

## A COLLECTION OF SERBIAN MARTYRS, vol 1

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### Kontakion (Tone VIII)

Let God be praised in the fields and meadows, / on the green mountain tops and in the valleys below, / on the rushing rivers and in dark caves, / since every place has been watered by the innocent and holy blood of many Serbian Martyrs: / worthy stewards, brave soldiers, young men, children and chaste virgins; / let God be praised and let everyone keep silent, // for the Lord of all ruleth this world!

### ---ST. THEODORE OF VRSHAC---

Theodore Nestorovich was from Banat. His early life is unknown, but it is known that in the 16<sup>th</sup> century he was made the Bishop of Vrshac. He was considered a suitable candidate and was well known for modesty, humility and complete devotion to the Orthodox Faith. He was very merciful and loving towards his people. Life under the Ottoman rule was especially difficult at that time. When word reached Vrshac that the Janissaries had rebelled, Bishop Theodore hoped and prayed that the Turks would withdraw from Banat and other enslaved Serbian Lands.

In 1593, the leaders of the Serbian people came to Bishop Theodore and informed him that the conditions for an uprising had been created, and they had the support of the Austrian Emperor to fight against the Turks. Bishop Theodore told them: "Take the flags of the churches, decorate them with the image of Saint Sava. Just as the Holy Emperor Constantine won with flags on which there was a Cross, so may the image of Saint Sava, our spiritual father and defender, be displayed on our flags. Let us start, my children and my brothers, in the fight for justice and freedom". The Banat uprising began in 1594. This event was recalled in a popular song from the period (that was eventually recorded by the famous Serbian poet Vuk Karadzich). "The whole country rebelled, six hundred villages rose up, each raised a rifle to the (Austrian) Emperor!"

The insurgents won many victories, but also shed a lot of blood. A company of 200 insurgents, under the leadership of Petar Modjzesh, freed the Vrshac plateau. The enraged Ottoman soldiers said that they were not defeated by the insurgents, but by the "Kaffir Sava". This led to Koca Sinan Pasha burning the relics of St. Sava on Vrchar hill (near Belgrade) that same year. In June 1594, however, a

decisive battle near Bechkerek sealed the fate of the Serbian insurgents. 30,000 Turks attacked the 4,300 strong Serbian Army. Almost the entire Serbian army perished, and Banat was once again under Turkish rule. The Serbian people, led by Bishop Theodore, escaped to Erdelj in Transylvania, in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth (modern day Romania) where the Hungarian Duke Stephen Bathory housed the Serbs as refugees.

The Turks blamed Bishop Theodore for the insurrection, and wished to get rid of him. The Pasha of Timisoara told Theodore that if he and the rest of the Serbian refugees returned to Vrshac, they would be given a pardon. Although he knew that he could not rely on their promise, he hoped that his sacrifice would be a sufficient pledge to end the suffering of the innocent Serbian people. Thus, choosing to be willingly martyred, he returned to Vrshac, where the Turks immediately imprisoned him and after numerous humiliations and tortures, he was hung by his feet upside down on a tree, and in an especially barbaric and cruel execution; the Turks skinned him alive. This is depicted on many icons of St. Theodore. Afterwards the Turks burned his relics. His traditional date of Martyrdom is believed to be May 16<sup>th</sup>, 1595, and he is remembered every year on May 16<sup>th</sup>, as a result.

His memory has been well kept since the 16<sup>th</sup> century. It is believed he was a writer -- as leaders of the Banat uprising do mention letters that he wrote -- however these are lost today. Some believe his surname was Teodorovich, but this is likely a confusion with a Serbian vojvode who lived a similar time (who did not participate in the Banat uprising) who had the last name. There also exists a Slava service to St. Theodore of Vrshac. As a result of St. Theodore's command to the rebels, many churches in Serbia still have banners of St. Sava today.

### ---ST. THEODORE OF KOMOGOVO---

Theodore Sladich was born in the village of Kukuruzari, near the Kozara mountain, in the Serbian Krajina (modern day Croatia) to parents known for their humility. Besides their surname, nothing is known about his parents. As a young man, he entered the monastery of Moshtanica, which was near his birthplace. It is unknown if he became a monk or stayed a novice. Shortly after arriving, he accompanied a monk on a pilgrimage to the Komogovina monastery near Kozarska Dubica (modern day Bosnia). He lived an austere and humble life in prayer and fasting at both Moshtanica and Komogovina.

Due to the distrust the Ottoman Turks had for the Serbs after the Banat uprising (1594) and their siding with the Austrians during the Austro-Turkish war (1593-1606), Serbs were treated unfairly, and Theodore was arrested along with 150 other Serbs from the Krajina for fear of being spies or Shajkashi (Serbian rebels) in the year 1693. The ascetic Theodore was ordered by the Turks to give up his belief in Jesus Christ, and then offered a bribe if he would refuse God and accept Islam. He refused and as a result, the Turks burned him alive near Moshtanica monastery. His body burned, but due to God's providence, his hand was preserved from the flames and showed to be incorrupt thereafter. The 150 companions of St. Theodore were also Martyred, however their names are not recorded.

The hand of St. Theodore was collected by the monk Svilokos in 1693 from the ruined remains of Moshtanica monastery. Due to his association with the monastery there, Fr. Svilokos brought St. Theodore's hand to Komogovina, and was kept in the monastery Church for centuries. In 1925 a silver reliquary was made for the hand of St. Theodore and donated by Dushan and Danica Trinich from Zagreb. Until 1942, the Holy Relics were kept in Komogovina, then transferred to Zagreb. Due to the persecution of the Ustashe during the Second World War, a Church warden by the name of Rajachich brought them to Karlovac, where it was found in the church of St. Nicholas. It remained at the Church of St. Nicholas in Karlovac until 1955, when it was brought to Kostajnica for fear of the Communists stealing the relic. On Holidays of the Serbian Orthodox Church, a solemn transfer on foot would bring the hand of St. Theodore to the monastery of Komogovina so that the faithful could venerate the Holy Martyr.

During the war in Croatia between 1991-1995, the relic of St. Theodore disappeared. It was later determined that it was stolen, and it is missing to this day. St. Theodore of Komogovo's memory is celebrated on the first Saturday of Great Lent, along with St. Theodore the Recruit (who is believed to have been St. Theodore's patron Saint) during the preparation of the Kollyvade. On some icons, he is depicted as a layperson in traditional Serbian costume, but in other icons he is depicted as a monk or even clergy. The latter in icons is more than likely a confusion of St. Theodore of Komogovo with St. Theodore of Vrshac. Some also claim he was martyred in 1788, but this is likely a confusion with another Theodore from the same area.

---ST. GEORGE OF KRATOVO---

George was born in Kratovo, near Sofia in Old Serbia, (now modern day

Macedonia) in the year 1497, to the parents Dimitrije and Sara, who were both ethnic Serbs. After being educated as a youth with the ability to read and write, he studied metallurgy and in particular, the gold and silver smith's trade. His father reposed when he was young and he went to Sredac (now a suburb of Sofia) and lived with the local priest, Fr. Peter, and continued to perfect his goldsmith's trade. He became famous for his great modesty, humility and piety, and also for his ability to write, which was rare in the days of the Ottoman occupation.

Upon hearing this, a local Turkish "softa" (proselytizer) went to visit George who was only eighteen years old and tried to convince him to become a Muslim. The young George shamed and confounded the Turk, and in embarrassment, the Turk claimed George stated his belief in Islam. As a result, the Turkish Janissaries imprisoned him on charges of apostasy since he was seen going to Church. They brutally tortured George and held him in a prison in Sofia. He was burned alive at the stake on February 11<sup>th</sup>, 1515 during the reign of Sultan Selim I.

His host, Fr. Peter wrote his life in Sofia between 1515 and 1523. The original manuscript was transcribed by Stojan Novakovich in 1867 and was held in the National Library of Serbia in Belgrade. A Russian Hieromonk by the name of Ilia wrote about his life in 1539. St. Paisus of Hilendar, one of the most important writers of the Bulgarian National Revival, in his work about Bulgarian and Serbian Saints, "Istoriya Slavyanobolgarskaya" (written in 1762) records St. George's life. In 1855, Nikola Krastoyanov from Samokov printed "The life of St. George the New" based on a manuscript that was kept in the metropolitan library in Sofia. Milan Milichevich wrote a work on St. George's life in 1885.

He is often referred to as "St. George the New" due to being one of the first Martyrs of the Serbian nation. A fresco from the 16<sup>th</sup> century shows the Saint in national costume. The famous Iconographer Djordje Krstich painted the icon of St. George of Kratovo in 1924. In 1925, the life of St. George was published in a newsletter of the Serbian Orthodox Church "Svetlost". A Church was dedicated to him in 1929 in Kratovo. The Orthodox Church celebrates the memory of St. George on February 11<sup>th</sup> and May 26<sup>th</sup>. A neighborhood in Belgrade, Pashino Brdo, has had a street named after St. George since before the Second World War, which was left unchanged even during the reign of the Communists.

---ST. CHRISTOS THE GARDENER---

Christos was an ethnic Bulgarian from Albania, however some believe one of his

parents might have been Albanian. When he was 40 years old, he left his homeland and went to Constantinople and became a gardener. He grew orchards of apples and sold them in the markets. One day, while selling his apples, a Turk began to haggle with him for the price. Unwilling to sell his apples for an unreasonable price, the enraged Turk slandered Christos and claimed he promised to convert to Islam. He was arrested and brought to court, where false witnesses testified against him. The judge by the name of Causpasata asked Christos if this was true, to which he answered clearly, "I am a Christian and never said such a thing, and I will no wise change my faith, even if it cost me a thousand sufferings."

Causpasata ordered him to be beat with clubs, and then to be tied and hit on the head until he was completely bloodied. They threw him in prison and his leg was shackled with a short chain to a very large log. While in prison, a Greek monk by the name of Kaisarios Dapontes visited him and offered him food, Christos said: "Why should I eat? I do not expect to live, so I may as well die hungering and thirsting for Christ." Christos was sentenced to death via beheading for apostasy. To fund a pannikhida, he asked Fr. Kaisarios to sell a metal file he owned. He was beheaded on either February 12<sup>th</sup>, or November 12<sup>th</sup> 1748 in Constantinople. His relics were collected by Fr. Kaisarios and brought to Serbia. Fr. Kaisarios also wrote his hagiography.

In icons of St. Christos, he is depicted in either Bulgarian or Albanian national costume, and usually holding an apple, or doing the work of a gardener.

### ---ST. GABRIEL OF PECH---

Gabriel was born in the Stari Vlah region to a noble family. The name of his parents and much of his early life is unknown. He was the Metropolitan of Smederevo until 1643, then he was elected Metropolitan of Ras and Novi Pazar. While he was the Metropolitan of Ras and Novi Pazar, he rebuilt the ruined Monastery of the Holy Archangels near the Kovilje Mountains in 1644. After the repose of Patriarch Pajsije on November 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1647, Gabriel was unanimously elected Patriarch by the Synod at Moracha Monastery on the eve of the feast of Ascension in 1648. Like previous Patriarchs, he was forced to pay a tribute to the Turks, the tribute he gave was 100,000 akchas (about 4,000 pounds of sterling silver). He visited Constantinople in order to gain protection for the Serbian people.

Once he visited his home of Stari Vlah, there he met a Russian nobleman by the name of Ivan Vasily Suski, who invited Patriarch Gabriel to visit Russia to get material and spiritual support for the Serbian people. He traveled to Russia for the first time soon after, accompanied with Metropolitan Arsenije of Trebinje. On his way to Russia, on the eve of the Nativity of Christ, he was in Wallachia near the village of Tergoviste and helped reconcile the Wallachian Prince Mattei of Besarab with the Zaporzhian Cossack Ataman Bogdan Khmelnytsky.

He made another visit to Russia in 1654 and brought two books with him to be printed, "Lives of the Serbian Emperors and Patriarchs" and "Typos against the Latin heresy" by St. Nilus Kabasilas. While in Moscow, he was welcomed personally by Patriarch Nikon and Tsar Mikhail Romanov. He participated in and represented the Serbian Church at the famous Moscow Synod in 1658, in which Patriarch Nikon's reforms were approved and the Old Ritualist schismatics were condemned. While in Russia, he sensed that the Turks would soon turn against him, and wrote to the Synod in Serbia that they should find a candidate for the Patriarchate.

When he returned to Serbia in 1659, he was accused by the Turkish government for causing the Russo-Turkish War. Many of the Jews falsely accused him also of trying to convert Turks to the Faith, as they were envious that Patriarch Gabriel had converted many Jews to the Christian Faith. The Jews provided false witnesses at the trial against Patriarch Gabriel, who was sentenced to either embrace Islam or be killed. After Patriarch Gabriel refused to accept Islam, he was sentenced to death. However before his execution, he fell asleep in the Lord on July 18<sup>th</sup>, 1659 in Bursa, in Turkiye. A priest, Fr. Pavle, took his remains and buried them in Pech among the rest of the Patriarchs of Serbia. He was shortly thereafter recognized as a Confessor and Martyr for the Faith, where his memory is celebrated on July 18<sup>th</sup>.

---ST. AVAKUM THE DEACON---

Lepoje Prodanovich was born in 1794 in Kneshpolje (modern day Bosnia) near the Kozara mountain to the parents Gavriilo and Bozhana. He was raised piously in a Christian spirit. His father had reposed when he was young, and his mother took him to the Moshtanica monastery near Banja Luka. Shortly thereafter, he became a novice and was placed under obedience to the Priestmonk Fr. Gennadije Shuvak. He learned how to read and write while there. In 1809, the Turks suppressed a rebellion in the area around Moshtanica, and the Serbs, led by Fr. Gennadije, who

had since become Abbot and his son Stojan left the monastery. Lepoje and his mother also left the monastery – which was later destroyed – and moved to Trnovo, near Chachak, and stayed in the Annunciation Monastery there under a Igumen named Paisiy.

Sometime before the revolt of Karadjordje in 1813, Lepoje was tonsured a monk with the name Avakum, and was ordained a Hierodeacon by Metropolitan Josif (Sakabenta). Due to the reprisal campaigns of the Turks, another revolt started in 1814 under Hadzhi-Prodan Gligorijevich, which the monks of the village of Chachak became actively involved in. Hierodeacon Avakum was a military chaplain to the rebels under Hadzhi-Prodan. A local Serbian nobleman, by the name of Milosh Obrenovich, collaborated with the Turks to help suppress the rebellion of Hadzhi-Prodan. As a result, 300 prominent Serbs were captured and later killed, most by beheading or being impaled. The Turks offered mercy if they would convert to Islam; Abbot Gennadije and his son Stojan accepted this offer and took on the names Mula Salija and Redzep. Fr. Avakum, however, on this offer said:

"A terrible judgment awaits thee Turks, so may thou do what thou please! Soon God will come, and He will be a witness and a judge!"

Hierodeacon Avakum and Igumen Paisiy were captured, and were brought to Belgrade and imprisoned in the tower of Nebojsa, near Kalemegdan. On the way, Hierodeacon Avakum and Fr. Paisiy were marched past the impaled bodies of the other Serbs who were captured. Fr Avakum's mother, Bozhana, wanted him to falsely state his intentions to convert to Islam, in order to save his life, to which Fr. Avakum replied:

"My mother, I thank thee for thy milk, but for thy words, I thank thee not. There is no faith as beautiful as the Christian one. A Serb is Christ's; he rejoices in death. Today is for the Name of Christ."

Fr. Avakum said these words while they were leading him past the Stambol gate (near the National Theater in Belgrade today) while carrying the stake he would be impaled on. While in prison, Fr. Avakum and Fr. Paisiy both sang "God is with us" (from the office of Great Compline). The Pasha of Belgrade, Skopljak, came to visit the two Fathers in prison, and urged them to convert to Islam, saying if they converted, they would not die. Fr. Avakum laughed and responded "don't Turks die eventually too?" The Pasha said; "of course, we do", to which Fr. Avakum said

"Blessed is the one who dies early, for torments and sins are lessened!"

The Pasha ordered that Fr. Avakum be killed quickly, as he was impressed by Fr. Avakum's faithfulness. After him and Fr. Paisiy were impaled, the Turks stabbed Fr. Avakum through the heart with a sword, at the age of 18 or 19. They both received crowns of Martyrdom on January 27<sup>th</sup>, 1815. Both of their memories are celebrated on December 17<sup>th</sup> by the Church. A primary school in Trnovo is named after St. Avakum. St. Avakum is an incredibly well known Saint in Serbia even to the modern day. In many icons, he is depicted in a chaplain's uniform, usually holding a sword, by which he was killed, and there are many icons where St. Paisiy is with him.

### ---ST. JOVAN OF PECH---

Patriarch Jovan was born in the middle 16<sup>th</sup> century. Not much is known about his early life, however we do know his brother, Milosh, served as a spahija (cavalry officer), and he had the nickname "Kantul". By his nickname, it is believed he might have been of Vlach descent. He was elected Patriarch of Serbia in 1592, following the repose of Patriarch Filip. His election was confirmed by the Sultan's decree, and he paid a tribute to the Turks.

Patriarch Jovan's tenure as Patriarch was very difficult, with rebellions breaking out in Banat (1594) and Herzegovina-Sandzhak (1596), and the burning of St. Sava's relics. Patriarch Jovan ordained new priests and helped consecrate new Bishops. He convened a Church Council in Peja, helped restore Churches and monasteries, including the Monastery of the Holy Trinity near Pljevlja, and the Hopovo Monastery in Srem -- and funded the completion of the mosaics in the latter. He also gave much attention towards copying books, and some of his copied books were donated to the Churches in Peja and the Hilandar Monastery on Mount Athos, which was founded by St. Stefan Nemanja.

The burning of St. Sava's relics marked a turning point in Serbian history. Patriarch Jovan began supporting many of the national movements and insurgent leaders of the time. He supported the Banat rebellion in 1594 and at the same time he reversed the decision of Patriarch Makarije to appease the Turks, and supported the Austrians during the Austro-Turkish war (1593-1606). The Turks were unaware of Patriarch Jovan's support of freedom movements.

After the failed Banat uprising, Bishop Theodore of Vrshac was Martyred, and



Metropolitan Vasilije of Pozhega left Lower Slavonia, and went to Upper Slavonia, which was under Austrian rule, becoming the first Orthodox Bishop in the Austrian Empire. However this action led to the already strained situation within Serbia becoming worse. In 1596, a new uprising occurred in Herzegovina-Sandzhak, led by the famous Duke Grdan, who was supported spiritually and materially by Patriarch Jovan.

In 1605, the Roman Pope was trying to form an alliance against the Turks, and wanted to invite the Serbs to this alliance – under false pretenses, in an attempt to convert them to Papism -- Patriarch Jovan wrote to the Pope that the affairs of the Serbs were of the Serbs alone, and that they would remain faithful to Orthodoxy, even if it caused suffering under the Turks. This enraged the servants of the Pope.

Due to the intrigues and wrath of the Jesuits, the Papists caused a schism in Pashtrovichi, and tried to hinder Patriarch Jovan in his ministry. The Jesuits conspired with the Turks, and slandered Patriarch Jovan to them. Patriarch Jovan would continue to work for the Serbian people, taking regular trips to Constantinople to consult the Greek Patriarch and negotiate with the Sultan, in order to gain favorable conditions for the Serbian people.

Patriarch Jovan went to Constantinople in 1614, to once again consult the Greek Patriarch and negotiate with the Sultan. At this time, the enemies of Orthodoxy struck. Patriarch Jovan's Martyrdom was particularly violent, being beaten and stabbed multiple times, and his body was mutilated. The Turkish authorities blamed the attack on common criminals, and it was never investigated. It is not known whether Turks or agents of the Pope did the deed. St. Jovan's relics were brought to Pech, and honorably buried among the rest of the Patriarchs of Serbia. He was succeeded by Paisije as Patriarch.

---ST. ZLATA OF MEGLEN---

Zlata (which is a Slavic translation of the name Chryse, that is, "Bride of Christ" or "Golden vessel of Virginity") was born in the village of Slatena, in the Meglen province, a border town between Bulgaria and Serbia. She was one of three daughters by her parents. She was a very meek and pious young girl, and not only golden in name, but also in her God-fearing heart. Growing up in poverty, she displayed an unusually pious character, and an unshakable faith in Christ.

Due to her beautiful appearance, a certain Turk became obsessed with her, and

wished to take her as a wife. The Turk kidnapped her as she was gathering wood with some other women. The Turk brought her into his home, and tried to seduce the maiden, and persuade her to convert to Islam, stating his intentions that he would take her as a wife. Zlata refused and stated: "I know only Christ as my Bridegroom, Whom I shall not deny, even if thou slice me into a thousand pieces!"

Her parents, sisters and other relatives all urged her to renounce Christianity and become a Muslim in order to save her life, saying: "O daughter, have mercy on thyself and on us, thy parents and sisters; deny Christ in words only, so that we can all be happy, for Christ is merciful. He would forgive such a sin, committed due to the necessities of life." However, the wise Zlata rejected the temptation of the enemy and answered her parents and relatives saying: "When thou counsel me to deny Christ, the True God, thou are no longer my parents or my sisters. I have the Lord Jesus Christ as my father, the Theotokos as my mother, and the saints as my brothers and sisters."

The Turk kept Zlata in his home for six months, and after flattery and persuasion failed, he resorted to threats of torture and violence. Many of the local Turks tried to counsel Zlata to become a Muslim, but she remained unwavering in her faith. After six months, the Turk and false witnesses claimed Zlata converted to Islam and had returned to Christianity. Brought before a judge, Zlata was ordered to accept Islam, or be killed. She refused to accept Islam and was cast into prison.

She stayed in prison for three months, where she was flogged every day until her blood soaked the ground. After a while, seeing the flogging would not break her resolve, they resorted to beating her with clubs, and eventually peeling strips of skin from her body. They also heated a skewer and passed it through her ears.

After three months, the Turks attempted to kill Zlata by suspending her upside down from a tree, and lighting a fire underneath her to suffocate her with smoke. God was with Zlata, and at her Martyrdom she showed no fear or signs of pain, the enraged Turks finally decided to cut her into pieces – fulfilling her own words, and she was Martyred on October 13<sup>th</sup> 1796. One of the witnesses of her Martyrdom was her spiritual father, Hieromonk Timofiy of Stavroniketa Monastery on Mount Athos. She sent word to him to pray that she would persevere until the end. He wrote the hagiography of St. Zlata.

Pieces of her body were collected by Christians, and brought to households as precious relics of a Martyr. They were greatly revered and many of them are now

found in Churches throughout the world. God glorified His Saint with two crowns, one of Martyrdom and one of Virginity. Many miracles are associated with St. Zlata and she is one of the most famous Saints in all of Serbia. In icons of St. Zlata, she is usually depicted in either traditional Bulgarian, or Serbian costume. Some sources claim she was Martyred in January, but the Church celebrates her memory on October 13<sup>th</sup>.

### ---ST. VISSARION SARAJ---

Nikolaj, surname Saraj, was born in 1714 in the village of Majdan (Mrkonjich Grad, modern day Bosnia) to the parents Maksim and Maria, who were both ethnic Serbs. When he was young, they moved to Kostajnica (modern day Croatia). As a youth, he was pious and longed for the monastic life, and at the age of 18, he traveled to the Holy Land and lived at the monastery of St. Sabbas, near Jerusalem, where he was tonsured with the name Vissarion in 1738. After leaving the Holy Land, he visited and spent time in the monasteries of Mount Athos, then returned to his homeland of Serbia and settled at the Pakra monastery in Lower Slavonia. There he served as a Hierodeacon for a few years, and was eventually ordained to the Priesthood. He lived as a Hesychast and spent years living in a cave.

He had no formal education, and gained popularity as an ascetic and teacher of the Orthodox Faith. Upon learning of him, Patriarch Arsenije IV, who was living in exile in the territory of the Austrian Empire during the time of Emperor Leopold I Habsburg, invited Fr. Vissarion to come to Transylvania, who arrived in the Austrian Empire in late 1743. While there, Fr. Vissarion spent much time resisting the Uniates in Romania who were attempting to convert the Orthodox to Papism after the Austrian Empire's conquest of Transylvania and the union of Uzhorod, and brought many back to the Orthodox Faith. He learned Latin and Romanian -- despite his humble background -- in order to preach to both Austrians and Romanians.

He would be warmly greeted wherever he went, and hundreds would listen to him speak. He would encourage Orthodox Christians to not abandon their faith, and Uniates to return to the faith of their fathers. He preached in Timisoara, Lipova-Arad, Deva, Orashtie, Salishte-a-on-Sibiu, and other places. He would set up a wooden three-bar Cross in the middle of villages, one of these Crosses is still preserved in the Hodosh-Bodrog monastery near Lipova, and another one is in the apse of the Dormition of the Theotokos Church in Lipova. It is said that

underneath the Cross he placed in Lipova, a well spring sprung forth, the waters of which healed many sick and ailing people.

The Roman Catholic and Austrian authorities were not pleased with Fr. Vissarion's preaching. He traveled to Transylvania on March 11<sup>th</sup>, 1744, accompanied by three Aromanian merchants, Dima Nino, Gheorghe Nicola, and Gravila Bistro. After a warm reception in the village of Dobra, he headed to Marginmea Sibiului, to preach against the Unia, he was quoted by a Jesuit author in this speech as saying "Woe to thee, thou hast sold thy souls! The untying of thy dead is not untying, but damnation! The pannikhidas, moliebens and offerings thou paid them all in vain to ungodly popes -- to non-popes! The baptism of theirs is not a real baptism, but a harmful washing!"

As a result of this speech, he was charged with sedition, and was arrested in April 1744, while on his way to Sibiu, on the order of General Czernin. The Uniate bishop Inocentiu Micu-Klein wrote that violence was permitted against those who undermine the Unia with Rome. On April 27<sup>th</sup> 1744, he was interrogated, but refused to answer questions about his sermon. He only told the Austrians that he was 30 years old and was a servant of God. He was brought to Vienna and placed on trial.

He was placed in shackles and brought to various places, including Alba Iulia, Deva, Hunedoara, Timisoara, Osijek, Raab (today Győr), and eventually at the order of Empress Maria Teresa, he was brought to the Kufstein prison in the Tyrol mountains -- considered to be the harshest prison in all of Imperial Austria. He was severely tortured while there, and despite attempts from the Russian ambassador in Vienna, and the protest of the Orthodox people of Romania, Fr. Vissarion was kept in prison. In chains, he suffered for a year before giving up his soul to God due to the harsh conditions in the year 1745.

St. Vissarion's relics were secretly buried by the Austrian authorities, and have never been found. He is well beloved in Romania, where there exist many icons of him, sometimes with St. Sava Brankovich (+ 1683) a Confessor against Calvinism, – and the brother of George Brankovich, the famous chronicler – who are the two most beloved Serbian Saints in Romania. Both of them are commemorated on a Synaxis on October 21<sup>st</sup>, along with the ethnic Romanian Saints, Sofronie of Cioara, Clanicus of Cernica, Metropolitan Ilie Iorest, Ioan Valahul, and the layperson Nicolae Miclaus, all of whom were Martyrs who resisted the efforts of the Papists and Calvinists.

