival on the East Coast, Archimandrite Raphael set out on a five-month visit to more than 30 cities along the rail lines that led due west to San Francisco. His main objective was to become acquainted with Arab-speaking American Christians.

He later took other missionary tours across, up, and down the country. However, not only the Orthodox gathered with him. Melkite and Maronite Christians as well as Muslims sought him out. Within two years, he had organized many parishes throughout the United States that served Orthodox Arab-Americans. In 1898 St. Tikhon (Belavin) was sent to America as ruling bishop. Archimandrite Raphael was the highest-ranking representative of the American Orthodox community to greet him.

Two times in 1901 Archimandrite Raphael had been elected to the episcopacy in his homeland. On each occasion he declined, stating that his work in America was not yet finished. St. Tikhon, however, also believed that the archimandrite would be an excellent vicar (assistant) bishop. In 1903, St. Tikhon went to Russia and asked the Holy Synod to approve of the election of Archimandrite Raphael to the episcopacy in order to serve the faithful in America. The approval was granted. His election took place at St. Nicholas Russian Orthodox Cathedral in Manhattan on March 12, 1904. His episcopal consecration took place at St. Nicholas Syrian Orthodox Cathedral in Brooklyn the next day — at the hands of St. Tikhon and Bishop Innocent (Pustynsky). Bishop Raphael had become the first Orthodox bishop to be consecrated on American soil.

With the help of Father Alexander Hotovitsky, a fellow missionary from Russia (and publisher of The Russian-American Orthodox Messenger), Bishop Raphael immediately began the publication of The Word, his Arabic-language diocesan journal.

Disputes among immigrants from different regions and villages of the Middle East proved to be a never-ending challenge for Bishop Raphael. In addition, the Maronites (a Lebanese Christian group in communion with Rome) opposed his episcopal consecration and in protest caused a violent riot on the streets of Brooklyn which resulted in Bishop Raphael's arrest — and eventual exoneration.

Bishop Raphael came to accept the realities of life in America, refusing to fight against them. When he saw the young people of the Church drifting away because they did not understand Arabic, he insisted that Sunday School instruction, the Divine Liturgy, and other services be in English. He worked with Isabel F. Hapgood in order to prepare the famous English language Service Book that was published under the direction of St. Tikhon in 1906.

Repeated attempts to lure Bishop Raphael back to the Middle East failed: he was offered the archdioceses of Beirut, Aleppo, Tripoli, Tyre-and-Sidon, and others. But he continually declined, declaring that his work in America was not completed. He always maintained his loyalty to the Russian
Orthodox Church and served as an envoy of Antioch in America under the jurisdiction of Moscow.

At the turn of the century, relations between the Orthodox and Western Christians arose most naturally with the Protestant Episcopal Church. The Episcopalians had been extremely helpful to and financially supportive of the immigrant Orthodox Christians. Together with St. Tikhon and Bishops Platon and Evdokim, Bishop Raphael maintained regular relations with the Episcopal Church. He was often invited to address their local diocesan and national General Conventions. Preliminary steps were even taken (but eventually abandoned) to investigate the possibility of receiving the Episcopalians into the Orthodox Church.

Due to his tireless labors, by 1909 Bishop Raphael had contracted a severe case of rheumatism that eventually developed into heart disease. He became bed-ridden for extended periods of time, weakening in health as the years passed. (By the end of his active ministry, more than 30 Syrian parishes had been established in America due to his direct guidance.)

Bishop Raphael fell asleep in the Lord on February 27, 1915, at the age of 54. There were so many mourners that his body lay in state for more than a week at St. Nicholas Cathedral in Brooklyn. Special permission was obtained from the City of New York, and he was buried beneath the altar of that church.

Proto presbyter
Alexander Hotovitsky

Alexander Alexandrovich Hotovitsky was born in Zhitomir, Kremenetz, in the Volynia region of Russia in 1871. His father was the rector of the Volynia Theological Seminary. It was at this school that young Alexander completed his studies, and he then went on to the St. Petersburg Theological Academy for his graduate studies.

Alexander graduated from the academy in 1895. He immediately applied for a position in the North American Mission. His application was accepted, and he accompanied Bishop Nicholas (Ziorov) to America that year. In January 1896, Alexander married Maria Sherbutchin. Four weeks after their wedding, Alexander was ordained to the diaconate and then the priesthood. He was assigned to be the rector of the newly founded parish of St. Nicholas in New York City, which was to become the Russian Orthodox Cathedral in Manhattan. The parish occupied a house on Second Avenue, where the faithful worshiped on the street level, and Father Alexander's family lived above. In 1901, Father Alexander traveled to Russia to raise funds to build the cathedral, which was to be located on East 97th Street. St. Tikhon (Belavin) consecrated the church.
in May 1901. By 1903, St. Nicholas Cathedral had become the center of the Russian Orthodox Missionary Diocese of America.

During his years of pastoral work, Father Alexander assisted in founding parishes up and down the East Coast and in Canada. He was the publisher and editor of the *Russian American Orthodox Messenger*, the American Church’s major English- and Russian-language publication. Due to his outstanding service to promote the life and witness of the Orthodox Church in America, Father Alexander was elevated to the rank of archpriest by St. Tikhon in 1901 — only five years after his ordination.

He returned to Russia in February 1914. It is at this point that any direct record of Father Alexander’s activity ends. We know that he served on the staff of the famous Cathedral of Christ the Savior in Moscow. His years in America affected his style of living after he returned to Russia. Among other things, he continued to wear his hair and beard short, in the American manner.

Father Alexander was reported to have been sent to Siberian and Solovetsky Island concentration camps. He met his martyrdom at the hand of the Soviets about 1930.

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**Archpriest**

**John Kochurov**

John Kochurov was born June 13, 1871, in the village of Bigildino (Surka), in the Donkovsky District of the Ryazan province in Russia. His father was the village priest.

John studied at the St. Petersburg Theological Academy in the early 1890s, when he met Bishop Nicholas (Ziorov) of the Aleutians and Alaska (the missionary diocese in America). Upon his graduation in 1895, John asked Bishop Nicholas to let him become part of the American Mission. Even though he was not yet ordained, he was assigned to be the rector of St. Vladimir Parish in Chicago, as well as priest-in-charge of a Slovakian mission in Streator, Illinois, 90 miles from Chicago. After graduating from the theological academy, he married Alexandra Vasilievna, the daughter of a priest in St. Petersburg. By August, John had been ordained to the priesthood, and by October he was in Chicago.

St. Vladimir Parish in Chicago worshiped on the ground floor of a house, and the upstairs served as living quarters for the priest, the choir director and their families. The congregation consisted of Russians, Serbs, Galicians, Bulgarians, and Arabs. He knew that the parish would require a proper church building to meet the needs of the Orthodox faithful of Chicago.
Father John traveled to Russia and raised considerable funds to be added to the parish's building account. Yet this amount was not sufficient to build a church. He returned to Chicago and appealed to prominent citizens for assistance. Eventually, and with the help of one of the most renowned architects of the time, Father John saw to the design and construction of Holy Trinity Cathedral — an innovative amalgamation of traditional Russian church architecture and 20th-century American architecture. When the cathedral was completed, St. Tikhon (Belavin) celebrated the service of consecration.

In addition to his monthly mission trips to Streator, Father John traveled to Hartshorne, Oklahoma; Slovaktown, Arkansas; Buffalo, New York; and Joliet and Madison, Illinois. An ongoing concern of Father John's was the conversion of Byzantine Catholics, to allow them to return to their mother Church. He worked to this end and encouraged others to do the same. He also held a deep commitment to the Christian education of young people, so as to instill in them the firm religious and moral foundations they would need in secular society.

Living in Illinois made Father John one of the most isolated priests in the American diocese. Yet his wife Alexandra and their three sons were for him the source of strength and community he needed. His brother clergy throughout the church held him in high honor and love. The tsar awarded him with the Order of St. Anna in 1903. St. Tikhon elevated him to the rank of archpriest before they both departed from America in 1907. Father John had spent 12 years laboring in this missionary diocese, and he returned to Russia, where he was martyred by Bolsheviks during the Revolution.

At Tsarskoe Selo, near Petrograd, Father John was presiding at a Service of Prayer. He confronted an angry and unruly mob of revolutionary sailors for having interfered with this priestly ministry. The sailors attacked and shot him and apparently dragged him over the tracks of the railroad until he died. He was the first priest-martyr of the Russian Revolution. The date of his murder is variously given as November 1, November 13 or even December 8, 1917. There is no clear record of the date.

One contemporary account reads: "He met a martyr's death at the hands of Bolshevik sailors. . . . These revolutionaries objected to Father John's serving a molieben for the salvation of Russia. When he refused to stop, they killed him."

In another place: "Archpriest John Kochurov was shot to death while in his vestments. Wounded, he falls to the ground and sighs heavily, he is in convulsions before death. A voice in the crowd says: 'Let's finish him off like a dog.'"

Since the moment of his martyrdom, which by the shedding of his blood had sanctified his homeland, the veneration of his life and witness has continued and grown both in Russia and in America.
Bishop Nicholai (Velimirovich)

Nikola Velimirovich was born into a large peasant family in the village of Lelich, Serbia, on December 23, 1880. Young Nikola began his education in Lelich and later went to the capital city, Belgrade, to attend St. Sava Theological Seminary. He graduated in 1902 at age 22.

He entered the graduate Theological Faculty (or school) in Bern, Switzerland, in 1905 and in 1909 received a doctorate in sacred theology — the first of many doctoral degrees he would earn. Later that year, he returned to Serbia and was tonsured a monk at the Monastery of Rakovica, receiving the name Nicholai. He was soon ordained to the priesthood and eventually elevated to the rank of archimandrite. Two years after his ordination, he joined the faculty at his alma mater, the St. Sava Theological Seminary in Belgrade and taught there until 1915. During his four summer vacations from St. Sava’s, Archimandrite Nicholai went to study in Russia.

When World War I broke out, Archimandrite Nicholai was sent to England on a diplomatic mission. While he was there, he lectured at Oxford University and received a doctorate in philosophy at the university’s King’s College. At the same time, he received honorary doctorates from Cambridge University and Glasgow University. He returned to Serbia in 1919 and was elected and consecrated a bishop that same year, at age 39. He was appointed to the Diocese of Zicha and later to the Diocese of Ochrid.

He spent 1921 and 1922 as a missionary bishop in America, creating and administrating the Serbian Orthodox Diocese in the United States and Canada. After his two years in America, he returned to Ochrid, where he resumed the archpastorate of his two Serbian dioceses. That is where he remained until 1934, when he went back to Zicha until the collapse of Yugoslavia in World War II.

During World War II, the Nazis occupied Yugoslavia. Civil war broke out, and Serb fought Serb. In addition, hundreds of thousands of Orthodox Christians were tortured or massacred by the Croatians under the direction of the Nazis. Hosts of other Serbs were sent to Nazi death camps. Serbian Patriarch Gavrilo and Bishop Nicholai were sent to the infamous Dachau concentration camp, where — although they suffered horribly — they both survived the war.

Years later, Bishop Nicholai said that he had once spoken with an elder on Mount Athos. Young Nicholai asked the monk: “Father, what is your main spiritual exercise?”

The elder replied, “The perfect visualization of God’s presence.”

“Ever since then,” Bishop Nicholai said, “I tried this visualization of God’s presence. And as little as I succeeded, it helped me enormously to prevent me from sinning in freedom, and from despairing in prison. If we kept the vision of the invisible God, we would be happier, wiser, and stronger in every walk of life.”

As the war was nearing its end, Bishop Nicholai and Patriarch Gavrilo were liberated from Dachau. Patriarch Gavrilo
returned to Yugoslavia, but Bishop Nicholai did not, having found that he was unwelcome in Serbia. During the years that followed the war, Church leaders were not given the freedom to preach the Gospel and teach the Faith in Yugoslavia. So it was from abroad that Bishop Nicholai felt he could best serve the faithful of his Church, and he chose to remain in foreign exile.

He first went to England, but within a year, in April 1946, he decided to go again to America. This time he was a refugee, without any official position in the Church. He arrived at the Serbian Orthodox Cathedral in New York City. He also taught at the Serbian Orthodox Seminary in Libertyville, Illinois, until 1949. Bishop Nicholai moved to the Russian Orthodox St. Vladimir’s Seminary in New York and later to St. Tikhon’s Monastery and Seminary in South Canaan, Pennsylvania. There he would teach, preach, continue to write, and pursue his own studies. In addition to degrees from Bern and Oxford, Bishop Nicholai received doctorates from Halle in Germany, the Sorbonne in Paris, and Columbia University in New York.

He began as a professor at St. Tikhon’s Seminary, but eventually he was appointed rector. At that time, most of the courses at St. Tikhon’s were taught in Russian, but Bishop Nicholai chose to teach only in English. Other faculty members disagreed with his decision, and some became resentful of him, but the bishop knew that it was important for the students to hear their lectures in their own language. On most occasions, he even preached his sermons in English in the monastery church at St. Tikhon’s so that everyone — the monks, the seminarians and the faithful laity who attended the Liturgy — would be able to understand him. The people often complained about the use of English, but he would answer: “You have learned and heard enough. It is time for the seminarians to learn something.”

One of his students wrote of Bishop Nicholai: “He sighed a great deal when he prayed and before class he would spontaneously pray for us and the seminary. He knew the strengths and weaknesses of each seminary student. At times he would sit on a warm fall evening and play his flute, and the tears would stream down his face as he remembered his beloved Serbia. He also survived the Dachau prison camp. When the students would complain about the food, he would say, ‘You don’t know what bad food is. We would search through the garbage cans at Dachau.’ But beyond that, he would not mention his sufferings.”

Bishop Nicholai’s health had been weakened by his captivity at Dachau. Despite his ill health, however, he remained in constant contact with the faithful of the Serbian and other Orthodox churches. He taught his seminary classes with enthusiasm, power, and deep insight. He often traveled to the Serbian Church House in New York, and there he received his spiritual children and other visitors. His correspondents, his spiritual children, his students, his fellow monks, and all who knew him came to regard him with love and respect.

Bishop Nicholai fell asleep in the Lord on Sunday, March 18, 1956, at St. Tikhon’s. Ten days later, his body was moved for burial to the Serbian Monastery of St. Sava in Libertyville, Illinois, where it remained until April 24, 1991. At that time his body was taken back to Yugoslavia, where he lay in state in many towns and cities. According to his own final wishes, the bishop’s body was finally transferred to his native village of Lelich in Serbia on May 12, 1991. His remains joined those of his parents and his nephew, Bishop Jovan Velimirovich. In 1987, Bishop Nicholai was glorified by the local diocese as a saint of the Church.