

## **---BISHOP JOSEPH ZHUK OF NEW JERSEY---**

24<sup>th</sup> December 1872 – 23<sup>rd</sup> February 1934

Joseph A. Zhuk was born on December 24<sup>th</sup> 1872 to a family of Greek Catholics (Uniates) in the village of Pidkamin, Brody County, Lviv district, within the Kingdom of Galicia and Lodomeria, at that time a client state of the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

At a young age his family moved to Rogatin county (now within the Ivano-Frankivsk province). After completing primary school he attended the Jesuit University of Lemberg, where he gained a reputation for being opposed to the Latinization of the Eastern Rites and for his “Slavophile” views. He was expelled from the University for his beliefs and enrolled at the Uniate-run Stanislavov Theological Seminary.

Joseph continued his studies after his graduation from the Stanislavov Theological Seminary by attending the University of Innsbruck in Austria, receiving a Doctorate in Theology in 1898. After completing his studies Joseph was appointed the dean of a Seminary in Ternopil, being the youngest person in Ukraine to hold this position at the age of 27. After Andrey Sheptytsky – an opponent of Latinization – was consecrated a Bishop for the Greek Catholic church, he ordained Joseph as a Deacon in 1899.

In 1901 to combat the efforts of the Jesuits, Andrey Sheptytsky ordained Joseph to the priesthood and appointed him as the dean of the Lviv Theological Seminary. In 1904 he defended his Doctoral Dissertation at the Canisianum college in Austria. By 1910 Fr. Joseph was transferred to Sarajevo and elevated to the rank of Mitred Archpriest by the Latin Bishop Joseph Stadler. In 1911 state records from Sarajevo mention he was married to a woman named Maria Hechechi and had two sons with her, but when they married is not known.

Pope Pius X appointed Fr. Joseph as a Papal Delegate and Vicar General for the Uniates in Bosnia and Herzegovina. On May 1<sup>st</sup> 1913 he was transferred to serve as a priest at the Church of St. Barbara in Vienna Austria. Despite the church being a Latin-rite Church, Fr. Joseph continued to exclusively serve in the Eastern Rite.

Fr. Joseph was accused of being a Russian spy by the Jesuits who attempted to have him arrested; but Emperor Franz Joseph of Austro-Hungary personally

protected him and awarded him the Order of the Iron Crown in the 3<sup>rd</sup> degree – an award that automatically promoted one to a Knight and usually only given to military officers – for his service in the St. Barbara Church.

After the death of Emperor Franz Joseph in 1916 his nephew Charles became Emperor of Austro-Hungary. Emperor Charles I did not support Fr. Joseph's Slavophile views or opposition to Latinization and had him removed from the St. Barbara Church, Fr. Joseph was given permission by the Archbishop of Vienna to serve at the Galician Embassy in Vienna instead.

The time during the First World War was difficult for Fr. Joseph, with the Austrians suspecting him of being a Russian spy and the mistreatment of the Ukrainians under Austro-Hungarian rule, he wished to retire from public service, but in November 1917 he appointed a Papal Nuncio to Ukraine after Andrey Sheptytsky had been arrested by the Russian Army when they captured Lviv.

At the end of the war in 1918 Fr. Joseph and his family remained in Vienna as Ukraine was invaded by the Soviets and in a state of civil war. In 1919 Fr. Joseph's wife Maria died during the “Spanish Flu” outbreak and her body was buried in a mass grave without a proper funeral. He moved to Poland to serve Uniates there, but shortly after his emigration to Poland the government declared him “persona non grata”, accused him of being a Ukrainian revolutionary and began proceedings to deport him to the Soviet-controlled Russia.

Pope Benedict XV suggested Fr. Joseph and Andrey Sheptytsky move to Canada before they could be deported from Poland. He emigrated to Canada in 1921 and began serving Uniate parishes in Montreal, Toronto and Winnipeg. It was during this time he began to encounter many Orthodox Christians who had belonged to the Russian Mission that existed prior to the Revolution, in particular he fostered a friendship with Abp. Arseniy (Chahovstov) of Winnipeg after his arrival in Canada in 1925.

Benedict XV continued the policy of Pius X towards the Eastern Rites, protecting them from Latinization. Shortly before his death in 1922 Benedict XV made Fr. Joseph aware he should prepare to be consecrated a Bishop for the Greek Catholics in Canada.

Fr. Joseph was very active among Ukrainian nationalists in Saskatoon, who proposed there was a difference in race and ethnicity between the Uniates that

lived in Western Ukraine and the Orthodox Christians who lived in Eastern Ukraine. However upon meeting many Orthodox Christians who had descendants from Galicia and some who even came from the region themselves, Fr. Joseph became disillusioned with the Ukrainian nationalists.

With the sudden death of Pope Benedict XV and the elevation of Cardinal Ratti as Pope Pius XI (who had formerly been a Papal Nuncio to Poland) the policy of the Roman Catholic church towards its Eastern Rites changed. Fr. Joseph often clashed with Pius XI – who he had known before he became Pope – and with Cardinal Pachelli (later Pope Pius XII) who were attempting to suppress the Eastern Rites and Latinize them.

In 1928 Pius XI and Cardinal Pachelli decreed all the Uniates in North America were to use the Latin language, Gregorian Calendar, abolish the married priesthood, serve the Tridentine Mass and become full members of the Latin-rite church. The Greek Catholic Exarch to America, Konstantin Bogachevsky, at first tried to resist these decisions but was threatened with excommunication and forced to comply.

Between his disillusionment with the Ukrainian nationalists, his friendships with many Orthodox Christians and finally forced Latinization, Fr. Joseph decided to leave the Greek Catholic church and join the Holy Orthodox Church. He had known about Orthodoxy since his childhood, having grown up in Ukraine and receiving higher education, but meeting the pious Orthodox people in Canada gave him a new perspective; the Catholic and Orthodox churches were not “two different confessions” like many of his Uniate peers had posited, but rather the Catholic church was a schismatic entity hostile to the Orthodox Faith, which his ancestors had belonged.

Fr. Joseph wrote in the newsletter “Ukrainski visti” his intention to leave the Roman Catholic church and be received into the Orthodox Church. The Papists tried to bring legal action against Fr. Joseph, but due to Canada being a secular country the courts refused to intervene. He was excommunicated by Rome and they expunged all mention of him from all their records, subjecting him to a *damnatio memoriae*.

The newsletter of Fr. Joseph was received well by the Ukrainians in America, soon after all throughout Canada and the United States, thousands of Ukrainians wished to join the Orthodox Church with twenty-six other Uniate priests stating their

intention to become Orthodox after the publication of Fr. Joseph's letter. These events led to a second wave of Orthodox revival among the Ukrainian people, as by the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century over 100,000 Ukrainians Uniates had returned to Orthodoxy.

An issue remained however of which Orthodox Bishops to go to: In America and Canada at that time were competing church factions led by Met. Platon (Rozhdestvensky) of the American Metropolia – later renamed the OCA – and the American Orthodox Catholic Church (AOCC) led by Archbishop Aftimios (Ofiesh). Both Bishops had been involved with the Russian Mission before the Revolution and declared the other to be uncanonical.

Met. Platon originally blessed the creation of the AOCC, but later pulled his support and declared it to be an illegal structure due to threats and pressure from the Episcopalian church who considered an American Orthodox Church to be a claim against their “legitimacy”. Met. Platon was called to submit to the ROCOR led by Met. Antony (Khrapovitsky) but refused due to personal animosity towards Met. Antony, leading to Abp. Apollinary (Koshevoy) breaking communion with Met. Platon and joining the ROCOR.

In 1927 Met. Sergei (Stragorodsky, eponymous founder of the heresy of Sergianism) declared Abp. Aftimios' elevation to a ruling Bishop by Met. Platon – previously he had been a Vicar Bishop to Abp. Evdokim (Meschersky) of Alaska – to be illegal, excommunicating him and Met. Platon. However this was mostly as a result of both Bishops refusing to declare loyalty to the Soviet state.

Archbishop Aftimios' jurisdiction was multi-ethnic whereas Met. Platon's was mostly made up of Russians. At that time the ROCOR did not seek to take in new parishes and only in 1937 – mostly at the insistence of Abp. Arseniy of Winniepeg and Bp. Vitaly (Maximenko) of Detroit – would the American Metropolia go into communion with the ROCOR.

Ultimately Fr. Joseph and the Ukrainians with him decided to join Abp. Aftimios in 1929, who appeared to be canonically regular especially in the troubled days after the Revolution. Abp. Aftimios received Fr. Joseph after he had offered Confession in the Church, publicly renouncing the heresies of Papism and being Vested in the Church.

Over the next few months Fr. Joseph would Chrismate hundreds of Uniates into

the Orthodox Church across Canada and the United States. In pre-revolutionary Russia Confession, Chrismation and Vesting were the standard methods of reception of Roman Catholics into the Orthodox Church.

Fr. Joseph moved to the United States and began serving Ukrainian parishes in Syracuse New York, Passaic New Jersey, Allentown and McAdoo Pennsylvania. The St. Dimitri Church in Carteret New Jersey decided to leave the Greek Catholic church and join itself to the Orthodox Church in 1930, shortly thereafter becoming Fr. Joseph's home parish, where he had a small office and lived in an apartment nearby.

In 1931 Ioann Teodorovych (who later joined the Ecumenical Patriarchate) a “bishop” under Vasyl Lypkivsky – who infamously “auto-consecrated” himself – arrived in the United States attempting to get the Ukrainian Orthodox parishes to place themselves under the Lypkivskites.

Seeing the need for a valid Orthodox Bishop to administer the Ukrainian parishes and protect them from the efforts of the Papists and parasynagogues, Abp. Aftimios elected Fr. Joseph as a candidate for the Episcopacy in late 1931 and tonsured him a monastic. He still had the name Joseph after his tonsure; it is likely he was named after different Saint named Joseph (as he originally named after St. Joseph the Betrothed) but which Saint this may have been is not known.

In a letter Abp. Arseniy of Winnipeg wrote to the Archpriest Leonid (Turkevich, later Met. Leonty of New York) dated October 1931: “Everywhere, both in America and Canada, they are organizing new Orthodox churches with Fr. Zhuk, and we (in the American Metropolia) pray, we fear that our sheep are going to be turned to foreign faiths... Why don't we come to an agreement with the other Orthodox Bishops? That is Greeks, Serbs, Bulgarians, Syrian Arabs and discuss at our Sobors the ways to preserve true, authentic Orthodoxy... I am afraid to die and leave the Church in such chaos... We are supposed to be guardians of the Church...”

On September 23<sup>rd</sup> 1932 Joseph Zhuk was consecrated as the Bishop of New Jersey by Abp. Aftimios of Brooklyn, Bp. Sophronios (Beshara) of Los Angeles and Bp. Emmanuel (Abu-Hatab) of Montreal at the St. Nicholas Church in Brooklyn and the following day Bishop Joseph served the Hierarchal Divine Liturgy. Abp. Aftimios received the Old Catholic bishop Ignatius (Albert Nichols) and his “Society of Clerks Secular of St. Basil” (SSB) earlier that year and asked

Vladyka Joseph to help consecrate Ignatius to the Episcopacy.

Abp. Aftimios, Bp. Joseph and Bp. Sophronios consecrated Ignatius as the Auxillary Bishop of Washington on September 27<sup>th</sup> 1932 in Brooklyn. When Bishop Joseph learned Ignatius Nichols and his group were to continue using their Anglican and Roman Catholic liturgics and the Gregorian Calendar, Vladyka Joseph wrote to Abp. Aftimios a letter of disapproval, as he had previously been against use of the New Calendar as a Uniate, and was familiar with Latin-rite liturgics.

After months of debates about the administration of the SSB, an unexpected event occurred: While Aftimios was visiting the St. Mary's parish in Pennsylvania in February 1933 he formed an unclean infatuation with one of the parishioners, a 15 year old Syrian Arab girl named Mariam Namey.

In April 1933 the 52 year old Aftimios Ofiesh – a tonsured monk – married Mariam Namey in a civil ceremony. Despite the blatant disregard for his own monastic tonsure and the Canons, he continued to serve as a “bishop”; Bishop Sophronios broke communion with Aftimios and attempted to form a new Synod for the AOCC with the Albanian Bishop Theofanos (Noli) and Exarch Bishop Benjamin (Fedchenkov, who was sent to America in order to convince parishes to declare loyalty to the Sergianist church).

Bishop Emmanuel of Montreal joined the American Metropolia and reposed on May 29<sup>th</sup> 1933. Most of the Arab parishes, clergy and laypeople of the AOCC joined the newly organized Antiochian Archdiocese of America led by Abp. Victor (Abu-Assaly), with most of the Ukrainians staying with Vladyka Joseph and the SSB staying with Bishop Ignatius.

Bp. Joseph and Bp. Ignatius wrote a letter declaring the marriage of Aftimios illegal and that he was no longer to be considered a bishop in May 1933. However only a month after signing this letter, Ignatius Nichols married and continued to serve as a “bishop” leading to Vladyka Joseph and Bp. Sophronios writing a statement declaring Ignatius defrocked from the Episcopacy in October 1933 and the American Orthodox Catholic Church defunct in November 1933.

Ignatius Nichols' group entered communion with the Soviet-sponsored Renovators and their American “bishop” Ivan Kedrovsky in 1934. After Nichols' death in 1947 the Society of Clerks Secular of St. Basil remained

independent until they entered communion with the Antiochian Archdiocese and became their Western Rite Vicariate in 1961.

Bishop Joseph continued to serve the Ukrainian Orthodox across the United States and Canada – which by this time had grown to over 15,000 people – reorganizing these parishes as the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of America by September 1933. Vladyka Joseph learned from recent Ukrainian immigrants of a terrible man-made famine that was ravaging Ukraine, the extent of the persecutions against the Orthodox Church and many other crimes committed by the Bolsheviks.

He spoke with Hamilton Fish (later the chair of the “Fish Committee” of the United States Congress) to investigate the activities and crimes of the Soviets and expose the man-made famine – later called the Holodomor – to the world, with Vladyka Joseph being instrumental in making the crimes of the Bolsheviks in Ukraine known outside of the Soviet Union.

On November 9<sup>th</sup> 1933 Vladyka Joseph ordered that all parishes in submission to him were to hold memorial services on November 26<sup>th</sup> for: “...the souls of our unfortunate brothers and sisters who have died terrible deaths by starvation in Ukraine, and for all those who have died in the prisons of the Cheka, on the Solovetsky Islands, in Siberia and far away from their native lands...”

That same month Vladyka Joseph received a visit by Archbishop Athengoras (Spyrou, who later became Ecumenical Patriarch and “lifted the anathemas” against the Roman Catholics in 1965) of the newly formed Greek Orthodox Archdiocese in America (GOARCH) who tried to convince Bishop Joseph to join the Ecumenical Patriarchate, who were aggressively trying to take control of all Orthodox churches in America. From his personal letters Vladyka Joseph made clear the reasons he refused to join the GOARCH was due to their acceptance of the New Calendar and for their routine concelebrations with Anglicans.

In December 1933 Vladyka Joseph fell seriously ill – despite having been healthy throughout most of his life – the cause of the illness was unknown but the symptoms were consistent with poisoning. His doctor recommended he move to Florida, as the warmer climate would help him recover quickly. Vladyka Joseph moved to St. Petersburg Florida in January 1934 and served a small Ukrainian community there.

In the Soviet Union the NKVD on orders from Joseph Stalin launched “Operation

Tryst” with the goal of assassinating “enemies of the Soviet state” abroad. Stalin personally ordered that Vladyka Joseph was to be killed on February 23<sup>rd</sup> 1934 – “Red Army day” where the Soviets celebrated their military victory over the White Army – primarily for his role in exposing the Holodomor to the world.

On February 23<sup>rd</sup> 1934 an NKVD agent who was also a priest of the Sergianist church lured Vladyka Joseph to the Don Caesar Hotel in St. Petersburg under the pretext he wished to join the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of America, and at a lunch he administered a dose of arsenic to Vladyka Joseph in his drink. Before Vladyka Joseph left the hotel he fell ill; shortly after he was brought home, he fell asleep in the Lord on the evening of February 23<sup>rd</sup> (N.S.) at the age of 61.

Bishop Joseph was a United States citizen when he was murdered by the Soviets. President Franklin Delano Roosevelt sent the Bureau of Investigation (renamed the Federal Bureau of Investigation in 1935) to investigate Vladyka Joseph's murder, whereupon they quickly uncovered the NKVD plot. FDR did not wish for this information to go public – wishing to ally with the Soviet Union which he had just given stately recognition to – and ordered for the information to be classified for 75 years.

After his repose his remains were transferred by train to New Jersey as per his final wishes. His coffin was accompanied by the Archpriest Mykhailo Lysiak, rector of the St. Mary Ukrainian Church in Perth Amboy, Fr. John Hundiak, rector for the St. Dimitri Church, Fr. Andrey Ivanyshyn, rector of the St. Mary Church in New Haven Connecticut and Fr. Hryhoriy Prluk, who served various parishes in Pennsylvania.

Arriving in Carteret New Jersey on February 26<sup>th</sup> Vladyka Joseph's remains were brought into the St. Dimitri Church by Protopope Mykola Pidhoresky, rector of the St. Michael the Archangel Church in Scranton Pennsylvania. The body of Bishop Joseph rested in the Nave until the time of his funeral – which had to be delayed by a day due to bad weather – and despite several days passing, there was no sign of corruption upon his body.

On February 27<sup>th</sup> 1934 the funeral for Vladyka Joseph was held in the evening. After the funeral a letter written by him shortly before his repose was read in the Church: “I am leaving no riches or estates to you my dear ones... I can only leave true love and sincere prayers. I ask my funeral be a most simple one without pomp or grandeur, and I desire they be held in our Church in Carteret. I sincerely ask for

you to make no expenses or bring flowers... I thank the Carteret parish of St. Dimitri that has shown so much consideration and understanding to me. My children, to you, I always came with confidence. It was a pleasure to be among you, and it will be pleasant to rest near you..."

After the funeral, Vladyka Joseph's body was interred at the Alpine Cemetery in Perth Amboy, New Jersey, near the St. Mary's Greek Catholic section. After the repose of Bishop Joseph of New Jersey, Athengoras Spyrou intensified the efforts to get the Ukrainians to join the Ecumenical Patriarchate. In 1936 the St. Dimitri parish joined the EP after Athengoras offered to consecrate a new Bishop for the Ukrainian Church in America, with Bohdan Shpylka being consecrated as the Bishop of the UOC of America, shortly thereafter many other Ukrainian parishes joined the EP.

On July 3<sup>rd</sup> to 4<sup>th</sup> 1939 Vladyka Joseph's body was exhumed and transferred to the Clover Leaf Memorial Park in Woodbridge New Jersey, where most of the Ukrainian Orthodox chose to be buried in the years following Vladyka Joseph's repose, a report in the local newspaper was published:

“CARTERET – Rev. Bohdan, bishop of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of America, consecrated the St. Demetrius section of the Clover Leaf Memorial Park on Tuesday, and conducted the rites there for the re-internment of his predecessor, the late Bishop Joseph A. Zhuk. Over 600 people from Carteret and other communities were present.

A cement vault containing the late Bishop's body had been transferred to the cemetery the preceding day from the St. Mary's Greek Catholic cemetery in Perth Amboy. Over the vault was placed a canopy and floral pieces, one of them a blanket from Bishop Bohdan which covered the whole casket. Other flowers were sent from Clover Leaf Park, the St. Demetrius Ukrainian Church, the Society of the Blessed Virgin in Carteret, St. Mary's Church of South Plainfield, and other churches and societies. A guard of honour from the St. Demetrius Church stood at the grave throughout the night of July 3<sup>rd</sup>

Dedication of the burial grounds was followed by the pontifical requiem liturgy celebrated by the Bishop, assisted at the altar by Very Rev. Nicholas Pidhorecky, vicar general, Very Rev. John Hundiak, archpriest of the diocese and pastor of St. Demetrius Church here, and ten other priests from various points in the diocese, including Utica, N.Y., and St. Louis.

Bishop Bohdan preached in Ukrainian, and Father Hundiak in English, and there was music by St. Demetrius Choir, directed by Dmitry Zaiworsky. The bishop paid tribute to the late Bishop Zhuk and quoted from his pastoral letter written on his death-bed in St. Petersburg, Florida, in 1934. The bishop cited the re-interment of the late ecclesiastic's body on Independence Day as symbolic of the spirit of Christian Democracy preached, by the church. Frank S. Huffman of the Clover Leaf Memorial Park delivered the deeds to the shrine plot to the Bishop and to Father Hundiak.”

In 2023 Bishop Joseph's grandson, Dr. Orest Zhuk, wrote that in 2010 the declassified documents concerning Vladyka Joseph were delivered to him at a dinner hosted by US Ambassador to Ukraine William B. Taylor Jr. with an apology for having lied to him for years about the cover-up of his grandfather's murder, which he considered to be a national embarrassment. Dr. Zhuk wrote in 2024 that former President of the United States of America, Joe Biden, was trying to help the Zhuk family bring Bishop Joseph's remains to Kyiv, so they could be buried in the Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra.

No progress has been made on this and as of 2025 Bishop Joseph Zhuk is still buried at the St. Dimitri Orthodox Cemetery in Woodbridge New Jersey. Over 250 letters, sermons and other writings by Vladyka Joseph have survived and are held in the archives of the Ukrainian History and Education Center in Somerset, New Jersey. Vladyka Joseph is well remembered as the first canonical Ukrainian Bishop on American soil, who led thousands of souls to the Orthodox Church.