



# The NORTHERN THEBAID\*

*Monastic Saints of the Russian North*

# The Northern Thebaid

By the Rev. John G. ...  
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*The Anchorite in the Northern Desert*



Engraving by O. Miloradorich, 19th Century,  
from the Life of St. Sergius of Radonezh



*Monastic Saints of the Russian North*

COMPILED AND TRANSLATED BY  
FATHERS SERAPHIM (ROSE)  
AND HERMAN (PODMOSHENSKY) OF PLATINA

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY  
I. M. KONTZEVITCH



FR. SERAPHIM ROSE FOUNDATION

1995

BX596  
.N6  
1995x

Copyright 1975 by the  
St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood  
First Printing 1975  
Second Printing 1976  
Third Printing (Revised Edition) 1995

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Platina, CA 96076

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Forestville, CA 95436

*Front cover: "Evening Prayer" by Iouri Sidorenko, 1992*

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

Rose, Fr. Seraphim (1934-1982) and Fr. Herman  
Podmoshensky (1934— ), comp. & trans.  
The northern thebaid: monastic saints of the Russian  
north.

Library of Congress Card Number: 75-18031  
ISBN: 0-938635-37-9



THE FOREST OF THE NORTH, VALAAM

*Blessed is the life of the dwellers of the desert,  
for they are winged by divine fervor.*

*Sunday Matins: Hymn of Degrees, Tone 5  
First Antiphon*







OBNORA MONASTERY CAVE-CHURCH  
built over St. Paul's original earthen cell

*This book is dedicated, on the thirtieth anniversary of his death, to the blessed memory of our beloved teacher, Prof. Ivan Michailovich Kontzevitch ⚡ 1965 who labored so faithfully to transmit the true understanding of the patristic teaching of Orthodox Spirituality which is so indispensable today.*



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## Preface

WHAT ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN is not exalted in heart and mind at the thought of the Egyptian Thebaid—the place of struggle of the great St. Anthony, first among monastic Fathers and model of the anchoritic life; of St. Pachomius the coenobiarch, who received the monastic rule of the common life from an Angel; and of the thousands of monks and nuns who followed them and made the desert a city peopled with Christians striving towards the heavens in the Angelic way of life?

Few, however, are those who know of Orthodoxy's *Northern Thebaid*—the Russian "desert" of the forested, marshy North—where no fewer thousands of monks and nuns sought out their salvation in the footsteps of the great monastic Fathers of more recent times: St. Sergius of Radonezh, St. Cyril of White Lake, St. Nilus of Sora, and hundreds of others whose names have been entered in the Calendar of Orthodox Saints.

Little has been published in English about these Saints, and most of what has appeared thus far is of little value. No work in English has even attempted to present the *Orthodox monastic tradition* which inspired and formed the great Russian Fathers. Indeed, the Russian religious intelligentsia of the Diaspora has been largely at fault for spreading false ideas about these Saints and their tradition. The most accessible works on Russian Saints in English (those of Fedotov and de Grunwald) are so filled with inaccuracies and distortions, with a Roman Catholic terminology totally foreign to Orthodoxy, and with an astonishingly



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fanciful notion of Orthodoxy, sanctity, and monasticism—as to be more a hindrance than a help to the serious student of Russian monastic tradition.

One Orthodox scholar of the Russian Diaspora—Ivan Michailovich Kontzevitch (†1965)—devoted his life to a serious study of the Orthodox spiritual tradition. Unlike the Westernized Russian intelligentsia, he was not an “academic” scholar, but proceeded rather from the living Orthodox tradition. Even while living in the Diaspora in the 1920’s, he continued to receive spiritual guidance from Elder Nectarius of Optina, and to mold his life and thought, not on the heterodox “wisdom” of the West, but on the age-old tradition of Holy Russia. Having acquired a theological education, he planned to write (in Russian) a trilogy of works on this tradition: the first, on the spiritual tradition of ancient Russia, before Peter I (*The Acquisition of the Holy Spirit in Ancient Russia*, Paris, 1952); the second, on Blessed Paisius Velichkovsky (which was never completed); and the third, on the Optina Elders (*Optina Monastery and Its Epoch*, published posthumously by Holy Trinity Monastery, Jordanville, N.Y., 1973).

The present work, which was inspired by Professor Kontzevitch, is a kind of “source book” in English for the first volume of his trilogy in Russian on ancient Russia, and utilizes above all two of his key ideas regarding the Orthodox spiritual tradition: (1) that the Lives of the Saints are the chief source of our knowledge of the Russian spiritual tradition of this period, and a careful examination of them will give a clear idea of this tradition to one who is well versed in the phenomena and the vocabulary of true Orthodox spirituality; and (2) that it is evident—as a result of such an examination—that the Russian spiritual tradition is not at all something “uniquely Russian,” or something novel in Orthodox history, but is identical in essence with the whole Byzantine tradition of spirituality, which in its monastic formulation comes down to us from the Fathers of the Egyptian desert. Indeed, the Orthodox reader of these Lives—which have been taken from sources in Russian and Slavonic as close to the original Lives as possible—will find that they breathe the same spiritual fragrance as the Lives of the great Fathers of the Egyptian desert, and have the same signs of true Orthodox monastic life: the “mental activity” of the Jesus Prayer, spiritual guidance by Elders, “revelation of thoughts” to the Elder, spiritual labors joined with love of neighbor. The Introduction of Professor Kontzevitch consists of excerpts from his book, *The Acquisition of the Holy Spirit in Ancient Russia*, referring to the period of the “Northern Thebaid”—the great spiritual current which proceeds from St. Sergius of Radonezh in the 14th century (and behind him, from Byzantine Hesychasm) to the end of the 17th century, when

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Russia, although outwardly in spiritual decline, was preparing its forces for a final spiritual current which has come down to our own times—that of Blessed Paisius Velichkovsky and the great Elders of the 18th to the 20th centuries.

It was in the mid-19th century that a pious Orthodox Russian, Andrew Muraviev, undertook a pilgrimage to the almost-forgotten monasteries of the North and brought them back to life for the readers of his book, giving the whole region the name by which we now know it.\* At that time most of these monasteries still existed.

Today, however, these monasteries have been closed and destroyed, and most of them removed from the face of the earth. Why speak of them any more, and give the Lives of their founders and the history of their monastic tradition, as we attempt to do in these pages—and that not merely as an example of dead history, but of living tradition, as is our definite intention? While these Lives were being printed separately in *The Orthodox Word*, one of the leading modernist “Orthodox theologians” chastized in print “those who call to non-existent deserts,” evidently regarding such Lives as an appeal to a religious “romanticism” and idealism totally out of step with contemporary conditions of life. Why, indeed, should we inspire today’s Orthodox youth with the call of the “Northern Thebaid,” which has in it something more attractive and somehow more accessible for a 20th-century zealot than the barren desert of Egypt?

First of all, the monastic life here described has not entirely disappeared from the earth; it is still possible to find Orthodox monastic communities which teach the spiritual doctrine of the Holy Fathers, and to lead the Orthodox monastic life even in the 20th century—with constant self-reproach over how far one falls short of the Lives of the ancient Fathers in these times. True Orthodox Christians have preserved the living monastic tradition of Holy Russia and are linked directly to Optina, Valaam, St. Seraphim’s Diveyevo, St. Job’s Pochaev, Lesna, and of course to the monastic citadels of the Holy Land and the Holy Mountain of Athos. The wise seeker can find his “desert” even in our barren 20th century.

But this book is not intended only for such fortunate ones.

Every Orthodox Christian should know the Lives of the Fathers of the desert, which together with the Lives of the Martyrs give us the model for our own life of Christian struggle. Even so, every Orthodox Christian should know of Valaam, of Solovki, of Svir, of Siya and Obnora and White Lake, of the Skete

\*Andrew Muraviev, *The Russian Thebaid of the North*, St. Petersburg, 1855.

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of Sora, and of the Angel-like men who dwelled there before being translated to heaven, living the Orthodox spiritual life to which every Orthodox Christian is called, according to his strength and the conditions of his life. Every Orthodox Christian should be inspired by their life of struggle far from the ways of the world. There is no "romanticism" here. The actual "romantics" of our time are the reformers of "Parisian Orthodoxy" who, disparaging the authentic Orthodox tradition, wish to "sanctify the world," to prostitute the spiritual tradition "for the life of the world," to replace the authentic Orthodox world-view with a this-worldly counterfeit of it based on modern Western thought. The spiritual life of the true monastic tradition is the *norm* of our Christian life, and we had better be informed of it before the terrible last day when we are called to account for our lax life. We shall not be judged for our ignorance of the vocabulary of contemporary "Orthodox theology," but we shall surely be judged for not struggling on the path of salvation. If we do not live like these Saints, then let us at least increase our far-too-feeble struggles for God, and offer our fervent tears of repentance and our constant self-reproach at falling so short of the standard of perfection which God has shown us in His wondrous Saints.

Monk Seraphim Rose  
The Hermitage of the  
St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood,  
near Platina, in Northern California  
Pentecost, 1975



*A fragment from the Document  
given for the foundation of  
the Vysotsky Monastery*

St. Sergius calls St. Athanasius  
to found a monastery  
in Serpukhov

## Preface

TO THE NEW EDITION

**T**WENTY YEARS AGO, as a result of our monastic life in the wilderness of northern California, the St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood came out with its first full book in English: an anthology of vivid representatives of Russian monasticism after the ascetic flowering of St. Sergius of Radonezh. Initially we did not even dream of having it come out as a book, and were satisfied with merely publishing the Lives of Russian ascetics, one by one, serialized in our magazine *The Orthodox Word*; but in time, with great strain and difficulty, we were able to present these Lives in one volume.

These Lives were not translated straight from any one source (with the exception of the Life of St. Nicodemus of Kozha Lake, taken from *Rusky Palomnik* of 1898), but were compiled from various rare sources. Our intent in making these compilations was to inspire a young generation of American Orthodox converts with the idea of *podvig* (ascetic struggle), which is all but absent in the present-day ecclesiastical situation, where church-oriented subjects are treated not as something alive and vibrant, demanding energy, creativity, and unwavering commitment, but as a part of the establishment of a particular ethnic church, devoid of life, and almost as an addendum to the liturgical practices, covered with cobwebs and dust. That is why, perhaps, this book evoked a surprising response and was accepted as something fresh, new, and almost unheard-of in church circles. It was printed twice, in very small quantities due to our poverty, and was sold out immediately. The interest it drew was an indication to us that the "desert ideal" of Orthodox ascetics is something very real to the young person living in today's post-Christian reality. It was also inspiring to us because at that time we had several young people coming to our wilder-



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ness hermitage, trying their strength. Above all, *The Northern Thebaid* became an arrow on a compass that leads young people to Christ's otherworldly realm.

Through our meager efforts in publishing this Book, we hoped to present in the English language that which had been almost lost by the Russians, Serbs and Romanians on both sides of the Iron Curtain. As for the Greeks, young Americans with monastic fervency in the Greek Church were officially directed to Greece, to the Athonite heights, thus depriving America of a monastic presence amidst her contemporary youth of the post-hippie counterculture.

Innumerable problems sprang up, quite mystically, when we embarked on the job of printing the Lives of Russian ascetics separately for the book. The roofs would leak and the paper would warp; the linotype machine and generator would constantly break; trucks with supplies would get stuck on the muddy mountain roads, and various accidents would occur. The Life of St. Paul of Obnora had to be printed over again. The translation of the Life of St. Cyril of White Lake was lost, and my co-laborer Fr. Seraphim had to retranslate it. When the Life of St. Anthony of Siya was being printed—which was Fr. Seraphim's favorite, and required almost no additions or corrections—the printing press kept breaking down and finally hurt Fr. Seraphim's finger, disfiguring it for life. In spite of all this, Fr. Seraphim was especially determined to have the Lives of these Holy Fathers and Mothers see the light of print. The *podvigs* and difficulties we experienced in printing them were proofs to us that the book was piercing the darkness of the modern-day American wilderness and was infuriating the demons by shedding spiritual illumination in an age of rock culture and satanism.

As we worked to publish these Lives, we felt that the Saints depicted in them were alive and with us, and were participating in the process of their emerging on the American continent. We would sing services to them in church after having printed troparia hymns to them along with their Lives, and we would proofread their Lives aloud during our monastic meals, which at the time, due to our poverty, were sometimes as meager as those in the Lives themselves.

There were obvious indications to us that the Saints were responding to our prayers and helping us. When we were about to print the Life of St. Alexander of Svir in *The Orthodox Word*, we were lamenting that, although we had received from Finland a rare manuscript of the Saint's Life, we did not have a single icon of the Saint. At that time we stopped at the post office to get our mail, and there we found an envelope containing an icon of St. Alexander. Totally amazed—for we had never requested it—we gave thanks to God and immediately printed it to go along with the Saint's Life.

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This book could have been much more extensive, but we rushed to come out with it because we felt that, due to the darkness of Communism in ravaged Holy Russia and other Orthodox lands, the end was so close. We had hoped to include many other Lives, but hesitated to do so because we had no icons of them.

Today, as we are bringing out a new edition of this book, the climate has changed. Communist regimes have collapsed, dragging their evil deeds to hell. A new generation of ascetics is emerging in Russia, giving an impetus to young ascetics in the West. Though the night of spiritual unrighteousness is now darker than when Fr. Seraphim was hastening to work on the book, a new light comes from the East. In Russia today, they translate back into Russian our English translation, and publish it at any cost. Thousands of men and women are now taking on the monastic, ascetic *podvig* in the land of these northern Saints, and, at least to some small measure, are building their house with bricks from our labors in California.

*The Northern Thebaid* has also become an inspiration to Orthodox monastics in Greece, and is especially loved and treasured by monks on Mount Athos. In 1980, some pious Orthodox Christians in Greece translated and published the book in mass quantities in the Greek language, and today it is very popular in Greece.

May the new edition of *The Northern Thebaid* inspire the reader to call to mind the contemporary American struggler who translated and compiled it, humble Fr. Seraphim, and heed his admonition to "hasten to do the work of God," as he said, "for it is later than you think." As for me, who saw his secret tears and swear, it is clear that the American soul—that of the land of Abraham Lincoln and innumerable righteous pastors on the other side of the threshold of the Orthodox Church—can produce, and perhaps is already producing, a semblance of the Northern Thebaid, only in a much more modest form, since the times we live in are fragile and evil. Before the throne of God, any repenting, loving soul, inspired by the grandeur of God's world adorned with myriads of spiritual lamps, is capable of shedding divine light and providing a glimpse into eternal glory, for which man is created.

All the Saints of the Northern Thebaid—together with millions of New Martyrs, confessors, and missionaries, and joined now by an unseen choir of spiritual toilers of this land—pray to God for us! Amen.

Abbot Herman

Commemoration of St. Paul of Tobolsk

January 10/23, 1994

PUBLISHER'S NOTE:

This new, offset edition of *The Northern Thabaid* has been photographed from the original edition of 1975, which was set in lead type and hand-printed on a simple letterpress by Fr. Seraphim Rose and his monastic brothers at the St. Herman of Alaska Hermitage in the mountains of Northern California. The title pages, Table of Contents, Prefaces, Introduction and Index were updated for this new edition.

## Introduction: *Acquisition of the Holy Spirit in Ancient Russia*

by Prof. Ivan Michailovich Kontzevitch

### 1. THE 14TH CENTURY

THE 14TH CENTURY in Russia was not a period of "transition," as has been previously thought; rather in its political and cultural movements it was the brilliant epoch of the "Russian Renaissance." This high cultural movement was evoked in Russia by the approaching wave of the Byzantine Renaissance under the Paleologues which embraced the whole Orthodox world. Hesychasm, which at this time had penetrated and inspired all cultural manifestations of life, could not but reach Russia together with the general wave of cultural activities. Muscovite Russia was not isolated at this period. On the contrary, this very 14th century and the first half of the next century were marked in Russia by lively contacts with other Orthodox peoples, and in this way Hesychasm, which was the soul of the Orthodox East, was communicated to Russia in various ways.

First of all, Russian literature at this time was under the influence of South Slavonic literature. Secondly, throughout this period Bulgarian church figures had an immediate influence on Russia. Thirdly, Serbian art, penetrated by the spirit of Hesychasm, made its influence known in the Russian art of that time. Fourthly, a whole series of Russian Metropolitans of this time shared the Palamite view (Hesychasm). And fifthly, this whole time there existed an unbroken living contact with the East; this was expressed in the pilgrimages of Russians to the East and the coming of Greeks to Russia.

The two great hesychasts, Metropolitan Alexis and St. Sergius, with whom none of their contemporaries could compare, were the founders of a new epoch of spiritual rebirth and the restoration of the inward activity (the true Orthodox spiritual life), which had grown weak or been all but forgotten owing to the Tatar incursions. The monastic blossoming in northeastern Russia is the fruit of the co-operation of these two lamps of the Russian Church: its head, Metropolitan Alexis, and the great Elder of the Russian land, St. Sergius.



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The whole character of this epoch might be summed up in the symbol of spiritual rebirth and the higher spiritual struggle which bears the name Hesychasm, which put its seal upon all manifestations of church and cultural life. And all manifestations, whether of literature, or art, or the coming to Russia of church figures, or the immediate mutual contacts owing to frequent journeys—all these aided in Russia the spreading of this spiritual current.

### 2. THE NORTHERN DESERT

"With the beginning of the 14th century there is to be observed in Russia a manifestation which is to be explained by the historical circumstances of Mongol times, a manifestation unknown in the local conditions of the East. It has become accepted to call this *monastic colonization*. Going away from people into the inaccessible forest depths, which in the ancient Russian language were called 'deserts,' a hermit for a long time labors alone, being visited only by wild beasts. No sooner does news of him go about the people and the fame of him become known, than there begin to gather about the small cell of the hesychast in the forest desert his future co-dwellers and fellow ascetics, one after the other. With axe and shovel they labor with their own hands, adding labor to labor, chopping trees, sowing fields, building cells and a church. A monastery grows up. And to the murmuring of the age-old forest, to the wild howling and growling of wolves and bears, there is now joined a new sound—to be sure, at first a weak one—a resounding voice; and as it were to the call of the new voice, to the welcome sounding of the monastery semantron, peasants appear at the monastery. They ceaselessly chop down the forests, lay out roads into the thickets which were previously inaccessible, build settlements and villages near the monastery.... The villages grow and turn into towns or even cities.... This movement was inspired by the greatest ascetic of the Russian land, the Father of subsequent monasticism, St. Sergius of Radonezh, who, in the expression of his biographer, was 'abbot of a multitude of brethren and father of many monasteries,' and according to the Chronicler, 'founder and teacher of all the monasteries which are in Russia.'"<sup>†</sup>

What was the life of the desert-dweller when he lived "alone in solitude" in the bosom of virginal nature? Anchorites sought out places which might inspire in the soul an elevated feeling, a feeling of God's presence. The place of the second hermitage of Siya (where St. Anthony of Siya labored) "was in the

<sup>†</sup> S. I. Smirnov: *How the Ascetics Served the World* (in Russian), Holy Trinity Lavra, 1903, p. 24.

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mountains and was surrounded by mountains as by walls; and in the valley between those mountains was a lake, which was called Padoun. In these mountains a great forest was to be seen, and at the base of these mountains stood the cell of the Saint. Around it were twelve birch trees, as white as snow. Most melancholy was this place, so that one coming to see this wilderness would have great contrition, for the very sight of the place could bring the beholder of it into tender feeling."

Yet the very wilderness which moved and exalted the soul was at the same time a threatening power, full of every possible danger. The same St. Anthony of Siya, in the words of his biographer, "went into the northern lands which lie in the region of the Dvina, passing through the impenetrable forests, gorges, and swamps which lie near the White Sea, and the mossy places and inconstant marshes, and the many lakes, seeking a suitable place, wherever God might instruct him to stay." In these mossy places and swamps "wild beasts dwelled, bears and wolves, deer and hares and foxes, a great multitude of them, which were like herds." However, he lived in harmony in their midst, as did other ascetics who had attained dispassion. "When St. Sergius settled in the forest of Radonezh," in the words of his biographer, "the desert was impenetrable; there were no trails, and it was untrodden by the foot of man. Many beasts and creeping serpents then appeared to him; diverse beasts came in multitudes to his cell not only at night, but even during the day; wolves began to dig and howl around his cell, and sometimes bears appeared, drew near to him and surrounded him without doing any harm." St. Macarius of Kolyazin (†1483, March 17), again, "had the custom of going about the desert places; and if there were wild beasts inhabiting a wilderness, they would walk with him like the meekest sheep; and what is more, they submitted to him and many times took food from him." The northern climate was likewise severe and merciless to defenseless human nature. In the Life of St. Anthony of Siya it is said that during the winter from great storms the anchorite's cell would be covered with snow, and he "lived under the snow as in a cave, and sent up to God his fervent prayers with warm tears." From where did the saints obtain this power, thanks to which they could conquer the laws of nature? How, for example, could St. Paul of Oborna live in the hollow of a linden tree for three years? In his Life it is said: "He was a chosen vessel of the Holy Spirit." In these words we may find the answer also to such a supernatural life of the Saint.

We know the ferocity of the Russian forests, and the fact that he lived in the hollow of a linden tree shows that the anchorite managed without fire. Such

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a life surpasses human power, since anyone would have to die in the first severe freeze.

This phenomenon is explained by St. Seraphim in his Conversation with Motovilov on the acquisition of the grace of the Holy Spirit. After the grace of God had shown upon them in visible fashion at the prayer of the Saint, the latter said to Motovilov: "No pleasantness of earthly fragrance can be compared with the fragrance which we now smell, for we are now surrounded by the fragrance of the Holy Spirit.... Notice, Your God-love, how you told me that around us it is as warm as a bath; but look, neither on you nor on me does the snow melt, nor above us either. Therefore, this warmth is not in the air, but in ourselves. This is that very warmth of which the Holy Spirit, in the words of the prayer, causes us to cry out to the Lord: 'Warm me with the warmth of Thy Holy Spirit.' Being warmed by it, men and women desert-dwellers did not fear the winter frost, being clothed as in warm fur coats in a garment of grace woven by the Holy Spirit." These words refer to the Russian ascetics. But in the Egyptian desert the picture was different and the nature of the manifestation of help from Above was different also.

In the Life of St. Onuphrius (†4th century, June 12) there is a description of the journey of St. Paphnutius in "the inner desert, where an anchorite lived in the midst of sand-dunes under a blazing sun." This is one of a series of supernatural lives. These anchorites, as also later Russian anchorites, following their example, for the sake of God renounced everything that belongs to human nature, all the way to the instinct of self-preservation, and threw themselves into the abyss of God's mercy unconditionally, preserving only the faith which moves mountains. And this faith, in both Russia and Egypt, proved to be justified. But in Russia anchorites were saved from frost by the warmth of the Holy Spirit, whereas in Egypt, in the midst of a barren desert, springs suddenly gushed forth, and palms grew up with branches bearing fruit every month. St. Onuphrius said to St. Paphnutius about those like himself: "God sends to us holy Angels," who offer food to them, bring water out of the rocks, and strengthen them to such an extent that in them are fulfilled the words of the Prophet Isaiah, who said: *They that hope in the Lord shall renew their strength. They shall take wings as eagles; they shall run and not be weary* (Is. 40:31). To the question of St. Paphnutius as to how he received Communion, St. Onuphrius replied as follows: "An Angel of the Lord comes to me, bringing with him the Most Pure Mysteries of Christ, and gives me Holy Communion. And not to me only does the Angel come with Divine Communion, but also to the other ascetics

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who live for the sake of God in the desert and do not see the face of man, and in giving Communion he fills their hearts with unutterable rejoicing; and if someone desires to see a man, an Angel takes him and raises him into the heavens so that he might see the Saints and rejoice. And the soul of such a desert-dweller shines like the light and rejoices in spirit, having been vouchsafed to see heavenly good things. And then the desert-dweller forgets about all his labors undertaken in the desert. And when the desert-dweller returns to his place he begins all the more fervently to serve the Lord, hoping to receive in the heavens that which he was vouchsafed to see."

That which was in the fourth century in the Egyptian desert was repeated in the Russian desert, in the Sarov forests even of the 19th century. "Once when reading the words of the Savior," says St. Seraphim to John Tikhonov, "that in My Father's house there are many mansions, I the wretched one stopped in thought upon them and desired to see these heavenly dwellings.... And the Lord, in actual fact, in His great mercy did not deprive me of consolation according to my faith, and showed me these eternal abodes, in which I, a poor earthly wanderer, being raised up to there in a moment, saw the unutterable heavenly beauty and those who live there: The Great Forerunner and Baptizer of the Lord, John, the Apostles, Hierarchs, Martyrs and our monastic Fathers, Anthony the Great, Paul of Thebes, Sabbas the Sanctified, Onuphrius the Great and Mark of Thrace, and all the Saints shining in unutterable glory and joy such as eye has not seen, nor ear has heard, nor has entered the thought of man, but such as God has prepared for those that love Him."

St. Seraphim is separated from St. Onuphrius by fifteen centuries, but the mystical phenomena are one and the same. St. Seraphim is almost our contemporary: some of us have known those who have personally seen him. This is not some mysterious remote antiquity in the mist of the ages. But it is precisely now, when our spiritual wings have become atrophied and we have forgotten what possibilities are concealed in our spirit, that St. Seraphim was sent to us, in all the power and spiritual might of the ancient Fathers, so that we might remember our divine sonship and strive towards the limitless perfection of our Heavenly Father: *Be ye perfect as your Heavenly Father is perfect* (Matt. 5:48).

St. Seraphim himself thus understood his mission: in the just-cited conversation with Motovilov, in conclusion he said the following: "I think that the Lord will help you always to keep this [action of grace] in your memory... all the more in that it is not given to you alone to understand it, but through you to the whole world, so that you yourself might be confirmed in the work of God and might be useful to others."



### 3. THE KEY TO THE DESERT LIFE: LOVE

To all that has been said one may yet add the following: the dominating characteristic of the northeastern ascetics is *love*. "Having acquired love for God and neighbor, thou didst fulfill the chief part of the Law and the Prophets; for he who does not love his neighbor cannot love God. But thou, O holy father Paul, didst fulfill both" (Sixth Song of the Canon to St. Paul of Obnora). St. Seraphim was also distinguished by such an exceptional love; all who came to him he called "my joy." This resemblance is not accidental and is not a simple coincidence. Although the two ascetics lived in different times and are separated by four hundred years, they are made kin by the fact that both of them went by experience through the same path, the same school of the Holy Fathers, and were crowned with the same crown of virtue—perfect love.

The explanation of this mystery (the attainment of true love) is given us by St. Isaac the Syrian (7th century): "There is no means of arousing in the soul Divine Love, in pursuit of which you mystically run to anchoritism, if the soul has not overcome passions. But you have said that your soul, not having overcome the passions, has loved the love of God, and in this there is no order... Everyone says that he desires to love God, and not only Christians say this, but even those who incorrectly worship God. And this word is pronounced by everyone as his own; but in the pronunciation of such words the tongue only moves, while the soul does not feel what is said." First one must heal the soul: "As a sick man does not say to his father: 'make me king,' but first takes care of his infirmity, and after his complete recovery the kingdom of his father by itself becomes his kingdom; so also the sinner, offering repentance and receiving the health of his soul, enters with the Father into the realm of pure being and reigns in the glory of his Father."

The gift of love is possessed by all true ascetics and hesychasts who have uprooted the passions. Of such ascetics St. Isaac the Syrian says that if anyone has no opportunity to manifest love of his neighbor in an active way by reason of his life of silence and his constant remaining in seclusion, then it is sufficient before God to limit oneself to mental love (prayerful intercession). "For if one has no communication at all with men and is entirely immersed in thought in God, when he is dead to everything and remote from everyone—such a one is not commanded to serve men and please them. And if one from time to time interrupts his labor and, after the fulfilling of his rule, meets with men and is consoled by communion with them, but is negligent over his brethren who are in sorrows, he is unmerciful and cruel. He fails to condescend to participate in works of love because of an insufficiency of mercy, because of self-esteem and

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false thoughts. He who disdains the sick will not see the light. He who turns his face away from a sorrowing one,—his day is darkened. And he who disdains the voice of a sufferer, his sons in darkness will seek out their houses by groping. Let us not mock the great name of silence by our ignorance. For to every kind of life there is its proper time and place and distinguishing characteristic."\*

In this citation St. Isaac the Syrian speaks of the two sides of the Christian religious ideal, namely, active mercy and contemplative anchoritism which flees communication with men. ("I cannot be with God and men." Abba Arsenius). Professor Zarin has investigated in detail these "two paths," showing their equal value and even the duo-unity of the religious ideal, which includes both its contemplative and active sides. The aim of this ideal is to raise up and bring into reality love for God and for one's neighbor, for the sake of God, inseparably but also without confusion.† From the words of St. Isaac already cited one may see in what way this aim must be realized in practice in the very life of the ascetics.

### 4. THE FATHER OF THE MONASTIC RENEWAL: ST. SERGIUS

St. Sergius was the chief inspirer and planter in Russia of contemplative life. The Holy Trinity Monastery produced fifty monasteries, which in their turn produced forty more. Hieromonk Nikon, in his Life of St. Sergius, indicates one hundred names of monk-saints who came from the monastery of St. Sergius. This was a spiritual school which produced a blossoming of contemplative labor in the whole northeastern part of Russia.

St. Sergius was an Elder not only for the monks in submission to him, but also for laymen. But something even more astonishing happened: there came to him for a word of instruction contemplative ascetics already wise in experience of many years, such as St. Sergius of Nurma (†1412, Oct. 7), who came from Athos, St. Euthymius of Suzdal (†1404, Apr. 1), St. Demetrius of Priluki (†1392, Feb. 11), St. Stephen of Makra (†1406, July 14), and others; they are called the "fellow-conversers" of St. Sergius. These fellow-conversers show us the greatness of the spiritual image in which St. Sergius was manifested in the eyes of his contemporaries, being a teacher of teachers and an instructor of instructors. "Can it be that in these distant lands, so shortly before converted to the light of Christ, such a lamp has shone forth, at whom even our

\*St. Isaac the Syrian: 55th Homily, Russian ed., Sergius Posad, 1893, pp.255-259.

†Prof. S. Zarin: *Asceticism*, St. Petersburg, 1907, Vol. I, book 1, p. 107.

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ancient Fathers would be astonished?" cried out the Greek bishop who doubted; and for his doubt he was chastized with blindness, and immediately after this he was healed by the Saint himself. And in truth, the spiritual visage of St. Sergius attained an unutterable beauty which might astonish even the ancient Fathers.

The miraculous apparitions in the Life of St. Sergius are characteristic of the ascetics of the tradition of the East, who went first through the path of outward labors (*praxis*) and attained, as the fruit of these, Divine vision (*theoria*). And as St. Gregory Palamas says, "Being removed from the material, in which he [the ascetic] at first travels on the path known to him..., he proceeds to the Truth by the unutterable power of the Spirit, and by an unutterable spiritual reception he hears unutterable words and sees the un beholdable, and already here on earth he is, and becomes, a miracle."\* One must assume that it was for similar mysteries and depths of the inward ascetical life that the holy fellow-conversers of St. Sergius came to him and took counsel.

Spiritual attainments, however, are not the lot of the majority, but are accessible only to a few chosen ones. Such was the young monk Cyril, the future founder of the White Lake Monastery. And this is why St. Sergius, when he came to the Simonov Monastery, hastened to go to him in the bread-bakery, where his obedience was, and instructed him for hours, paying no attention to others. And the testament of St. Sergius passed through St. Cyril to subsequent ascetic tradition of the whole of northeastern Russia, the "Northern Thebaid." Among the various disciples of St. Sergius were two especially clear examples of contemplative ascetic life: Sts. Sylvester and Paul of Obnora. In the monastery of St. Paul there has remained a written memorial which confirms this. This document, which concerns the guidance of young monks, contains expressions such as: "Spiritual prayer," "concentration of spirit," and "silence," which serve as signs of the school of Eastern asceticism.

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The Northern Thebaid of Russia was in no way inferior to its African archetype. The dwellers of the virgin forests beyond the Volga in their spiritual power, the might of their ascetic life, and the height of their attainments were equal to the Fathers of the first centuries of Christianity. But just as the sultry African nature with its clear blue sky, lush colors, its burning sun, and its in-

\*Quoted in Archimandrite Cyprian, "The Spiritual Forerunners of St. Gregory Palamas," in *Theological Thought*, Paris, 1942, p. 130.

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comparable moonlit nights, is distinct from the aquarelle soft tones of Russia's northern nature with the blue surface of its lakes and the soft shades of its leafy forests, with their emerald-green of early spring and the rich fulness of their golden auburn tones in September—in the same way the sanctity of the Fathers of the Egyptian desert, elemental and mighty like lava erupting from a volcano, with the brightness of the southern nature, is distinct from the sanctity of Russia, which is quiet, lofty, and as crystal-clear as the radiant and quiet evening of the Russian spring. But both in Russia and in Egypt there is the same "noetic activity," the same silence. In the Life of St. Paul of Obnora it is said: "St. Paul, being humble in mind and hating glory and honor from men, loving silence and being a lover of God, entreated St. Sergius for a long time that he command him to remain in solitude." Of St. Paul again it is said that he remained "singing and praying constantly and cleansing the vision of his mind." He took care for the purity of his thoughts, "lest there cleave to his mind any of earthly things." Later we read how he "with fervor constantly prayed to God, diligently laboring, cleansing the vision of his mind." Before his repose, St. Paul permanently "began to live in silence, going away from any human dwelling and having his mind constantly in prayer and heedfulness towards God, cleansing his vision and gathering the light of divine understanding in his heart, and in his purity beholding the glory of the Lord, whereby he was a chosen vessel of the Holy Spirit."

Muraviev, the author of *The Russian Thebaid of the North*, during the time of his pilgrimage to the Vologda region, when crossing the river Nurma, saw at the bridge a solitary chapel and entered it in order to venerate St. Paul. "His meek visage greeted me there," says Muraviev, "in the rank of other desert-dwellers at the side of the Crucified Lord for Whose sake they had labored so much. In the hands of St. Paul was a scroll with the inscription: *Oh, if you knew the whole power of love.* Such a short reminder in the wilderness was especially moving for the heart and was more eloquent than many oratorical speeches." Right here there stood also a pitcher of water with a ladle for the quenching of the thirst of travellers on hot days. "And I remembered the word of the Gospel: *Whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones a cup of cold water only in the name of a disciple, verily I say unto you, he shall in no wise lose his reward* (Matt. 10:42)."\*

\*Muraviev, *The Russian Thebaid of the North*, St. Petersburg, 1855, pp. 23-4 (Russian).



## 6. THE 15TH CENTURY AND AFTER

The 14th century was the time of the rebirth of anchoritism and monasticism, the century of St. Sergius. The 15th century is still rich in sprouts of the spiritual seeds sown in previous centuries. From the monasteries already founded, new monasteries arose, giving new Saints. This was a continuation of the epoch of the 14th century, its blossoming, the "golden age" of Russian asceticism; but at the same time it was the eve of crisis and rupture. The Russian historian Soloviev has accurately written: "The rejection by Moscovite Russia of the Florentine Unia is one of those great decisions which determine the fate of peoples for many centuries ahead." The historical moment of the rejection of the Unia is one that drew after it a whole epoch. "After this the inward separation of the Russian world from the West, under the influence of the dream which burst forth of Moscow the Third Rome, firmly strengthened the specifically Eastern European character of Russian culture, and it was not wiped out either outwardly, nor all the more inwardly, by the great westernizing reform of Peter the Great."<sup>†</sup> Such was the incalculably great significance of this historical step, the rejection of the Unia.

Let us speak now briefly of the inner changes and shocks which ascetic life underwent in this transitional epoch and the one which followed. Monasticism falls into two currents. The main branch proceeds from St. Cyril of White Lake, the fellow-converser of St. Sergius and the greatest Saint living at the beginning of the 15th century. He is at the head of that school of spiritual activity which with the lightness and wingedness of spiritual exaltation and Divine vision has room also for service to the world, feeding the hungry in difficult years and nourishing spiritually the people who came to the monastery. To this school belongs the merit of continuing the colonization of the northeast which was begun in the century of St. Sergius. St. Cyril's tradition is given to the "North-ern Thebaid" by St. Dionysius of Glushitsa (†1437, June 1), who likewise lived in the White Lake Monastery; it was he who painted the portrait of the great Saint himself (see page 48). In the Lives of the ascetics of Vologda and Komel one can feel a reflection of St. Cyril's testament. Spreading to the northeast, the "Northern Thebaid" is still blossoming in the 16th century. But in the 17th century only in the far north, on the periphery of the Russian state, do we encounter two more clearly delineated types of hesychasts: St. Diodorus of George-Hill and St. Eleazar of Anzersk. After them the spiritual activity almost is lost to our view.

<sup>†</sup>A. Kartashev, *Holy Prince Vladimir*, Paris, 1938, p. 18.

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The second branch is concentrated around Moscow. Around it is formed a ring of monasteries. Although these latter do take their beginning from Holy Trinity Lavra, spiritually they are inferior to the "Northern Thebaid." These are the coenobitic monasteries which have no striving for contemplative life and silence. In the 15th century they give two Saints who have a decisive influence on later generations: St. Paphnutius of Borov (†1447, May 1) and St. Joseph of Volokolamsk (†1515, Sept. 9). These Saints, although they did not fully realize the ideals of St. Sergius of Radonezh and St. Cyril of White Lake, nonetheless were genuine ascetics and great benefactors of the people. However, their followers did not possess their grace-given qualities; in them the chief aim became the preservation of rules and rites. Intolerance, dry asceticism, severity, the idea of an inexorable and strict justice which obscures the idea of mercy: such is their tendency. Rule and rite dominate in everything, the keeping of outward rules is given the chief significance, in forgetfulness of the fact that the spirit gives life. On this ground the Old Believers' schism takes root, that great spiritual catastrophe which later cleared the way for the secularization of custom and the whole public life of Russia which was brought about by the reforms of Peter.

At the end of the 15th century there occurred the collision, so typical of the epoch, of these two currents in the persons of St. Nilus of Sora and St. Joseph of Volokolamsk. St. Nilus is the last of the Russian ascetics of the period to make a pilgrimage to the East with the aim of restoring the teaching of the spiritual activity. He visited Athos, where he became acquainted with the teaching of St. Gregory the Sinaite. St. Nilus is a monk of contemplative life and a hesychast of the purest type. He systematized the teaching of the inward activity. Characteristic of him is his absolute departure from and break with the world.

The dispute over monastery lands divided monasticism into two camps. At the head of the non-possessors stood St. Nilus of Sora, and at the head of those who favored the possession of monastery lands, St. Joseph of Volokolamsk. The latter was victorious. Thus, what was joined together in the spiritual school of St. Cyril—contemplative life and deeds of charity—were now no longer compatible. St. Nilus took the chief things: the inward activity and the non-possessiveness closely bound up with it; but he lost the tie with the life of the state, and in this was his weak side. St. Joseph, on the contrary, became organically one with the state; his type of monasticism continued the tradition of charitable works, but now it was at the expense of the spiritual activity. After St. Joseph the abbot of the Monastery of Volokolamsk was Daniel, the future Metropolitan of Moscow. As is known from history, he was an oath-breaker (in

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the case of Prince Shemyatich), a "conniver" with the Great Prince (in his marriage to E. Glinskaya), and the destroyer of St. Maximus the Greek. Such a hypocritical type could come out of the monastery of St. Joseph thanks to the fact that in it there was no school of sobriety, no confession of thoughts, and attention was concentrated on the keeping of outward rules and not on the inward condition of the monks' souls. Therefore St. Joseph could be deceived, which in no case could have occurred, for example, with St. Sergius.

Monasticism should not refuse to serve the world for the sake of God, but for it the service of worldly principles is ruinous. When ascetic life departed from the world into the forest depths in the period of colonization, the world ran after it and submitted to it. But from the moment when monasticism undertook to serve worldly principles (the historical rupture of the Council of 1503, at which the question of monastery possessions was resolved in the positive), then the world began to enslave it until it decisively subjected it to itself.

In the middle of the 16th century the flight of heretics to the monks beyond the Volga called forth a persecution against the latter. Thus the field of battle was left to the Moscow tendency, that of St. Joseph.

At the same time both the type and character of sanctity were changing. The schools of hesychasts under the guidance of elders gave a numerous offspring: the following generations took advantage of the experience of the preceding ones. When this school was forgotten, individual asceticism came to the fore. Now the ascetic had to attain everything personally, by long and difficult experience, not having the ascetic tradition to rely on. Inward cleansing and sobriety were replaced by labors of mortification: iron helmets, chains, every kind of "iron" are its means. The path of sanctity became incomparably more difficult. St. Nilus of Sora in the Foreword to his "Rule" says: "Many have attained this radiant activity by means of instruction, but few have received it directly from God by force of ascetic labor and warmth of faith." He himself testifies of "the difficulty now of obtaining an undeceived instructor." This difficulty, noticed by St. Nilus, refers already to the end of the 15th century.

In the 14th century St. Sergius saw before him a multitude of beautiful birds which he had never seen before and heard a mystical voice from the heights of heaven, saying, "thus will thy flock of disciples increase, and after thee they will not die out." But in the 17th century the exact opposite was said to St. Irenarchus by the Blessed John the "Big-Helmet": "God gives to thee a horse, and on this horse no one but thee will be able to ride or sit." In

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his immense exploit he remains alone. His path is unique and individual, and by the fierceness of its asceticism it can have no imitators.

And so Russian asceticism, being cut off from Byzantium and being left to itself, is subjected to a process of dissolution and falls into two tendencies. The spiritual tendency soon nearly perishes, and the school of spiritual activity is forgotten to such an extent that when Paisius Velichkovsky at the end of the 18th century will restore this school and re-establish the institution of elders, the latter will be greeted with mistrust and apprehension as an unheard-of novelty.

Russia in the 14th and 15th centuries proceeded under the sign of Byzantium: its direct influence is present in the rebirth of monasticism and in the labors of contemplative life. Russia drew spiritual power and inspiration from communion with the East. But towards the end of the 15th century these earlier ties became weak and were even cut off. The occasion for the rupture with the Greek tradition was the Council of Florence and then the devastation of the Orthodox East by the Turks. From this moment the authority of Byzantium quickly fell, and the very interest in it died out.

One must make note of yet another sad characteristic of the latter part of this period (16th-17th centuries): the changing attitude of the people to the anchorites. Now the world no longer went after them, but rose up against them. Monastery possessions grew larger and larger, and the peasants, fearing their own enslavement, considered the anchorites as their personal enemies, and sometimes they even killed them. Two Saints Adrian, of Andrusov (†1549, August 26) and of Poshekhonye (†1550, March 5) were killed with the aim of robbery. St. Agapitus of Markusheva (†1578, May 21) was killed by peasants and his body thrown in a river. Before this he had gone to Moscow to ask a blessing of the Metropolitan and land from the Tsar for a mill; at this mill he was killed. Further, St. Simon of Volomsk (†1613, July 21) was martyrically killed by peasants. The same fate befell St. Job the Gorge-dweller (†1628, August 6). St. Nilus of Stolbensk was saved from the midst of the forest which had been set on fire around him. By chance St. Arsenius of Kornel was saved when his disciple was taken for him and killed. Finally, St. Leonid of Ustnedumsk (†1654, July 17), likewise banished, had to move his monastery from a mountain to a swamp.

With Saints Diodorus and Eleazar (17th century) we conclude our cycle of saints of the period of "ancient Russia." In them, before the virtual annihilation of monasticism and the secularization of monastic property, the Lord once more raised up Saints whose features very strongly remind us of the ancient



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desert-dwellers. To the end, the "Northern Thebaid" was faithful to the Byzantine spiritual tradition, thus sowing the seeds that were later to give rise to another great monastic movement: that of Blessed Paisius Velichkovsky and the great Elders who followed him.



## The Northern Thebaid



*The earliest known icon of the Saint*

#### SAINT SERGIUS OF RADONEZH

TROPARION, TONE 4

**A**THLETE OF VIRTUES,\* a true warrior of Christ God,\* thou didst struggle mightily against the passions in this temporal life.\* In psalmody, vigils, and fasting thou wert an example to thy disciples.\* Thereby the Holy Spirit did abide in thee,\* and with His activity thou wast radiantly adorned.\* Since thou hast boldness before the Holy Trinity,\* remember thy flock whom thou hast wisely gathered.\* And do not forget, as thou hast promised,\* to visit thy children,\* O Sergius, our holy Father.



THE LIFE OF

## *Saint Sergius of Radonezh*

THE HOLY ABBA OF THE NORTHERN THEBAID\*

*Commemorated July 5 and September 25*

**O**UR HOLY FATHER SERGIUS was born in the year 1314 in the city of Rostov, of noble, devout, and righteous parents named Cyril and Mary, who for their holy lives were venerated locally as Saints after their death. The child was baptized with the name Bartholomew and was the second of three brothers, the eldest being Stephen and the youngest Peter. All were raised in strict piety and purity.

Stephen and Peter quickly learned to read and write, but Bartholomew did not learn so easily; he could not put his mind to his studies nor keep pace with his companions. The boy often prayed to God in secret and with many tears: "O Lord, give me understanding of learning. Teach me, O Lord, and enlighten me."

The great Saint received learning not from men, but from God. One day his father sent him to find some lost horses. On his way he met a strange monk, a holy elder, a priest by rank, of a holy, Angel-like appearance, who was standing beneath an oak tree, praying devoutly with many tears. The boy bowed down humbly before him and awaited the end of his prayers. His prayer finished, the elder glanced at the boy and, foreseeing with his inward eyes that he would be a chosen vessel of the Holy Spirit, he called him to his side, blessed him, bestowed on him a kiss in the name of the Lord, and asked: "What are you seeking, child?" The boy answered: "My soul desires above all things to understand reading and writing, and I am sorely grieved that I understand nothing of what I am taught. Will you, holy father, pray to God for me, that He will give me understanding of book learning?" The monk raised his hands and eyes toward heaven, sighed, prayed to God, and said, "Amen." Then, taking from his sachel as it were some treasure, with three fingers he handed the boy what appeared to be a little bit of antidoron or prosphora, saying, "Take this in your mouth, child, and eat; this is given you as a sign

\* Condensed from the Life of the Saint's Disciple, Epiphanius the Wise.



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of God's grace and for the understanding of Holy Scriptures. Though the gift appears but small, the taste thereof is very sweet."

The boy ate, tasting a sweetness as of honey; and said: "Is it not of this that it is written, *How sweet are Thy Words to my palate, more than honey to my lips, and My soul doth cherish them exceedingly?*" (Ps. 118:103, 167.) The monk answered, "You believe, my child, and therefore you will see even more than this; from this time forth the Lord will give you learning above that of your brothers and others your own age." Then he instructed him for the profit of his soul. The boy stood, receiving like some fertile soil the fruitful seed, rejoicing in heart and soul that he had been vouchsafed to find such a holy elder.

At the boy's tearful request the monk accompanied him to his parents' house, where Cyril and Mary came out to meet him and bowed low before him. The monk blessed them, and they offered him food, but he went first into their chapel, taking with him the child sanctified from his mother's womb, and began to recite the Hours, telling the boy to read the appointed Psalms. The boy said, "Father, I do not know how." And the elder said to him, "I told you that the Lord would grant you understanding of learning; speak the word of God without doubt!" Then the boy entered a state as it were of astonishment, and having received the elder's blessing, began to recite the Psalms very well and in an excellent rhythm, and from that hour he could read. His parents and brothers were astonished, and glorified God.

All returned to the house where the monk ate, bestowed a blessing on the parents, and calmed their fears. For, as they informed him, their son, while yet in his mother's womb, had three times uttered a cry in church during the Divine Liturgy. "O blessed pair!" he exclaimed. "Why do you fear where there is no place for fear? Rather rejoice that you have given birth to such a child. Here is a proof that my words are true: when I leave, you will see that the child will know how to read and write superbly and will understand all the holy books. The boy will be great before God and man, and will direct others thanks to his virtuous life." He further pronounced that their son would be a dwelling of the Holy Trinity and would lead many to an understanding of the Divine commandments.

They accompanied him to the doorway, where suddenly he became invisible. Perplexed, they wondered if he had been an Angel sent to give the boy knowledge of reading. After this the boy could read and immediately understand any book, was submissive to his parents, attended church services daily, studied holy writings, and constantly disciplined his body and preserved himself in purity of body and soul. Even before the age of 12, his fasting was so severe that his mother tried to persuade him to abandon it and eat like everyone else. But the boy answered with the wisdom of an elder: "Should I



RADONEZH, THE PLACE OF ST. SERGIUS' BOYHOOD

not strive toward God with all the strength I have, so that He might deliver me from my sins?" And so he continued his fasting, and God helped him in his good intent.

At this time Cyril moved with his family from Rostov, where there was then much civil strife, to Radonezh, where he settled near the church of the Nativity of Christ. Two of his sons, Stephen and Peter, married, but Bartholomew, who was leading a life of prayer, fasting, and lamentation, was desirous of becoming a monk. His parents counseled him to wait and to look after them, because they were old and had become poor and sick, and they had no one else to turn to. Bartholomew gladly cared for them until both of them entered the monastic life. They lived but a few years thereafter.

Having buried his parents and prayed for them for forty days at the Divine Liturgy and at memorial services, Bartholomew began to make preparations for abandoning the world. He gave his share of his father's inheritance to his younger brother Peter, keeping nothing for himself. Stephen's wife soon died also, leaving two sons, and Stephen renounced the world and became a monk in the Monastery of the Protection of the Most Holy Mother of God in



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Khotkov. Bartholomew went to him there and asked him to accompany him in the search for some desert place. Together they explored many forested places, until finally they found a clearing in the middle of a dense forest, near water. Liking the place, they prayed and then set to chopping wood.

First they built themselves a hut, then a cell and a small church. Bartholomew asked his brother, whom he now had as father in the Lord, to which feast the church should be dedicated. Stephen reminded him of the signs that had been given him even in his mother's womb, that he would be a disciple of the Holy Trinity and would lead many others to believe in the Holy Trinity. And so they agreed that the church should be dedicated to the Holy Trinity. Then they asked the blessing of the ruling prelate, and a priest was sent by Theognostes, Metropolitan of Kiev and All Russia, to consecrate the church.

Stephen did not long remain in the wilderness with his brother. He began to find the hardships too great to endure. On all sides was nothing but forest and wasteland. There were no roads or paths, no villages or houses, no means of providing food and drink, and no one came to them or brought them anything. Stephen could not endure all this and left his brother and went to Moscow. There, in the Monastery of the Epiphany, he labored fervently in virtues and ascetic practices. In the same Monastery at this time was Alexis, the future Metropolitan and Saint. Stephen lived in spiritual communion with him, and sang together with him on the cliros. The Grandduke Simeon came to hear of Stephen and his godly life and had him ordained priest and later abbot of the Monastery, appointing him also as his own confessor.

In the meantime, the blessed youth Bartholomew remained faithful to his calling and continued to live in the wilderness alone. He had not yet taken the monastic vows, for he had not yet become sufficiently accustomed to the monastic works and rules and all else that is required of a monk. He was tonsured only later, when he was 23 years old.

**A**LL THIS TIME our holy Father prayed fervently and with tears to God that he might be vouchsafed the Angelic habit. Finally, he invited a spiritual elder, the Abbot Metrophanes, to come and visit him in his solitude. In great humility he entreated him: "Father, have mercy, and give me the tonsure of a monk. From childhood have I desired this fervently, but my parents' needs withheld me. Now I am free from all this, and I thirst for the monastic desert life as the hart thirsts for the springs of living water."

The Abbot gave him the tonsure on the seventh day of October, giving him the name Sergius, for it was the feast day of the holy martyrs Sergius and Bacchus. The Abbot celebrated the Divine Liturgy in the church of the Holy

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Trinity, and blessed Sergius received Holy Communion; and the Grace of the Holy Spirit came upon him and remained with him from then on. From one whose witness is true and sure we are told that when he partook of the Holy Mysteries, the church and all around it was filled with a sweet odor. The Saint remained in the chapel for seven days, eating nothing but one prosphora given by the Abbot, giving himself up to fasting and prayer, having ever on his lips the Psalms of David.

The Saint in all humility asked the Abbot's instruction on living alone in the wilderness and wrestling with the enemy; and the Abbot, after discoursing with him for a while on spiritual matters, commended him to God and went away, leaving him to silence and the wilderness.

Who can express the holy youth's labors and struggles in his desert solitude? Who can understand his fervent desire, his warmth of love for God, his sighs and tears and constant prayer? Who can know the fearlessness of soul he must have had to withstand all the snares of the enemy? Many wild beasts also visited him, not only by night but also by day; there were bears, and howling wolves. At first he was afraid, being human, but then he turned to prayer, and by God's mercy the beasts departed.

One bear in particular would come to the Saint. Seeing that the animal came only to get some food, the Saint would place a small slice of bread on a log, and so the bear learned to come for the meal thus prepared for him. At this time the Saint had no variety of foods, only bread and water from the spring, and a great scarcity of these. Often there was no bread, and both he and the bear would go hungry. Sometimes the Saint would give his only slice to the bear, being unwilling to disappoint him.

Let no one be astonished at this, knowing certainly that when the Holy Spirit dwells in a man, the creatures become submissive to him, just as to first-created Adam in the beginning, before the transgression of the commandment, when he likewise lived alone in a wilderness, and everything was subject to him.

Often the Saint occupied himself with the reading of holy books, nourishing thus every virtue in himself, and by understanding what was hidden in them he inspired his mind to desire the treasures of eternal good things. He never weakened in his fervor for the silent, undisturbed life of the wilderness, remaining alone with God.

After two years or so of such a life, St. Sergius was visited by certain God-fearing monks. They expressed their willingness to endure the hardships of the place, with God's help and his prayers. Holy Sergius, seeing their faith and zeal, marvelled and said, "My brethren, I desired to dwell alone in the wilderness and to die in this place. But if it be God's will that there shall be a monastery in this place, with many brethren, then may God's holy will be



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done. I welcome you with joy, but let each one build himself a cell. And let it be known to you, if you come to dwell in the wilderness, that the beginning of righteousness is the fear of the Lord."

To increase his own fear of the Lord, he spent day and night in the study of God's word. Being young in years and strong in body, he could do the work of two men or more. The devil now strove to wound him with the darts of fleshly lust. But the Saint disciplined his body, mastering it with fasting, and thus by God's grace was he delivered from this passion.

The Saint was present every day with the brethren in church for the reciting of the daily cycle of services: Nocturn, Matins, the Hours, Vespers, and Compline. For the Liturgy a priest came sometimes from one of the villages. At first, because of his humility, St. Sergius did not wish to be raised to the priesthood, and especially did not wish to become an abbot. He constantly remarked that the desire to be an abbot is the beginning and root of the love of power.

The monks were few in number, about a dozen. Among the first were Basil, called "the Dry"; James, called Yakuta, who was sent on errands when this was necessary; Onesimus, a deacon, and his father Elisha. They built small cells for themselves within the enclosure and put up gates at the entrance. The Saint built four cells with his own hands and performed other monastic duties at the request of the brethren. The monastery came to be a wonderful place to look upon. The forest was not far away, and the shade and murmur of trees hung above the cells; around the church was a space of trunks and stumps, and in other spaces there were garden beds, where many kinds of vegetables were grown.

The Saint flayed and ground grain, baked bread and cooked food, cut out shoes and clothing and stitched them; he drew water from the spring nearby, carrying it in two pails on his shoulders, and put water in each cell. He spent the night in prayer, without sleep, eating only bread and water, and those in small quantities. He never spent an idle hour. Remaining thus in ceaseless prayer and labors, he completely wore out and refined his flesh, having the constant desire to be a citizen of the Jerusalem that is above.

After a while the Abbot Metrophanes, who had given the tonsure to St. Sergius, came to live in the Saint's monastery. He died there a year later, and then the brethren begged the Saint to become their abbot. He protested very forcibly, but finally he agreed to submit to the will of God. And so he, together with two elders of the monastery, went to Bishop Athanasius of Volynia, begging him to give them an abbot and guide of their souls. But the venerable Athanasius had heard of the Saint and his good deeds, and he replied: "It is you who will be father and abbot of your brethren." The Saint



The holy parents of St. Sergius bring the infant to church



An Angel appears to the holy child Bartholomew, giving him the gift of book learning



While still in the world, young St. Sergius prays in his room, preserving his purity before God

ICONOGRAPHIC ILLUMINATIONS  
FROM THE ORIGINAL LIFE BY EPIPHANIUS



THE SMOLENSK HODIGITRIA ICON OF THE THEOTOKOS  
St. Sergius' Main Cell-icon in Front of Which the Saint  
Poured Out His Heart in Prayer



ICON OF ST. NICHOLAS  
FROM THE CELL OF ST. SERGIUS



Apparition of the Most Holy Mother  
of God to St. Sergius and St. Micah  
(15th century embroidery)

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insisted on his unworthiness, but the bishop said: "Beloved, you have acquired all virtues save obedience." And the blessed Sergius, bowing low, replied, "May God's will be done. Praised be the Lord forever and ever." And all answered, "Amen."

Without delay the holy bishop led blessed Sergius to the church, and there he ordained him subdeacon and then deacon. The following morning the Saint was raised to the dignity of the priesthood and was told to celebrate the Divine Liturgy. Later, after speaking to him about the teachings of the Apostles and Holy Fathers, and giving him the holy kiss, the bishop sent him forth as abbot, pastor, and physician of his spiritual brethren.

Our holy Father Sergius returned to his monastery, and there the brethren bowed low before him. He blessed them, saying, "Brethren, pray for me. I am altogether ignorant, and I have received a talent from the Heavenly King, and I shall have to render an account of it and of the flock committed to me."

After this the Saint reflected on the Lives of the ancient great Saints who, while living in the flesh, led an Angelic life on earth: Sts. Anthony the Great, Euthymius the Great, Sabbas the Sanctified, the Angel-like Pachomius, Theodosius the Cœnobiarch, and others. Keeping their lives in his heart, he prayed to the Holy Trinity that he might be granted to follow in the footsteps of these Holy Fathers. He celebrated the Divine Liturgy daily, and daily the brothers confessed their sins to him.

There were twelve brothers when he became abbot, and he was the thirteenth. This number did not change for two or three years, although some died and others replaced them, until Simon, the archimandrite of Smolensk, arrived; and from that time their number steadily increased.

**G**OD MADE ST. SERGIUS as strong as one of the early Fathers, even in these latter times. He was a lover of hard work, and head over a number of monks. He himself baked the holy bread, entrusting this duty to no one else. He also cooked the grains for the *kutia* for memorial services, and made the candles. While occupying the chief place as abbot, he did not in any way alter his monastic rules, and he was lowly and humble with all.

After Compline, late at night, especially on long winter nights, after performing his rule of prayer in his cell, the Saint would go the round of the monks' cells. If he observed anyone praying, or making prostrations or busy with his handiwork, or reading sacred books, or weeping and lamenting over his sins, he rejoiced over them and gave thanks to God. But if he heard two or three monks talking together or laughing, he was displeased and would not endure such things. He would rap on the door or window and then go away. In the morning he would gently reprove such ones indirectly, by means of some parable, desiring to find out their striving and fervor toward God. The



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humble and submissive would quickly admit their fault and beg his forgiveness. But if one was not humble, but stood erect thinking he was not the person referred to, then the Saint would patiently explain his fault and lay a penance upon him. Thus all learned to pray to God assiduously, not to talk after the evening prayers, to work hard, and to have the Psalms of David on their lips.

In the beginning there were many hardships. At times there was no bread or flour, no oil or salt, no wine for the Divine Liturgy, no incense or wax candles. The monks sang Matins at dawn with no lights, save that of a single birch or pine torch. Thus the monks lived for over 15 years, until laymen began to come and settle near the monastery and clear the forest.

One time there was a great scarcity of bread and salt. The Saint gave orders that no one was to go out or beg from villagers, but that all should remain patiently in the monastery and await God's mercy. He himself spent three or four days without food. On the fourth day he chopped and worked all day making an entry-way at the cell of one of the elders, for the price of a few mouldy pieces of bread (for that was before the monastery was cenobitic and each monk had his own provisions). At close of day, when he received the bread, he offered a prayer and ate the bread and drank some water.

Some of the monks, and one in particular, having had nothing to eat for two days, murmured against St. Sergius, and the Saint, seeing that all the brethren were enfeebled and in distress, assembled the whole brotherhood and gave them instruction from Holy Scriptures, saying, "God's Grace cannot be given without trials; after tribulation comes joy. It is written: *In the evening weeping may pitch its tent, but joy cometh in the morning* (Ps. 29:6). Now you have no bread or food, but tomorrow you will enjoy an abundance."

He had not yet finished speaking when there came a rapping at the gates. The porter, seeing that a store of provisions had been brought, ran to tell the Saint, who at once gave the order for the gates to be opened. But before eating he commanded that the samantron be sounded, and with the brethren he went into the church to sing the service of thanksgiving. Going then to the refectory, they ate the fresh bread, which was still warm and soft, and the taste of it was sweet like honey. When they had eaten, the Saint remarked, "And where is our brother who was murmuring about mouldy bread? May he notice that it is sweet and fresh. Let us remember the Prophet who said, *I have eaten ashes like bread and mingled my drink with weeping*" (Ps. 101:10). Then he enquired who had sent the bread. The messengers only said, "A pious layman, very wealthy, living a great distance away, sent it to Sergius and his brotherhood."

The following day more food and drink were brought in the same manner, and again on the third day. The Saint, seeing this, gave glory to God

St. Sergius  
Feeding His Bear





19TH-CENTURY DEPICTION OF THE FINDING OF ST. SERGIUS' RELICS



General View of St. Sergius' Lavra as It Looks Today

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before all the brethren, saying, "You see, brethren, God provides for everything, and neither does He abandon this place." From this time forth the monks learned not to grow despondent under trials and privations, enduring all things, trusting in the Lord God with fervent faith, and having before them the example of our holy Father Sergius.

Blessed Sergius never wore new clothing; he only wore plain cloth, worn, dirty, and patched. So shabby were his clothes, worse than those of any of the other monks, that several people were misled and did not recognize him, taking him for an ordinary poor monk or laborer. One day a man from a nearby village came to visit him, asking, "Where is Sergius? Where is the wonderful and famous man?" He found the Saint in the garden, where he was digging, his attire patched and in holes, his face covered with sweat; but the visitor refused to believe that this was he of whom he had heard. "I came to see a prophet, and you point out to me a needy-looking beggar. I see no glory, no majesty and honor about him." The brethren wished to send the man away, but the Saint, seeing their confusion, said, "Do not do so, brethren; for he did not come to see you. He came to visit me." And the Saint went and bowed low before the visitor, blessing and praising him for his right judgment. The visitor, placed at table at the Abbot's right hand, continued to express his regret at not seeing Sergius, the famous man. The Saint remarked, "Be not sad about it, for such is God's Grace that no one ever leaves this place with a heavy heart. And now God will show you the one you seek."

As he spoke a neighboring prince arrived. The prince's armed attendants forcibly removed the visitor, and the prince then came forward and



PLAN OF ST. SERGIUS' LAVRA AS IT IS TODAY



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prostrated himself before Sergius. The Saint gave him his blessing, and they both sat down while everyone else remained standing. The visitor thrust his way through and asked one of those standing by, "Who is the monk sitting on the prince's right hand?" On learning that it was Sergius, he was overcome with remorse, and after the prince's departure he went and prostrated himself at the Abbot's feet and begged his forgiveness. The Saint readily forgave him and blessed him, comforting him and conversing with him on the salvation of the soul. The man departed with firm faith in the Holy Trinity and in St. Sergius, later returning to the monastery to end his days there as a monk.

**M**ANY WERE THE MIRACLES which God performed through his chosen one. Owing to lack of sufficient water near the monastery, the brotherhood suffered great discomfort, which increased with their numbers and with having to carry water from a distance. Some of the monks complained to the Abbot, asking him why he had not built his monastery near water. The Saint told them, "I intended to worship and pray in this place alone. But God willed that a monastery such as this, dedicated to the Holy Trinity, should arise."

Going to a ravine below the monastery with one brother, he found a small pool of rainwater. He knelt down and prayed, and when he made the sign of the Cross over the spot, a bubbling spring arose which may be seen to this day, and from which water is drawn to supply the monastery. Many cures have been granted to the faithful from the waters; and people have come from long distances to get water to take to their sick to drink.

A certain Christ-loving man living near the monastery brought his sick son to the Saint and begged him to pray for him. The son died while the man was talking to the Saint. While the grief-stricken father went to prepare a grave, the Saint, filled with pity, knelt and prayed over the dead child; and suddenly he was restored to life. The father, finding his child alive, fell at the Saint's feet and thanked him.

A long way from the monastery there lived a nobleman possessed by demons, who tormented him day and night. His relatives brought him to the monastery in chains so that St. Sergius might pray for him. As they neared the monastery, the possessed man screamed and demanded to be brought back home. The brethren, hearing the screams, came out, and at the Saint's order they assembled in church and sang a moleben for him, and he grew gradually calmer. When the Saint came out of the church carrying a Cross, the sufferer fled from the spot with a loud cry and flung himself into a pool of rainwater nearby, crying, "O horrible, O terrible flame!" At this moment, by the Grace of God and the Saint's prayers, he recovered and was restored to his right mind. When he was asked what he meant by his exclamation, he said, "When the Saint wanted to bless me with the Cross, I saw a great flame proceeding from



The last surviving church contemporary to Saint Sergius, in the Gethsemane Skete of the Lavra. 19th-century engraving.

him, and it surrounded me. So I threw myself into the water, fearing that I would be consumed in the flame." From that time on the Saint was regarded in the common opinion as someone great, and as an intercessor for all, sent by God's Grace. Multitudes began to flock to him from all sides, and from many cities and towns, and many monks came to join him. By all he was regarded as a Prophet.

It happened late one night that the Saint was keeping vigil, performing the usual rule and praying for the brotherhood, when he heard a voice calling, "Sergius." He was astonished, and, after praying, he opened the window of his cell and beheld a marvellous vision. An extraordinary radiance shone in the heavens; the night sky was illumined by its brilliance, exceeding the light of day. A second time the voice called, "Sergius! You pray for your children; God has heard your prayer. Behold what a great number of monks has come together in the Name of the Holy Trinity, in your fold, and under your guidance."

The Saint looked and beheld a multitude of beautiful birds flying not only to the monastery, but all around the monastery; and again he heard the voice, saying, "As many birds as you see, by so many will your flock of disciples increase; and after your time they will not grow less if they will desire to follow in your footsteps." The Saint marvelled and, desiring to have a witness of this vision, he called from a neighboring cell the above-mentioned Simon, who was able to see a part of the light before it vanished.



A 16TH-CENTURY DEPICTION: ST. SERGIUS LABORS FOR THE BRETHREN,

One day some Greeks arrived from Constantinople, bringing gifts and a letter from the Patriarch Philotheus. The Saint took the letter to Metropolitan Alexis, who ordered it to be read to him. The Patriarch wrote: "We have heard of your virtuous life in God, and we have greatly praised and glorified God. But one thing is still lacking to you: you do not live a cenobitic life... Wherefore, I give you this good counsel; establish the common life in your monastery. And may the mercy of God and our blessing be with you." The Metropolitan approved this counsel, and from henceforth life on the basis of community was established in the monastery, with all things possessed in common and no monk calling anything his own.

After some time dissension arose: the devil, the hater of goodness, caused some to desire not to have the Saint over them. The Saint's own brother Stephen became envious of him, and one day he said out loud on the left cliros, "Who is Abbot here? Was I not the first to settle here?" The Saint, being the Altar, heard this, but said not a word; and when he left the church he did not even go to his cell, but went out of the monastery and began walking on the road to Pereyaslavl. Coming to the Monastery of Makra, he asked the help of the Abbot, St. Stephen, and thus he found a beautiful deserted spot near the river Kirzhach, where there is now the Monastery of the Annunciation of the Most Holy Mother of God.

The brotherhood, when it saw that the Saint had left, immediately sought him out. Then the brothers began visiting him in twos and threes. St



PREPARES HOLY BREAD, EXHORTS THE BRETHREN, AND LITURGIZES

Sergius asked and received permission from Metropolitan Alexis to build a church, and many brethren gathered under the Saint's guidance in this new monastery.

Soon several monks from the Holy Trinity Monastery, unable to bear any longer the separation from their spiritual father, went to the Metropolitan and begged him to command St. Sergius to return to them. He did so, and the Saint obeyed without complaint. The Metropolitan, glad at his prompt obedience, sent a priest to consecrate the new church which St. Sergius had built, in honor of the Annunciation of the Most Holy Mother of God. The Saint chose one of his disciples, Romanus, to be the Abbot of the new monastery, and sent him to the Metropolitan to be raised to the priesthood. The Saint had wished Isaacius the Silent to be Abbot of this monastery, but the latter would not agree to this and only begged the Saint's blessing to undertake a life of total silence. This the Saint gave, making the sign of the Cross over him after the Divine Liturgy, whereupon a powerful flame came from his hand and enveloped Isaacius; and from that day he never spoke a word, by the Saint's prayers.

Thus St. Sergius returned to his own monastery, to the great rejoicing of the whole brotherhood.

Once St. Stephen, Bishop of Perm, who had for St. Sergius a great spiritual affection, was travelling from Perm to Moscow along a road which lay about seven miles from St. Sergius' monastery. He thought of visiting the



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Saint not then, but on his way back from Moscow. When he came to the point in the road nearest to the monastery, he stopped, sang "Meet It Is," bowed low in the direction of the monastery, and said, "Peace be with you, spiritual brother!" The Saint at this hour was seated at supper with his brethren. Seeing in spirit what the holy hierarch was doing at this moment, he suddenly rose from the table, stood for a moment in prayer, then bowed and said aloud, "Do thou also rejoice, shepherd of Christ's flock; the peace of God be always with you." At the end of supper he told his inquiring disciples, "At that hour Bishop Stephen, on his way to Moscow, did reverence to the Holy Trinity and blessed us humble ones"; and he indicated the place where this had occurred. Some of the Saint's disciples went to this place and, overtaking the Bishop, confirmed the truth of St. Sergius' words.

THE SAINT'S DISCIPLES established many monasteries. St. Andronicus came from the Saint's birthplace, Rostov, and joined the monastery as a youth, receiving the tonsure from the Saint. He remained many years in the monastery in perfect obedience, being adorned with every virtue, and was much loved by the Saint. Finally the thought came to this wondrous man to establish a monastery with the rule of the common life. Just at this time St. Alexis the Metropolitan, who was in close spiritual communion with St. Sergius, visited the monastery and asked the Saint to give him St. Andronicus, so that he might found a monastery in accordance with the vow which the Metropolitan had made after being saved from shipwreck. The Saint fulfilled the Metropolitan's request, and later he visited the new monastery and blessed his disciple. St. Andronicus wisely governed his monastery, and many monks joined him; on his death he was succeeded as Abbot by his disciple, St. Sabbas. At the same time there was another elder here, named Andrew (Rublev), a superb iconographer, surpassing all by his great mind and honorably adorned with gray hairs; and there were many other such ones.

St. Sergius' brother, Stephen, when he had returned to the Saint, had brought with him his son Theodore, who was twelve years old. This Theodore was tonsured by the Saint and led a virtuous life in perfect obedience, never concealing a single thought of his from the Saint, either day or night. When he reached mature years and was ordained priest, he began to think about how to find a place and build a cenobitic monastery. He confessed this thought to the Saint many times, and St. Sergius, believing this to be God's doing, finally blessed Theodore and let him go, together with those brothers who wished to follow him. They found a suitable place on the river Moscow, called Simonovo, and St. Sergius, after seeing it, blessed them to build the monastery. St. Theodore became so famous and honored for his virtues and his monastery that St. Sergius offered fervent prayer constantly for him, lest he fall into pride. St.

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Theodore later founded a second glorious monastery, and finally he was made Archbishop of Rostov, reposing in sanctity in the year 1395.

One time, when Stephen, the Saint's brother, and his son Theodore (before he left the monastery), were serving the Divine Liturgy with St. Sergius, the aforementioned Isaac the Silent saw a fourth man with a bright, shining appearance and dazzling apparel standing at the Altar-table with them. At the Little Entrance this Angel-like man came out of the Altar following St. Sergius. Another monk, Macarius, also saw this vision. When asked about this after the Liturgy, the Saint at first denied that anyone else had been present. But at their insistence he said, "Beloved brethren, what the Lord has revealed, can I keep secret? He whom you beheld was an Angel of the Lord, and this visitation of God occurs not only today, but every time I serve, unworthy as I am. But tell no one of this while I am alive." And his disciples were astonished beyond measure.

When the pagan Tatar hordes were preparing to invade Russian soil, St. Sergius blessed the Grand Duke Demetrius Donskoy to go to war with them and conquer them, giving him two of his own disciples to help him. Facing the Tatar multitudes in the Field of Kulikovo, the Grand Duke and his followers began to doubt and fear, but at that moment a courier arrived from the Saint, who assured them that God was on their side; and the Russian armies fought boldly and conquered.

The Saint saw this battle with his spiritual eyes, and the whole brotherhood prayed for victory at that hour. The Saint, by spiritual vision, announced the victory and prayed by name for the Orthodox warriors who had fallen. When the Grand Duke returned he hastened to give thanks for the Saint's prayers, gave a rich offering to the monastery, and, in fulfillment of a vow made to the Saint, established a monastery on the place chosen by St. Sergius, with the Saint's disciple Sabbas as Abbot. Many brothers joined the monastery, which was dedicated to the Dormition of the Most Holy Mother of God.

At the same time the Grand Duke Demetrius asked St. Sergius to come to Kolomna, the Grand Duke's native place, and build there, on a place called Golutvino, a monastery dedicated to the Lord's Theophany. This the Saint did, going there by foot, as was his constant custom, and left his disciple, the priest-monk Gregory, as Abbot. Many monks joined this cenobitic monastery.

At another time the pious Prince Vladimir of Serpukhov asked St. Sergius to establish a monastery there in honor of the Conception of the Most Holy Mother of God. This the Saint did, leaving his beloved disciple Athanasius as Abbot. Many brothers came to this monastery, which was called Vysotsky.

What a multitude of monasteries was established by this great pastor and man of God, St. Sergius, and how many were established by his spiritual



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children, and by their children! Like lamps they shine everywhere, enlightening the ends of the Russian land!

The Metropolitan Alexis, being old, sent for St. Sergius and tried to persuade him to be ordained bishop and become his successor. Despite much urging by the Metropolitan, the Saint, unyielding in his humility, continued to refuse the honor, and St. Alexis, fearing that the Saint might disappear entirely into the wilderness, gave up his entreaty and allowed him to return to his monastery. When Metropolitan Alexis died shortly thereafter, in the year 1377, the princes tried once more to persuade the Saint to accept the rank of bishop, but he was adamant in his refusal.

One day the blessed Father was praying, as was his custom, before the icon of the Mother of our Lord Jesus Christ. Having prayed fervently to Her and sung Her Akathist, he sat down to rest a while. Suddenly he said to his disciple Micah, "Son, be sober and vigilant, for we are about to have a wonderful and fearful visitation." While he was still speaking, a voice was heard: "The Most Pure One is coming." Hearing this the Saint hurried from his cell into the entry-way—and suddenly a dazzling radiance shone upon him, brighter than the sun, and he beheld the Most Pure Virgin, with two Apostles, Peter and John, shining with unutterable light. Unable to bear so resplendent a vision, the Saint fell to the ground. The Most Pure Virgin, touching him with Her hand, said, "Be not afraid, My chosen one! I have come to visit you. Your prayers for your disciples and for your monastery have been heard. Be not troubled; from henceforth it will flourish. And not only during your lifetime, but also after you depart to the Lord, I will be with your monastery, supplying its needs abundantly, providing for it, protecting it."

Having thus spoken, She vanished. The Saint, being enraptured in mind, remained in great fear and trembling. Returning to his senses, he raised up his terrified disciple; but the latter flung himself down at the Elder's feet, saying, "Tell me, Father, for the sake of God: what miraculous vision was this?" The Saint, so filled with joy that his face glowed, could answer only a few words: "Wait a while, son; my soul too is trembling at this wondrous vision." He stood, wrapped in wonder, until finally he said, "Son, call Isaacius and Simon here." When these two came he recounted to them all that had happened, how he had beheld the Most Pure Mother of God with the Apostles, and what a wonderful promise She had given him. Hearing this, their hearts were filled with indescribable joy, and they all sang a moleben to the Mother of God and glorified God. All night the Saint remained without sleep, reflecting on this unutterable vision. (This happened in the year 1388, four years before the Saint's repose.)

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After some time a certain bishop came from Constantinople to Moscow. He had heard much of the Saint, who was now known far and wide, even in Constantinople. But this bishop doubted the rumor about the Saint and said: "Can there be such a lamp in this land, and in these latter times?" He decided to go to the monastery in order to see the Saint himself. When he neared the monastery, terror overcame him, and no sooner had he seen the Saint when he was struck blind. The Saint took him by the hand to his cell, and there the bishop confessed his unbelief and begged with tears for healing. The Saint touched his eyes and healed him, exhorting him not to come tempting the simple monks again. The bishop, now enlightened, spoke loudly everywhere about having seen a true man of God, a heavenly man and earthly Angel.

One day the Saint was serving the Divine Liturgy with one of his disciples, venerable Simon, when the latter saw a wondrous vision: "While the Saint was serving, I saw a flame hovering over the Altar-table, surrounding and illuminating it. As the Saint was about to receive Holy Communion, the Divine flame coiled itself like a kind of shroud and entered the sacred Chalice, and then the Saint received Holy Communion." Seeing this, Simon trembled with fear. The Saint, seeing that Simon had been deemed worthy of this miraculous vision, forbade him to speak of it: "Tell no one of this that you have seen, until the Lord calls me away from this life." And together they offered praise to God.

Continually chastening himself with fasting, working unceasingly, performing numberless miracles, the Saint reached an advanced age, never failing from his place at Divine service or his rule of prayer. The older his body grew the stronger grew his fervor, in no way weakened by age. He foreknew his approaching end six months beforehand, and assembling the brotherhood, he appointed his dearest disciple, Nikon, to take his place, and then gave himself over to silence.

The great ascetic soon began to lose strength, and in September he was taken seriously ill. Seeing his end at hand, he again assembled his flock and delivered a final exhortation. He made them promise to be steadfast in Orthodoxy and to preserve oneness in mind with each other; to keep pure in body and soul and to have unhypocritical love; to avoid all evil and carnal lusts; to be moderate in food and drink; above all, to be clothed with humility; not to forget love of strangers; to avoid back-talk, and on no account to set value on honor and praise in this life, but rather to await reward from God in the joys of heaven and eternal blessings. Having instructed them also in many other things, he concluded, "The Lord already calls me, and I am about to leave you; I commit you to Almighty God and His Most Pure Mother: may They be to you a Refuge and Wall against the snares and attacks of the enemies." As his



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soul was about to leave his body, he partook of the Holy Mysteries of Christ, supported in the arms of his disciples; then, raising his hands to heaven, and having prayed, he surrendered his pure, holy soul to the Lord with prayer, in the year 1392, on September 25, being 78 years of age. After his death the Saint's body gave off an ineffable, sweet fragrance.

The entire brotherhood gathered around him and, weeping and sobbing, laid on its bier the body of him who in life had been so noble and unrelenting, and accompanied him with psalms and funeral prayers. His face shone white as snow and was not at all as if dead, but rather as if alive, like that of an Angel of God. His body was laid to rest within the monastery which he had established. Many were the miracles that took place at his death and afterwards, and they are still taking place. Angels preceded him after his repose and opened for him the doors of Paradise, leading him into the desired blessedness, the repose of the righteous, the radiance of Angels, and — what he had always desired — the illumination of the Most Holy Trinity.

**M**ANY WERE THE SIGNS of St. Sergius' care for his monastery after his repose. In the autumn of 1408, when the Saint's disciple Nikon was Abbot, the fierce Tatars began to draw near to the boundaries of Moscow. St. Nikon entreated the Lord that He would preserve the monastery of His Saint, and defend it from the enemies' attacks. At the same time, he called upon the name of the great founder of the monastery, St. Sergius. Once, at night after prayer, he sat down in order to rest, and fell into a light sleep. Suddenly he saw before him the holy Hierarchs Peter and Alexis, and with them St. Sergius, who said: "It has been pleasing to the Lord that the foreigners should touch this place. But you, my child, do not grieve; the monastery will not be deserted, but will flourish yet more." Then, having given their blessing, the Saints became invisible. Coming to himself, St. Nikon hastened to the doors, but they were locked; opening them, he saw the Saints going away from his cell. Then he understood that this was not a dream, but a true vision. The prophecy of St. Sergius was soon fulfilled: the Tatars devastated the monastery and burned it. But the monks, being forewarned in such a miraculous way, left the monastery temporarily, and when the enemy left the region of Moscow, St. Nikon rebuilt the monastery and erected a wooden church in honor of the Holy Trinity, with God's help and the prayers of St. Sergius.

Thirty years after the repose of the Saint, God desired to glorify His Saint even more. Near the monastery at this time there lived a certain pious man. Having great faith toward the Saint, he often came to his grave and fervently prayed to the Saint of God. Once, at night, after fervent prayer, he fell into a light sleep, wherein St. Sergius appeared to him and said, "Tell the

### SAINT SERGIUS OF RADONEZH

Abbot of the monastery: Why are they leaving me for so long under the earth in the grave, where water surrounds my body?"

On awaking, this man was filled with fear, but at the same time he felt in his heart an extraordinary joy. Immediately he told this vision to the disciple of St. Sergius, Nikon, who was then Abbot. Nikon informed the brethren and great was the rejoicing of the monks. Rumor of the impending opening of the relics spread far and wide, and many people flocked to the monastery. No sooner had they opened the Saint's grave, when immediately a great fragrance spread all around. Then they saw a wondrous miracle. Not only was the precious body of St. Sergius preserved whole and unharmed, but corruption had not touched even his garments. On both sides of the grave there was water, but it had not touched either the relics of the Saint or his garments. Seeing this, all rejoiced and praised God, Who had glorified His Saint. With rejoicing the holy relics of the Saint were placed in a new shrine. The opening of the relics of St. Sergius occurred on July 5, 1422, in memory of which a feast-day was established.

The miracles of the great St. Sergius throughout the centuries have been numberless. How many he has healed, enlightened, saved from peril and death! His miracles were especially abundant in the "Time of Troubles," in 1608-10, when the Poles surrounded and besieged his Monastery for sixteen months. Many times he appeared then, sometimes to encourage and strengthen the besieged and sometimes to threaten the enemy, sometimes by himself and sometimes with his disciple St. Nikon and other disciples; until the enemy abandoned the siege and soon thereafter left the Russian land.

After the Russian Revolution the Monastery of St. Sergius was closed and his holy relics were placed in an anti-religious museum for mockery. When, however, religion again became "useful" to the Soviet Government during the Second World War, the Monastery was reopened and the relics were returned to it. Today, St. Sergius' Holy Trinity Lavra is one of the last open monasteries in the Soviet Union, and great multitudes of Orthodox believers come to venerate the Saint's relics. Even in our frightful times, the promise of the Most Holy Mother of God to be with the Saint's Monastery remains fulfilled, and there are still catacomb monastic disciples of the Saint nearly six centuries after his repose — the last of the numberless "birds" of the Saint's vision during his lifetime. St. Sergius, the "Father of many monasteries" and Abba of the Northern Thebaid, likewise continues to be a "carer and sorrower for the Russian land," sending his unceasing prayer to the Throne of God for the enslaved Orthodox people, who yet hope for deliverance from the Communist Yoke and even for a last flowering of true Orthodox monasticism in the spirit of the great Saint of Radonezh.



THE LIFE OF  
**Saint Paul of Obnora**  
 IN THE KOMEL FORESTS OF VOLOGDA\*

Commemorated January 10

**B**ORN IN A PIOUS noble family of Moscow in 1317, St. Paul even from childhood showed leanings toward the contemplative life of a true Orthodox Christian. He avoided noisy children's games and sweet foods, he fasted, gave to the poor everything he had, even the clothes on his back, attended eagerly every church service, and spent whole nights in prayer. When at the age of 22 his parents decided to marry him off, he secretly left his home and entered a distant monastery on the banks of the Volga river, where he received the monastic tonsure, surpassing everyone in ascetic fervor. When the good news of the great St. Sergius of Radonezh reached the shores of the Volga, St. Paul felt that his prayer had been answered in obtaining an experienced instructor; and he left his monastery for the Lavra of the Holy Trinity.

St. Sergius received him with love, and seeing that he was full of the fear of God, he made him his disciple. He entrusted him with various obediences: in the kitchen, in the bread-bakery. St. Paul gave up his own will to the God-bearing Abbot and in time acquired the gift of heartfelt feeling and abundance of tears. After several years St. Sergius blessed him to withdraw to a separate recluse's cell, where he spent fifteen years in silence. In this time the study of the Word of God so filled his soul that it began to flow out in a gift of teaching, and the brethren, once having discovered this, began to flock to him for edification — which only evoked in him a greater desire for silence. He began to beg St. Sergius to bless him for a life of desert-dwelling. Knowing the spiritual maturity of his disciple, St. Sergius blessed him, and bidding farewell with a prayer, he gave him an invincible weapon, a holy Cross. This copper Cross was to accompany the Saint his whole life long, and centuries afterwards it was preserved on the reliquary over the Saint's holy relics.

Having left St. Sergius' monastery, St. Paul went north, deep into the forests beyond the Volga, and wandered for a while from place to place, visiting

\* Condensed from the *Historical Account of the Lives of Vologda Saints*, Vologda, 1880; and Andrew Muraviev, *The Russian Thebaid of the North*, St. Petersburg, 1855.



16th century Moscow Icon

ST. PAUL OF OBNORA

TROPARION, TONE 1

**B**EING INFLAMED from thy youth with divine love, O Saint Paul,\* and having come to hate all the attractions of the world,\* Christ alone didst thou come to love.\* For this reason thou didst settle in the inner wilderness\* to live with wild beasts, entirely for Christ.\* Wherefore, the All-seeing Eye having beheld thy labors\* did enrich thee even after thy repose with the gift of miracles.\* And so we sing to thee:\* pray unceasingly for us all\* who ever revere in hymns thine honorable memory.





St. Sergius blesses Paul to leave



St. Paul in his linden-tree hollow



The death of St. Sergius of Nurma

Fragments remaining after the fire of 1909, showing the bas-relief likeness of the face and hand of St. Paul, copied from the original portrait-icon of the Saint.



## ST. PAUL OF OBNORA

some of the monastic communities scattered throughout the Thebaid of the North. But the heart of the lover of desert-dwelling still thirsted for absolute silence, until finally he settled in a spot in the Komel forests overlooking the little river Griazovitsa, and chose for his abode the hollow of an old linden tree. Here the wondrous Paul spent three years, glorifying God together with the birds, for they alone seconded the hermit's singing in the desolate wilds where no man had yet penetrated. Here he could pray ceaselessly to God. Who can tell of the hardships he endured? Living on grass and roots and enduring all changes of weather, in silence he purified his mind by means of spiritual combat and divine vision.

But it was pleasing to God that St. Paul should serve for the salvation of others, instructing them by word and his ascetic life. And so, instructed by God, the Saint left his linden tree and went farther to the river Nurma, where the Obnora joins it, where he found a spot to his liking, built for himself a little hut no larger than his abandoned linden hollow, and settled therein to spend his days and nights in vigil and prayer. For five days of the week he would remain without food or drink altogether, and only on Saturday and Sunday would he have some bread and water.

Meanwhile, three miles from St. Paul's hermitage, on the same wild banks of the Nurma, another anchorite was laboring: St. Sergius of Nurma, who had received the monastic tonsure on Mt. Athos. He had come from the East to the region of Moscow to seek enlightenment from the lamp of Radonezh. Having matured in spiritual life, the Athonite Sergius, with the blessing of the Russian Sergius, came to settle in this wilderness when the anchorite Paul was still living in his linden hollow, as a *sparrow that hath found her a home, and the swallow a nest for herself* (Ps. 83:4). Twice thieves fell upon Sergius; the first time they beat him almost to death, but when they came again they were chased away by the power of his prayer. When as many as forty ascetics had gathered around Sergius, he built a wooden church in honor of the Lord's Transfiguration and established a cenobitic monastery.

Having heard of the ascetic labors of Paul, Sergius went to him and saw in the forest a wondrous sight: A flock of birds surrounded the marvellous anchorite; little birds perched on the Elder's head and shoulders, and he fed them by hand. Nearby stood a bear, awaiting his food from the desert-dweller; foxes, rabbits and other beasts ran about, without any enmity among themselves and not fearing the bear. Behold the life of innocent Adam in Eden, the lordship of man over creation, which together with us groans because of our fall and thirsts to be delivered into *the liberty of the children of God* (Rom. 8:22).

With spiritual joy the two great ascetics became acquainted with each other; they practiced mutual counsel in all their spiritual undertakings and

## THE NORTHERN THEBAID

often visited each other, strengthening each other in advanced ascetic labors. Paul chose Sergius as his spiritual father, the latter having been ordained to the rank of presbyter while still on the Holy Mountain of Athos, and often Paul would receive communion from his holy hands of the Body and Blood of Christ in Sergius' monastery, confessing to him all his thoughts. But Sergius as well did not hide from Paul what was in his heart; for they were both close servants of the One God, and they helped each other in the tribulations of the wilderness.

It once happened that St. Paul left his cell and went about the wilderness; and when he returned he saw his cell razed to its foundation. Human fear suddenly overcame him and he ran to St. Sergius to tell him of his sorrow. But St. Sergius, more experienced in the spiritual work, realized that this had only been a demonic apparition, and he told St. Paul in the words of the psalm: "*God is our refuge and strength* (Ps. 45:2); go, my brother Paul, and you will find that your cell is not destroyed." The hermit believed his spiritual father and, returning, he indeed found his cell unharmed.

Whenever St. Sergius would visit his spiritual son, St. Paul, filled with deep reverence toward him, would accompany him for two-thirds of the distance to his monastery, and this place of parting was marked right up to the 20th century by a chapel, a witness of their mutual love.

When gradually the news spread of where St. Paul was living, people began to come to him: some just to look at the great ascetic and receive his blessing; others, who were troubled, for consolation; and yet others sought his spiritual instruction, begging him to allow them to settle near him and have him as their abbot, leading them to salvation. But the Saint, who all his life had sought silence and fled from people, refused. However, their insistent pleas caused him to wait for some indication of God's will, lest they perish and he be responsible for it. This indication was not long in coming.

One night while standing at prayer in his cell, St. Paul suddenly heard the ringing of bells in the forest thickets beyond the river Nurma. The same thing happened another time, and then it was repeated more and more often; and to the Elder's no little amazement, on week days there would be heard an ordinary ringing of smaller bells, while on feast days there would be a louder pealing; and the greater the feast day, according to the Church typicon, the more triumphant was the ringing.

For a long time the Elder paid no attention to the ringing of the invisible bells, considering it a deceptive apparition and a trick of the devil; and he told no one about it. However, one circumstance convinced him that the opposite was true. The feast of Pascha came, and St. Paul began an all-night vigil the evening before, pouring out his soul before God in the most fervent and



"Behold the life of Innocent Adam in Eden" — St. Sergius coming from Nurma (left) seeing St. Paul amongst peaceful animals.



The blessed repose of St. Paul amidst his disciples.

ICONOGRAPHIC SCENES OF THE LIFE OF ST. PAUL  
from the *Russian Pilgrim*, 1910.





Holy Trinity Cathedral (back view) in the St. Paul of Obnora Monastery, Vologda region, as photographed at the turn of the century



tearful prayer. Suddenly, just at midnight, he heard a triumphant ringing. An involuntary curiosity took hold of the Elder. He prayed and then opened the window of his cell and, looking downhill toward the Nurma, he saw an extraordinary light shining beyond the river in the forest on the very place where later was to stand the monastery church of the Holy Trinity. St. Paul felt peace and an inexpressible joy in his heart, and the whole night he spent in glorifying God and His Most Pure Mother. From the spiritual joy, peace, and calmness of his heart he concluded that what he had heard and seen was not a deceptive apparition, and that on that place the Lord was pleased to glorify His Holy Name. When the Elder related his vision to the brethren who lived with

## ST. PAUL OF OBNORA

him nearby, they all unanimously confirmed his opinion and begged him to undertake the building of a church and monastery; and the Saint himself saw that after such visions to hesitate to fulfill the will of God, which had been so clearly expressed, would be unforgivable, and he resolved to seek counsel about this from his spiritual father, St. Sergius. St. Sergius, taking this for an indication of God, prophesied that on this spot a monastery would be erected in the name of the Holy Trinity, and that many would find salvation in it. This was the last time the two Elders met in this life. St. Sergius, weighed down by age, began to prepare for his departure to the heavenly mansions, which occurred on October 7, 1413, and St. Paul went to Moscow to receive a blessing for the foundation of a monastery and the building of a church in the name of the Holy Trinity.

When St. Paul arrived in Moscow, Metropolitan Photius paid no attention to his request and even received him quite harshly. When the Saint was about to leave, he told the Metropolitan: "Not as you say will all come to pass, but as it is pleasing to the Holy Trinity." The same night the hierarch saw a frightening vision and heard a voice accusing him for offending a man of God and telling him to do as the Elder wishes. Seized with fear, the bishop sent many people in the morning to seek out the Elder, who was found in one of the monasteries. His request was fulfilled by the Metropolitan, and he returned to build a church and found near it a cenobitic monastery with a typicon according to the ancient Holy Fathers, Sts. Pachomius the Great and Theodosius the Cenobiarch. St. Paul saw to it that everything was possessed in common; he demanded complete silence from the monks, whether in church or at meals or in the workshops. All monks were in absolute obedience to their elders, as in the ancient monastic tradition. St. Paul taught his monks to love the poor. His disciple Alexis was ordained priest and made abbot, while he himself, refusing to be abbot or to accept the priesthood, retreated into his former cell on the slope of the hill, coming out only for Divine services. And thus the sign given by the invisible bells was fulfilled.

For some time before his blessed repose at the age of 112, St. Paul began to spend even more time in silence and solitude, praying ceaselessly with fervor to God, diligently laboring, and cleansing the vision of his mind. In silence his mind was constantly in prayer and heedfulness toward God; gathering the light of Divine understanding in his heart, he beheld in purity the glory of the Lord, thereby becoming a chosen vessel of the Holy Spirit. On the day of the Theophany, when the brethren came to him before the Liturgy, he suddenly sighed deeply and wept. At the entreaty of the brethren the Elder disclosed the reason for his tears: "At this very hour the godless Tatars have taken the city of Kostroma, given it over to fire and the sword, and led many away captive because of the increase of our sins; for we have left the path of righteousness and walk in the will of our hearts and in fleshly wisdom."

## THE NORTHERN THEBAID

And indeed, on this very day Kostroma was laid waste by the Tatars, who later also laid waste the Elder's own monastery, but only after his repose.

Several days after this, blessed Paul, became completely feeble, and sensing the approach of death, he summoned all the brethren. With prayer he gave them as his testament to keep the tradition of the Fathers and the cenobitic rule. The good order of the monastery he entrusted to his disciple Alexis, and he promised that if the brethren were to keep his commandments by a God-pleasing life, and if he himself obtained grace with God, then he would pray that the monastery would flourish. "Have unfeigned love among yourselves, keep the tradition, and may the God of peace be with you and confirm you in love." These were his farewell words. In the very hour of his departure he desired once more to receive the Divine Gifts; then, having blessed the brethren, he stretched out on his bed, signed himself with the sign of the Cross, and in quiet prayer gave up his holy soul to God. His face was bright, for God glorified His Saint. To funeral hymns the brethren carried his precious body across the waters of the wild Nurma and buried it near the church of the Life-giving Trinity, on the tenth day of January, 1429, in the fortieth year of the existence of his community.

**A**FTER THE SAINT'S REPOSE there were many miracles from his holy relics, and his monastery flourished. Soon stone churches were erected in place of the original wooden ones. But then, under the Saint's fourth successor, Abbot Protasius, there came upon the monastery a great calamity: it was destroyed by the Kazan Tatars.

In January, 1538, the Tatar hordes reached the boundaries of Vologda, giving everything over to fire and the sword. Some monks from a nearby hermitage fled, wounded, to St. Paul's monastery to warn the brethren there of the approach of the Tatars. Many of the brethren fled, and the rest prepared for death. They gathered in one cell and spent the whole night in prayer, entreating God's mercy. Towards morning the Elder Ephraim, who had spent eighty years in monastic labors, in a light sleep saw before him St. Paul himself, who entered the cell and, taking him by the hand, told him: "My brother Ephraim, much sorrow awaits you from the godless barbarians. You yourself will be cut with the sword, and two others with you; but one of them, after being wounded, will recover, and others will be saved. Do not grieve over this, for this death will be for you unto eternal life; and your monastery, even though it will be burned and pillaged, will later grow yet more and will be filled with many good things." Having said this, the Saint departed, and Ephraim sprang up and told the brethren what he had seen and heard. At this, the brothers who were able to do so, left the monastery, while the others awaited their certain death.

## ST. PAUL OF OBNORA

At the fourth hour of the day, as the monks were singing the Hours, the Tatars descended upon the monastery. The brethren, in fear, put on the Schema and bade farewell to each other. Like wild beasts the Tatars threw themselves on the monastery, destroying and killing; Ephraim and other monks thus met a martyr's death, but some survived their wounds, as the Saint had said they would. The barbarians set fire to the monastery and fled, and only the stone churches remained undestroyed.

Outside the monastery the Tatars met a monastery worker named John and, after severely wounding him, they left him unconscious in the snow. After five hours, he barely managed to reach a hut not far away, where he lay groaning, when suddenly he heard a voice from the window saying: "Go to your home, or else you will die here. Arise and pray to the Life-giving Trinity; call on St. Paul for help and he will help you; place a piece of paper on your wounds." Amazed, John miraculously found strength and did as the voice had told him. Lying severely ill at home, he prayed to St. Paul, and then he saw a splendid Elder who came to him with a knife in his hands and seemed to cut up his inward parts, saying, "I am taking away your affliction." Having finished, the Elder left, and John, completely healed, tried to follow him, but managed to see only how he ascended into the air toward the monastery of Obnora and then disappeared.

Eight years after this, Abbot Protasius decided to build a stone church dedicated to St. Paul, over his relics. When excavations were made for this church, six completely incorrupt relics of holy monks of the monastery were uncovered, and one sick brother was healed by touching them. Then the coffin of St. Paul himself was uncovered, and the Abbot, after consulting with the monastery elders, thought to open the coffin after prayer and fasting. But in a light sleep he saw St. Paul, who angrily told him: "Why do you think of examining my relics? Fire will come from them and burn you; command immediately that my coffin be enshrined." In terror the Abbot called an artisan who did as the Saint had commanded, and so the coffin was placed, closed, in the new church. From that time on the Saint appeared many times to the brethren, and many received healing of their afflictions.

The miracles of St. Paul continued right up to the destruction of the monastery by the new godless hordes of Communism. Since then his earthly testament has been covered with silence; but in heaven he remains an intercessor for the sinful race of Orthodox Christians.





## THE LIFE OF *Saint Cyril of Belozersk*

OR WHITE LAKE, IN THE HEART OF THE NORTHERN THEBAID†

**S**AINT CYRIL WAS BORN of God-fearing parents in the capital of Moscow; his name in the world was Cosmas. From childhood he was brought up in the fear of God and knowledge of the Holy Scriptures, and this spiritual upbringing became the spiritual inheritance of the monks of his monastery. His parents at their death entrusted the youth to their relative, Timothy Voluevich, who served as guardsman to the Grand Prince Dimitry Donskoy and surpassed in honor and wealth many boyars; but the wealth of the nobleman had no effect upon the young orphan, who concentrated all his thoughts upon God, and constantly devoted himself to the Church, in fasting and prayer, not desiring anything else but the monastic treasure. Seeing his virtues growing with years, the boyar drew the youth to himself and even put him above all his household; but this did not change the thoughts of the lover of solitude, but only saddened him with the worry that it would be more difficult for him to attain his desired goal. He placed his sorrow upon God, and God, foreseeing a great monk in the young Cosmas, deigned to assist him in the attainment of monasticism.

It happened that Abbot Stephen of Mahra,\* a man renowned for his virtues, visited the capital. Cosmas long awaited his arrival, having heard much about him, and with tears revealed to him his secret thought, asking that he not cast him away, for the sake of the Lord, Who did not cast away a single sinner. Stephen was touched at the sight of such zeal and, foreseeing in him a chosen vessel of the Holy Spirit, consoled him, promising to fulfill his desire. They began to think among themselves how to perform the tonsure. Because the boyar Timothy would not in any way consent to this, Saint Stephen decided simply to clothe the youth in the ryasson and named him Cyril, and left the rest to God's will. Then he himself came to the boyar. Timothy, delighted at his visit, met him with honor at the entrance to his house and asked his blessing. "Cyril, who implores God for you, blesses you," said Stephen, and when with surprise the boyar asked who this Cyril was, the abbot replied to him: "Cosmas, your former relative, but now a monk laboring for the Lord and praying for you."

† From A. Muraviev, *The Russian Thebaid of the North*, St. Ptsbg., 1855.

\* St. Stephen is commemorated on July 14.



St. Cyril of White Lake,  
an ancient icon  
based on the Saint's portrait



Portrait of St. Cyril of White Lake,  
painted by St. Dionysius of Glushitsa

†1429. Commemorated on June 9

TROPARION, TONE 1

**AS A FLOWER** in the wilderness didst thou blossom even as David, O Father Cyril,\* uprooting the thorns of evil passions,\* and didst gather there a multitude of disciples,\* who were instructed in fear of God and in thy teaching,\* whom as a loving father thou didst not leave to the end,\* visiting them that we all may sing:\* Glory be to Him Who gave thee firmness,\* glory be to Him Who crowned thee,\* glory be to Him Who worketh healings for all through thee.

ST. CYRIL OF WHITE LAKE

These words were difficult for the boyar; filled with grief, he spoke with irritation to Stephen. The holy man, however, not crossing the threshold, replied: "It has been told us by the Saviour, our Lord Jesus Christ, to remain where we are obeyed and received, but if not, then to cast the dust from off our feet, as a testimony against those who do not accept us" (Matt. 10:14). Stephen went away; but the God-fearing wife of the boyar, hearing such an admonition which was more Christ's than Stephen's, began to reproach her husband: how could he offend such an elder? And the boyar, repenting, sent to have him return. Both asked each other's forgiveness, the boyar permitted the newly-named Cyril to fulfill his heart's desire, and Stephen rejoiced that he had acquired a brother. He announced this to the new monk, who in fulfillment of his vows gave all his belongings to the poor, not even thinking of leaving anything to himself for old age, because of bodily infirmity.

Before returning to Mahra, Abbot Stephen brought the new monk to the Simonov Monastery, which had then been established in a new place by Archimandrite Theodore, the nephew of St. Sergius of Radonezh. With joy he received Cyril and made him a full monk, entrusting his supervision to the Elder Michael, who led a most strict life in the monastery and was later bishop in the city of Smolensk. Cyril was inflamed with fervor to live the life of his elder and, seeing his extreme labor, tried with absolute obedience to imitate him in everything. Fasting seemed to him sweet, and nakedness in winter seemed as warmth. By wasting his flesh he enlightened his soul and almost did not know sleep. He asked his elder to allow him to partake of food but once in two or three days; however, this wise preceptor did not permit this, ordering that he share the meals with the brethren, only not to satiety. After spending all night in the reading of the Psalter with many prostrations, at the first ringing of the bell, before all the others, he was to be found in church for the singing of Matins. In his cell he shook off the temptations of demons by the name of Jesus and the sign of the Cross. Some time later, the Archimandrite gave him an obedience in the bakery, and there he began to labor even more: he himself carried water, chopped wood and, carrying warm bread to the brethren, received in its place warm prayers for himself, being praised by all for his untiring zeal and devotion. He was unmerciful only to his flesh, in order that, according to the Apostle's word, while the flesh is mortified the spirit might be strong.

**IT HAPPENED** at times that St. Sergius would come to the Simonov Monastery in order to visit his nephew Theodore, but before anything else he would seek out Cyril in the bakery and for a long time speak with him about what was profitable for the soul. Both of them attended to the spiritual work



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together: one sowing the seeds of virtue, the other watering them with tears, in order, according to the expression of the Psalmist, to reap in joy what was sowed in tears (Ps. 125:5). All the brethren were astonished: how could St. Sergius, neglecting the Superior and all the monks, spend time only with Cyril? But they did not show any envy towards the youth, understanding his virtue. From the bakery he was transferred, by the will of the Superior, to the kitchen, and there he labored no less, at the sight of temporal fire being inspired to the remembrance of the eternal, undying fire. "Have patience, Cyril," he said to himself, "so that by this fire you might save yourself from the fire to come." Such feeling did God grant him that he could not even eat the bread which he baked without tears, and all the brethren looked upon him not as upon a man, but as upon an Angel of God.

Dismayed by the general attention, humble Cyril began to be a fool, in order to escape from vain honors. The Superior, seeing his foolishness, imposed a forty-day penance on him. Cyril accepted this with gladness, and later he was subjected to a stricter punishment; just as the proud delight in decorations, so do the humble delight in dishonor. The Superior finally discovered that it was not because of pride but out of humility that Cyril was foolish, and he became more indulgent.

The thought came to Cyril to ask to leave the kitchen for his cell, not for rest, but for more solitude; and he prayed to the Most Pure Virgin to arrange this for his good. At the same time it came to the mind of the Archimandrite to have a certain book copied for himself; and he ordered the young monk to occupy himself in his cell with this copying. Then, however, Cyril began to notice of himself that during his nightly prayers he did not have so much feeling as he had had in the kitchen, notwithstanding the multitude of people there; therefore with tears he asked the Mother of God to restore to him his former feeling; and again the Superior ordered him to occupy himself in the kitchen. With joy the Saint obeyed, and for five more years he remained in this difficult obedience, during the day scorched by fire and at night suffering from cold, but not permitting himself to wear anything warm. After this the Archimandrite, although against the Saint's will, brought Cyril to the Bishop to have him consecrated to the priestly rank. Here the Saint began a new work, strictly performing his turn of service in church, without, however, leaving his previous monastic obedience in the bakery and kitchen.

Soon Archimandrite Theodore was chosen Bishop of Rostov, and in his place in Simonov St. Cyril was elevated, in the year 1388, notwithstanding his tears and refusal. Remembering the word of the Gospel, that to whom much is given much shall be demanded, the new superior devoted himself to yet greater labors, not at all raising himself up in haughtiness over the honor

## ST. CYRIL OF WHITE LAKE

of his rank. He remained the same as he had been before, with all humility and love, revering the elder as his brothers and the younger caressing as children. From everywhere princes and noblemen ran to him for the sake of his spiritual conversation, interrupting his solitude; and so he decided to leave his post and withdraw into his cell, even though the brethren much entreated him to remain with them. But Cyril did not wish to have any more care of external things. Because it was not possible to leave the monastery without a superior, a certain Sergius was elevated to be Archimandrite, who was later Bishop in Ryazan. But the more the Saint avoided the glory of men, the more God glorified him; an extraordinary number of people gathered around him, because his word dissolved in the spiritual salt to the sweetness of those who heard him.

However, envy arose in the new Archimandrite at the glory of the Saint, and he became dissatisfied with him; the Saint, however, was not in the least offended by this, but rather gave place to anger and left to live in solitude in the old Simonov monastery of the Nativity of the Theotokos. He reflected on where he might further conceal himself from worldly cares and fervently prayed concerning this to the Most Pure Virgin. He had the custom late in the evening, after the cell rule, to read also the Akathist before sitting down to partake of some sleep. Once, when he was singing the Akathist before the Icon of the Theotokos and had reached the eighth kontakion: "Seeing the strange Nativity, let us become strangers to the world and transport our minds to heaven" — suddenly he heard a voice: "Cyril, go forth from here to White Lake (Belo-ozero); there I have prepared a place for you where you can be saved." Together with this voice there shone a great light from the northern side; the Saint opened the window of his cell and saw as if by a finger the place shown to him where now the monastery stands. His heart was filled with joy from the voice and the vision, and all night he remained in prayer; but this night was for him already as most bright day.

Some time later the monk Therapontes,\* who had been tonsured with him in Simonov, came to him from White Lake. Cyril began to question him: "Is there a place on White Lake where it would be possible to live in silence?" "Many such places are there for solitude," replied Therapontes; but the Saint did not reveal to him his vision. By mutual agreement they left old Simonov for the distant White Lake, and after many difficult days of travel they finally reached their desired goal. But no matter how much they traversed those deserted places, not one of them did the Saint like as a place to stay; he was constantly seeking for the place that had been shown to him from

\* St. Therapontes of Belozersk and Mozhaisk is commemorated on May 27.



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above, and at last he found it. Suddenly Cyril recognized this place as if it had long been familiar to him; and coming to love it with all his heart, he prayerfully declared: "Here is my rest unto the ages, here shall I dwell, since the Most Pure One decided upon this place; blessed be the Lord God, Who has heard my prayer." Here he erected a cross on the desired hill and sang a canon of thanksgiving to the Most Pure Virgin; and only then did he reveal to his fellow ascetic Therapontes his secret vision, which had showed this place to him, and together they glorified God. The ascetics at first put up a hut, then began to dig a cell in the earth; but after having spent some time together, they separated for greater solitude. The blessed Cyril remained in his place, and Therapontes removed himself some fifteen miles away to another lake, and there he erected a church and monastery in the name of the Nativity of the Mother of God.

THE PLACE where St. Cyril established himself was surrounded by water almost on all sides, and a thick forest grew on this small area where there had never been a dwelling of man. The farmer Isaiah, who lived not far from there, told how many years before the arrival of Cyril there had been heard on that place a ringing and as it were a singing of choirs; many came at the sound of this ringing in order to see where it came from, but to their surprise they returned without seeing anything. In his underground cell the holy anchorite labored against the tricks of the unseen enemy; only occasionally there would come to him two peasants from the surrounding region, Auxentius and Matthew (who later was a candlelighter in his monastery); and with them he went about the desert. Once it happened, by the instigation of the enemy, that such a heavy sleep began to overpower the Saint that he had to lie down and asked his companions to sit near him until he fell asleep; for he could not even reach his cell. He prostrated himself upon the earth under a tall tree; but having barely closed his eyes, he heard a voice saying, "Run, Cyril." Jumping up because of the unusual voice, he sprang from that place, and at that moment an enormous tree fell across it. The Saint understood the deceit of the devil; he prayed to the Lord that such a heavy sleep might be taken away from him, and from that time on he could stay without sleep for many days at a time, vanquishing the enemy's wiles by means of wakefulness.

At another time, when St. Cyril was felling trees, clearing a place for the vegetable garden, and gathering branches, from the heat and dryness the branches caught fire. The smoke, spread by the wind, surrounded the Saint on all sides, so that he did not know how to escape the fire and smoke. Suddenly he saw before him a man in the form of his guardian Timothy, who, taking him by the hand, said, "Follow me"; and following him he came out of the midst of the fire. Thus images of childhood came to him in saving visions, by God's grace.

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Another great trial occurred to the Saint. Not far from his solitary cell there lived a farmer who did not like his being nearby. Taught by the devil, he decided to burn the Saint's cell, but sudden terror would come upon him every time he wished to fulfill his infernal idea. Once he had already set fire to the fence and had begun to run, but stopping not far away, he saw that the fire he had set had been snuffed out by itself. Then, with a feeling of repentance, he fell to the feet of the blessed one, confessing his guilt to him, and Cyril meekly let him go. Soon that same man returned to him, begging him to tonsure him a monk; and to the end of his life he remained in obedience to the Saint.

Not long afterwards there came to him two monks whom he loved, from the Simonov Monastery, Zebediah and Dionysius. This was the first consolation which he had in his wilderness; he received them with love and allowed them to live together with him. Later from there came a third monk, Nathaniel, who later was cellarer in his monastery; and then many began to gather around him, asking the tonsure. Cyril, feeling that the time of his silence in the desert was ended, began freely to accept everyone, granting to them the monastic tonsure. With the addition to the brotherhood, the necessity of a church for common assembly began to be felt, and all the monks asked him to build them a church. But because the place was far removed from human habitations, there was nowhere to look for wood cutters. The Saint, according to his constant habit, turned before all to the Most Pure Virgin, entrusting all to Her kind will, and soon woodsmen arrived of themselves, having been summoned by no one, and they built a church out of logs in the name of the Dormition of the Most Holy Mother of God.

When, however, it was announced in the vicinity that the church was built and that soon there would be a monastery there, the rumor spread that Cyril, as the former Archimandrite of Simonov Monastery, had brought with him from the capital many valuables. A certain Boyar Theodore envied this fictitious wealth and sent robbers to seize it at night. But upon coming close to the monastery, they saw a multitude of people shooting arrows; and after waiting for a long time for them to depart, they finally departed themselves, not committing any evil. The next night the robbers saw the same apparition and still more armed people appeared surrounding the monastery; in awe they ran to announce this to the nobleman who had sent them. Theodore was astonished and, supposing that someone from the nobility was paying a visit to St. Cyril, dispatched men to find out who the visitors were; for he had heard that for over a week no one had visited them. Only then did he come to his senses, understanding that the Most Pure Mother of God was protecting the Saint of God. Hurrying to the monastery, with tears he acknowledged to the



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Saint his sin. The Saint, consoling him, said: "Believe me, child Theodore, I have nothing in this life except the clothes which you see on me, and a few books." From this time on the nobleman had great faith in the blessed Cyril, so that when he visited him he would bring him fish or other food.

**T**HE GLORY of the great ascetic spread to distant regions. It was then that there came the keeper of silence, Ignatius, a man of perfect virtue whose life was so strict that none of the brethren could equal it. He served as a model for them next after Cyril. It is said that during his thirty years of labors he never lay down to rest, but only partook of a little sleep while standing up, leaning a little. He attained a great height of poverty and unacquisitiveness.

When the brotherhood had grown, St. Cyril established a strict rule for it, in order that everyone would be in his own place during church services, not daring to talk in church or to leave before the end of the church service.

St. Cyril never allowed himself to sit in church and his feet were as unshakable pillars. At the monastic meal no conversation was to be heard and the food was most frugal, consisting only of two dishes, and water was the only drink. From the refectory all departed in silence, not inclining to any conversation or to go to each other's cells. The love of his cell was so deeply rooted in every one of St. Cyril's disciples that when one of them, St. Martinian\* (who was later superior of the monastery of St. Therapontes), happened to enter the cell of another brother after the meal, the Elder asked him why he had transgressed the monastic rule, St. Martinian answered him, smiling, "I am afraid that having entered my own cell I shall have no strength to leave it; but I have some business with my brother." But even at this St. Cyril replied to him: "First go to your cell in order to perform there the required rule of prayer, and then go to the brother, because your cell shall teach you everything." No one in the monastery dared to receive letters or gifts without the Saint's knowledge; unopened letters were brought to him, and without his blessing the monks could send nothing. Likewise, no one dared to call anything his own, even in his own cell; and silver and gold were kept only in the monastery treasury, from where the brothers received all that was necessary. Even when someone wanted to quench his thirst, he could receive water nowhere but in the refectory, since in the cell it was not permitted to keep either bread or water, but only icons and books; and therefore doors were never locked. All monks strove with humility and love to forestall each other in the church services or in the monastery's work, laboring not for men

\* St. Martinian of Belozersk is commemorated on Jan. 12 and Oct. 17.



The Hodigitria  
Icon of the  
Most Holy  
Mother of God  
from the cell  
of St. Cyril



The iron chains  
which were worn  
by St. Cyril



General view of St. Cyril's monastery across the waters of White Lake



The towers of St. Cyril's Monastery, on the very spot where the Saint originally settled on the shores of White Lake

but for God, and all vain talk was foreign to them; all was done among them in silence. The Saint served for all as an example, and while forbidding others luxury, he himself wore rags. Sometimes, in remembrance of his labors at Simoonov, he would come to the kitchen to help in preparing the brothers' food, and he strictly forbade every intoxicating drink in his monastery.

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St. Cyril's heart was to such an extent filled with love toward God that at the serving of the Divine Liturgy and during church readings he could not restrain tears of devotion, and especially copiously did he shed them when by himself in his cell during the performance of the rule of prayer. When there happened to be an insufficiency of bread and the brethren exhorted him to send a request for alms to one of the Christ-loving neighbors, with fervent faith he remonstrated: "If God and the Most Pure Virgin shall forget us in this place, what else shall remain in this life?" Thus he instructed the brethren not to inconvenience laymen with alms; but he had a disciple by the name of Anthony, versed in spiritual and secular matters, whom he sent once a year to buy all the necessities for the monastery. The rest of the year no one left the monastery, and if there were sent any alms they were received as a gift of God.

Princess Agrippina, the wife of Prince Mazhaisky-Belozersky, on whose holdings the monastery stood, had special faith in blessed Cyril. Once during Lent she wished to give the brethren fish, but the Saint in no way consented to permit such an infringement of the rule, saying that if he himself should give an example for the infringement of the monastic rule which he himself had established, then after his death would it not be said that Cyril himself had allowed the eating of fish during Lent? The Princess withdrew, extolling his strictness.

**T**HE LORD REWARDED His servant with the gift of foresight, so that he could read the secret thoughts of his disciples. A certain Theodore, attracted by the news of the Saint's holy life, desired to enter the brotherhood, but after some time the enemy of mankind instilled in him such hatred for St. Cyril that not only could he not look at him, but he could not even listen to his voice. Disconcerted by his thoughts, he came to the strict Elder Ignatius the silent to confess his oppressed state of soul and the fact that, because of his hatred for Cyril, he wished to leave the monastery. Ignatius consoled him somewhat, strengthened him with prayer, and convinced him to stay on trial one year more; but the year passed and his hatred did not abate. Theodore decided to reveal his secret thought to Cyril himself, but upon entering his cell he became ashamed before the Elder's gray hairs and could not pronounce anything. He wanted to leave the cell, but then the foreseeing Elder, understanding what was hidden in his soul, began himself to speak of hatred such as that which Theodore nourished for him. Torn by conscience, the monk fell to the Elder's feet and prayed for forgiveness of his sin; but the Saint answered meekly: "Do not sorrow, my brother. All have been in error about me; you alone understand the truth and all my unworthiness, for who



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am I, sinful and unworthy?" He sent him away in peace, promising that in future such temptation would not befall him, and from that time on Theodore remained in perfect love toward the great Abba.

When visitors came to the monastery and remained to live there, the Elder in his foresight could tell his disciples in advance which of the newcomers would remain with him and which would leave the monastery; and all happened according to his word. With the gift of foresight he combined the gift of healing, which began to flow from him even during his lifetime. A certain Athanasius, a neighboring landowner, became completely infirm, and he was advised to turn for help to the Saint. "If only you can go to the blessed Cyril and ask him to pray for you, you shall be healed," a pious man told him. With faith he sent to ask for the Elder's prayers, and his health was restored when he was sprinkled with holy water which the Saint sent to him. Similarly, the widow of Prince John of Kargolom, who had been blind for many years, asked the Saint to pray for her, and immediately her eyes were healed.

Even without seeing him, St. Cyril healed a certain boyar by the name of Roman, by appearing to him in a light sleep when he was severely ill; at the word of the Elder, the sick man sent to his monastery for holy water, and by drinking it he received health. When the healed man came to the monastery, he was surprised, recognizing in St. Cyril the wondrous elder who had appeared to him in sleep. Once, during the feast day of the Theophany, an infirm man was carried into the monastery, hoping to be healed by immersion in the "Jordan"; but he was too late for the blessing of the water. The Saint ordered him afterwards to enter the water with faith, and in truth he was healed after being immersed three times, as once was Naaman the Syrian.

The truthfulness with which the healings that occurred are described may be judged by the following example. A woman blind for three years was brought to the holy man and asked for his prayers. St. Cyril anointed her eyes with holy water and wished to find out whether the Lord had forgiven her. "What do you see?" he asked the woman. "I see a book which you are holding," she replied; then, "I see a lake and people walking." And so little by little she began to see objects near her, just as the blind man of the Gospel who gained his sight, to whom at first men seemed as walking trees (Mark 8:24).

Once there came to St. Cyril a man from the neighboring village and asked him to pray for his sick friend, from whose nostrils and mouth there gushed forth a bloody foam; but the Elder, merciful to others, this time by his foresight did not wish to grant mercy to the sick man and did not even

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allow him to lie beyond the monastery enclosure. To the sick man's friend, who importuned him, he said, "Believe me, my child, this sickness did not occur from chance, but as a punishment for his fornication. If he consent to correct himself, I believe the Lord will heal him; but if not, he will suffer worse things." When this was conveyed to the sick man, he was awed at the denunciation and promised to correct himself; with sincerity he confessed all his sins to the holy man and by his prayers was healed, not only in body but also in soul, having received a penance for the cleansing of his sins.

Many others, all manner of sick, blind, possessed and feeble were brought to St. Cyril, as his disciples have testified, and he healed all of them, anointing them only with holy water and oil; they returned home healthy, thanking God and His Saint, Cyril. And here is an example when the miraculous power of healing, given by God's grace, attained even to the resurrection of the dead. A certain man afflicted by a burdensome disease was brought to the monastery, asking only that he be tonsured before his death. The Saint did not scorn his holy desire and tonsured him a monk with the name of Dalmatius. After several days he began to die and asked to be allowed the Holy Mysteries; but the priest lingered in the performance of the Liturgy, and when he brought the Holy Gifts into the cell, the sick man had already died. The unnerved priest hurried to announce this to the Saint, and St. Cyril was much grieved at it; soon he closed the window of his cell and began to pray. A little later the cell-attendant who looked after Dalmatius came and, knocking on the window pane, announced to the blessed one that Dalmatius was getting better and asked for Holy Communion. Immediately Cyril sent for the priest in order to give the Holy Mysteries to the brother; and although the priest was sure that Dalmatius had already died, he did not want to contradict the Saint. But how great was his surprise when he saw Dalmatius sitting on his bed! As soon as he had received the Holy Mysteries, Dalmatius began to say farewell to all the brethren and quietly departed to the Lord.

The Lord glorified His Saint not only by the gift of healing, but also by other miracles. There was once insufficient wine for the church services, and it was necessary to serve the Divine Liturgy. The priest came to announce this to St. Cyril, and he asked the lamplighter Niphon whether there were really no wine. Hearing from him that there was not, as if doubting he ordered that the vessel in which wine was always kept should be brought to him. Niphon obeyed, and with surprise he brought the vessel so overflowing with wine that it even gushed out, and for a long time the wine did not diminish in the vessel, as once had occurred with the oil of the widow, by the word of the Prophet Elijah.

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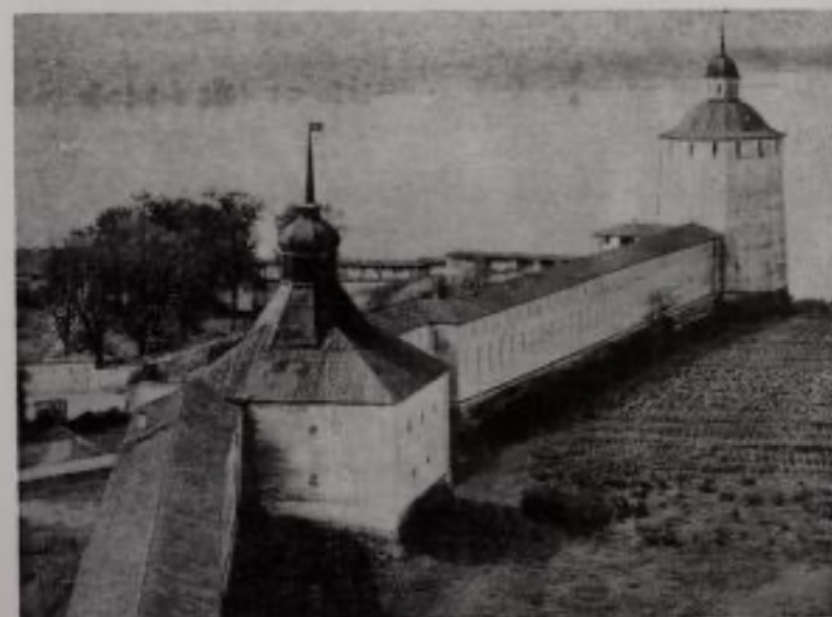
There once occurred a famine in the region, when mercifully bread was distributed to everyone, even though the monastery owned no lands from which to obtain bread. All there was to be had was the fruit of the monks' labors, for the alms that were brought were scarcely sufficient for themselves. But despite this, the more bread was distributed, the more it increased, so that the monks distributing the bread themselves understood the miracle. "Cyril increased the wine for the Liturgy, and he has likewise increased the bread for feeding the hungry by the aid of the Mother of God," they said; and thus it continued until the new harvest. And if sometimes later there occurred a scarcity of anything, the brethren did not even have to bother the Superior with this, knowing that by his prayer all would be given by God.

The Saint himself, filled with firm faith in the Lord and His Most Pure Mother, often manifested his unmercenaryness. The boyar Roman, who had great trust in him, granted the monastery every year fifty measures of grain. The thought came to him to confirm the gift by signing over a village to the monastery, and he sent a gift certificate in Cyril's name. But the Saint, on receiving the certificate, thought to himself: "If we shall own villages, there will come from them only noise and cares for the brethren, and our silence will be interrupted; we shall have settlers and contractors. Would it not be better for us to live without villages? For the soul of one brother is more precious than all possessions." And returning the certificate to the boyar, the Saint wrote to him: "If you desire, O man of God, to give the village as a house of the Most Pure One, for the maintenance of the brethren, then instead of fifty measures of grain, which you have given us up to now, give one hundred measures if you can; we shall be content, and keep the villages yourself, since we do not need them and they are not useful for the brethren."

As great as was the Saint's care for the spiritual salvation of the brethren, no less did he care for their bodily deliverance in moments of peril. It happened that some of his disciples, in fulfillment of his will, went fishing on the lake. A fierce storm caught them in the middle, so that waves passed over the boat and threatened them with death. A man who was standing on the shore, seeing their plight, hurried to inform St. Cyril, who, taking a cross in his hands, rushed to the shore. By the sign of the cross he immediately calmed the waves and the monks who had been thus delivered landed safely ashore. Another time a fire occurred in the monastery and the brethren could not extinguish it, for the flames surrounded the building on all sides; but the Saint, taking the cross with faith, rushed right to the place where the cells were burning. A layman who was in the monastery laughed at the seemingly vain zeal of the Elder, seeing that it was impossible to extinguish the flames.



The heart of St. Cyril's Monastery of Belozersk: the inner court



The Monastery's towers, seen over White Lake, preserved today as a museum





AN 1897 DEPICTION OF ST. CYRIL'S ORIGINAL DWELLING PLACE

At left: the protective shrine over the spring of St. Cyril.

Toward the right, concealed by the monastery

cemetery, is preserved the original log cell of St. Cyril.

At right (enlarged in circle): the shrine over the Saint's log cell.

But the Saint, standing with the cross right opposite the fire, raised to God his prayers, which were more ardent than the fire itself, and the flames, as if shamed by his prayers, suddenly went out. At that minute God's wrath struck the one who had laughed at the Saint, and suddenly all his members became weak. He understood his sin and asked for mercy, and by the same sign of the cross before which the fire had stopped, the Saint restored health to the penitent.

News of the Saint's miracles spread far. Prince Michael of Belevsk, with his wife Maria, had sorrowed for eight years over their childlessness, and having heard that the Lord accepts all the prayers of the Saint, he sent to him two boyars, asking his prayers for the termination of their sterility. The foreseeing Cyril, even without opening the prince's message, met the emissaries

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with these consoling words: "Since, my children, you have performed a difficult journey, I trust the Lord and His Most Pure Mother that your labor will not be in vain, and that God will grant your Prince the fruit of childbearing." That same night Prince Michael saw in a dream a radiant elder, adorned with gray hairs, with three vessels in his hands, who said to him: "Receive from me that which you have asked." The same apparition occurred also to Princess Maria, and both with joy revealed the vision to each other. After three days the Saint ordered the keeper of the cells to let the emissaries go, giving them only one and a half loaves of bread for their journey, even though they had with them eight persons. Surprised at such meagerness, they asked that there be given to them more bread and fish because of the long journey and the deserted places through which they had to travel, but the Saint let them go in peace, saying that even that was sufficient for them. And truly, at their first night's lodging they were convinced of the inexhaustiveness of their provisions, and, after a journey of ten days, they even brought them to their Prince. The messengers told him the words of Cyril: "Do not grieve, for the Lord will grant him what he asks"; and the Prince and Princess were filled with joy. With faith they accepted as a blessing the bread that remained from the journey, gave all the members of their household to eat of it, and all those afflicted with illnesses in their home became immediately healed. To Prince Michael two sons and a daughter were born, as foretold by the three vessels, and from that time on he had great faith in the Saint, supplying him with alms for his monastery. Princess Maria herself told all that had happened to them to one of the Saint's trustworthy monks, the strict Ignatius the silent, who personally passed it on to the writer of the Saint's Life.

THERE WERE MANY disciples of the Saint, like this Ignatius, who were renowned for the holiness of their lives. Among them was Herman, whose obedience was catching fish. With the blessing of the Saint, he never returned with empty hands when he was sent, and he always obtained enough for the brotherhood's table, even though he fished only with a hook. St. Cyril allowed fishing by net only for the feast of the Dormition, because of the many people who came then; such was his moderation in everything. Herman, to the last day of his life, remained in constant labors, not missing a single church service, and after his blessed repose he appeared in a vision at night to his friend Demetrius, with whom he was bound by ties of spiritual love. As this Demetrius had visited him during his illness, so Herman, from beyond the grave, wished to console his friend, who had fallen into a severe illness, by his visitation. "Do not grieve, brother Demetrius," he said to the sick man, "one more day and you shall also pass on to us." Demetrius, rejoicing at the

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visit of his spiritual brother, announced to others his foretold repose, and on the designated day passed on to the Lord; leaving after him the remembrance of his virtues.

The Saint's disciple Christopher, who was later Superior of Cyril's monastery, had a brother Sosipater, who fell into a severe illness. Seeing him losing strength, Christopher hurried to St. Cyril to announce that his brother was already dying; but the Saint answered, smiling, "Believe me, child Christopher, not one of you will die before me. But after my departure, many of you shall follow me" — which later happened, since there was then a great mortality around the monastery. But none of the brethren fell ill during the lifetime of the holy Elder, and even Sosipater rose up from his malady. Such were the great gifts of the Saint, granted to him because of his great love for God, according to the word of the Saviour: *Ask and ye shall be given* (Matt. 7:7). For this was said not only to His disciples, but to all believers; and so St. Cyril, in the name of Christ, performed miraculous deeds.

Not long before his repose, St. Cyril called together all the brethren of his monastery, of whom there were then 53 serving the Lord together with him, each according to his strength; and in the presence of all he entrusted the building of the monastery to one of his disciples, Innocent, naming him abbot even against his will. He called God as witness that nothing be removed from the monastic rule, but that all remain as in his lifetime; but he himself desired utmost silence, in order before death to give himself over to the contemplation of wisdom in his cell. From his great ascetic labors his feet could no longer serve him in standing in church, and he performed the cell-rule sitting down. But prayer never left his lips, because he wished never to forsake the rule of prayer, even if his bodily strength failed him. With great difficulty he could serve the Divine Liturgy only rarely; and when he became extremely weak, his disciples brought him in their arms to church.

Pentecost came, and for the last time the Saint performed the Divine service; but on the Day of the Holy Spirit, when his patron saint, Cyril of Alexandria, was commemorated, while still strong in spirit, he began to weaken completely in body. All the brethren with tears gathered around him in the cell, wishing to die with him. Some said to him: "If you shall leave us, Father, this place will be empty, because many will leave the monastery." But the Saint answered them: "Do not grieve over this, but rather understand that if I shall obtain boldness and my deeds shall be pleasing to God, not only shall this place not suffer any loss, but it will grow even larger after my de-

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parture; only preserve love among yourselves." It is evident that this testament before his death was deeply impressed on the hearts of the brethren, since from that time on these words have always been written on the icons of the Saint, on the scroll which he holds in his hand.

The lamentation of the brethren, nonetheless, did not stop. The Saint, wishing to console those who were weeping, said to them: "Do not grieve, brothers and children, in the day of my rest, because for me the hour to rest in the Lord has arrived. I entrust you to God and the Most Pure Mother of God; may She preserve you from all the temptations of the evil one, and my son Innocent shall be abbot in my stead. Have him in place of me, and he will make up your shortcomings." Much else the Saint said for their consolation, himself being in such a state of joy that it was as if someone from foreign and distant lands were returning to his homeland. He rejoiced in the hope of future good things and had only one care, that nothing be removed from the cenobitic rule and that there be no bickering among the brethren. The monks, kissing him with tears, asked his final blessing, and he, as a child-loving father, blessed all, forgiving them and mutually asking forgiveness for himself. In the exact minute of his separation from union with the body, he succeeded once more in receiving communion of the Life-giving Mysteries of Christ and, with prayer on his lips, he quietly entrusted to the Lord his labor-loving soul. A fragrance sensed by all suddenly filled the cell, and the Saint's face became radiant, even more than during his lifetime; there was nothing deathlike in it. With lamentation the disciples placed the body of their beloved Father upon the burial bed and carried it into the church to the singing of psalms.

At the very moment of the Saint's repose, the Saint's cell-attendant, Auxentius, who had been among the first to come to his desert, was in the village, suffering from a severe fever. With a high temperature, as if in a certain rapture, he saw before him the blessed one with a cross in his hand, and together with him another priest, Florus, who had recently died after great ascetic labors. The Saint blessed his cell-attendant with the cross, and at that moment he was healed of his sickness. With joy Auxentius rushed to his blessed instructor, in order to inform him of his healing, not knowing that he had already reposed; and he met the funeral procession. Throwing himself on the holy relics, he confessed his healing before everyone, and this somewhat consoled the brethren. With honor they gave to the earth the much-suffering body of their Abba, on the ninth of June in the year 1429. At thirty years of age St. Cyril had been tonsured in Simonov; he lived there for thirty years, coming to this place already in his sixtieth year; and he lived for thirty years more in his monastery, until he attained the perfect age of ninety. Even more miracles occurred after his departure, over his sacred tomb, than he had



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performed during his lifetime; all of them were written down in their time, and in them can be seen the special care the Saint took of his monastery.

**INNOCENT** TOOK the Saint's place and tried if everything to preserve his commandments, in order to be worthy of his selection; he himself had learned obedience for eleven years from the great Ignatius the silent. A year did not pass after the departure of the blessed one, when with the coming of autumn almost the whole brotherhood, as if agreeing among themselves and St. Cyril, left this life — more than thirty out of the 53 who had been with the Saint. Thus was fulfilled his prophetic word to his disciple Christopher; and last of all Abbot Innocent departed to the Lord, being replaced by Christopher.

When Christopher was Superior, there was an apparition of St. Cyril to one of the brethren, Theodosius by name. This Theodosius had come to the Saint during the latter's lifetime, sent by the boyar Daniel Andreevich, who, out of love for the monastery and the Elder, wished on his death to endow a village to the monastery, only wishing that Cyril send to inspect it beforehand. But St. Cyril replied: "In my lifetime I do not require villages, but upon my death do as you please." To the monk such speech seemed derogatory, and he grieved over the Saint's reply. However, when he saw the miracles with which the Lord glorified the tomb of his departed Abba, great feeling overcame him and he greatly regretted that he had called upon himself the displeasure of such a preceptor. A little later St. Cyril appeared to his disciple St. Martinian (who was appointed abbot in the St. Therapontes monastery) and said: "Tell brother Theodosius that he should not grieve and should trouble me no longer, since I have nothing even against him" — thus consoling Theodosius, who saw in this an answer to his prayer. Is not this manifestation of the Saint's love, even from beyond the grave, most touching?

Gradually the brotherhood grew, and the monastery had to be enlarged. Thus everything in it was renewed, excepting only the cenobitic rule, which was preserved unfringed; and during this time healings flowed unceasingly from the Saint's tomb, drawing to him ever more of the zealous faithful.

Once Prince Michael Andreevich, grandson of Donskoy, decided to visit his homeland of White Lake, together with his wife Elena, whose feet were afflicted. He was still far from the monastery, when to one of the elders at night, as if he were awake, it seemed that he stood at the tomb of the blessed Cyril, and suddenly the tomb opened of itself, the Saint came out as alive, and sitting on his tomb he said: "Child, great guests wish to come to

## ST. CYRIL OF WHITE LAKE

us and in great sorrow; but we should pray for them that the Lord deliver them from such sorrow, because they are our benefactors." St. Cyril again lay down in his resting place, and the tomb closed of itself. The elder sprang up and with astonishment told his spiritual father of this; and indeed, after five days the pious Prince and Princess came to pray to the Saint, and the Princess was healed. The gladdened Prince rewarded the monastery with abundant alms, and from that time on both had even greater faith in St. Cyril.

Thus, although the blessed one had lived in the desert, the glory of his virtue, as if on light wings, flew into distant lands, because the city on top of a mountain could not be hidden; in truth, the Lord glorifies those who glorify Him. With boldness the Saint could say about the children whom he had gathered during his lifetime and after his death: *Behold, I and the children whom God hath given me* (Isaiah 8:18), since his care for them extended even beyond the grave. Just as the streams of fresh water that feed the earth and satisfy those thirsting for refreshment are not diminished, so also the healings from the relics of saints are limitless when the faith of those who run to them does not fail. Physicians, having used all their medicines, sometimes request others; but not so the saints, who use faith alone, without which all the rest is vain, according to the word of the Gospel: *Thy faith hath saved thee, and According to your faith be it done unto you* (St. Matt. 9:22, 29).

In the days of Abbot Cassian, the learned hieromonk Pachomius the Logothete was sent from the Holy Mountain of Athos by the Grand Prince Basil the Dark and Metropolitan Theodosius, in order to write the Life of St. Cyril from the words of his disciples who had witnessed his righteous life. Most of all did he learn from his disciple St. Martinian, who had lived with the Saint from his youth.

Among the great saints of St. Cyril's monastery, in addition to those already noted, may be mentioned St. Joseph of Volokolamsk, the champion of severe cenobitism, who left a testimony of how strictly the Saint's disciples revered the Saint and observed his rule; St. Sabbatius of Solovki, the anchorite who laid the foundation of another great monastery of the Northern Thebaid; and St. Nilus of Sora, founder of skete-life in Russia, the pinnacle of Russian monasticism.

And indeed, St. Cyril inspired great faith and love toward himself and his Rule, not only during his lifetime, but even after his death. And this is why his monastery, like St. Sergius', was for a long time a foundation stone of monasticism for the whole North of Russia.



THE LIFE OF  
*Saint Sabbatius of Solovki*  
IN THE ARCTIC WATERS OF THE WHITE SEA\*

EDITORS' PREFACE

LYING IN the cold waters of the White Sea, the towers and ruined churches of the Monastery of Solovki still stand today, silent witnesses of five centuries of ascetic labors and holy deeds. The sacred monastery of Saints Sabbatius, Zosimas, and Herman is the northernmost Lavra of the *Russian Thebaid*.

Today the monastery is being "restored" as an historical monument, but of course the God-hating Soviets will not allow even the mention of the very essence of Solovki—its holiness, exemplified in its life of monastic labors and missionary enlightenment for the northern nomads.

To this twofold significance of Solovki the Soviets themselves have added a third dimension by making it a place of martyrdom for Orthodox Christians. Solovki, beginning just fifty years ago, was the chief concentration camp for clergymen, especially bishops; there the successors of the Apostles worked at such labors as fishing and mending nets. One of Solovki's new martyrs, Archbishop Hilarion (Troitsky) noted that "the Holy Spirit turned fishermen into apostles, but the Bolsheviks have turned apostles into fishermen." These latter fishers of human souls, stripped of the outward marks of their apostolic rank, became thereby yet more greatly filled with the Holy Spirit and today shine resplendently as a great source of light for the contemporary world, which sinks ever deeper into the darkness of godlessness.

The saints and ascetics of Solovki, now joined by the new choir of martyrs of the Communist Yoke, are ever alive in the heavenly abodes of the living God, being intercessors by whose prayers we, the last Christians, may draw the strength and inspiration to prepare to join them. The desecration of

\* From the September Volume of *The Lives of Saints*, Moscow, 1903, with a few corrections from the *Solovki Patericon*, St. Petersburg, 1873.



16th Century Moscow Icon

STS. ZOSIMAS AND SABBATIUS OF SOLOVKI

*Commemorated together on August 8*

TROPARION TO ST. SABBATIUS, TONE 3

HAVING LEFT the world and settled in the wilderness,\* in good labors thou hast labored,\* in suffering ills and in heedfulness and prayers:\* wherefore after death also thou gushest forth healings,\* O Sabbatius our father,\* pray to Christ God that our souls may be saved.





Voyage to the isles of Solovki  
(Watercolor by Archimandrite Cyprian)

## ST. SABBATIUS OF SOLOVKI

its holy places has not at all deprived Solovki of the spiritual treasure which, for those with eyes to see, may yet be seen, made our living inheritance, and used to gain an everlasting crown.



**I**T IS NOT KNOWN from what city or village St. Sabbatius came, nor who his parents were, nor at what age he received the monastic tonsure. It is only known that in the days of the Metropolitan of All Russia Photius (1408-1431) the praiseworthy Elder Sabbatius labored in the White Lake Monastery of St. Cyril.\* The devout ascetic mortified his body by prayer, untiring vigil, hunger and thirst, and many other uncountable labors of strict monastic life, zealously going through all the monastic labors, in constant obedience to the abbot and the brethren. For his unwavering fulfillment of his monastic vows St. Sabbatius was beloved and respected by all, being an example of virtuous and labor-loving life for the other brothers of the monastery, so that his name was constantly extolled by the brotherhood and the abbot. But firmly knowing that not from men, but from God, is it meet to seek glory in this earthly life, the Saint was weighed down by the glory rendered to him, and therefore he constantly thought of leaving St. Cyril's monastery, in which he had labored for many years, and of finding a new place for his monastic labors, where it would be possible to live in obscurity and retirement from men.

Hearing that in the same Novgorod province there was a certain Lake Ladoga, and on it an island called Valaam,† where there was a monastery dedicated to the Transfiguration of the Lord, where the monks remain in strict labors, offering unceasing prayers to God and feeding themselves by the labors of their own hands—St. Sabbatius began to ask the abbot and brethren of St. Cyril's monastery to let him go with their blessing to the Valaam monastery to live. Having left with their blessing, the Saint came to Valaam, where he was joyously accepted by the brethren. Here the Saint also spent not a little time. Emulating the difficult labors of those monks and constantly increasing his labors, St. Sabbatius here, just as in St. Cyril's monastery, surpassed all in ascetic labors, so that his virtuous life began to be known to all in Valaam, since he mortified his body to the utmost and even during his lifetime manifested himself as an abode of the Holy Spirit.

\* See page 46.

† On Valaam monastery and its founders, Sts. Sergius and Herman, see *The Orthodox Word*, 1970, no.1.

## THE NORTHERN THEBAID

As one experienced in the ascetic life, St. Sabbatius in Valaam monastery was an elder for beginning monks, whom he guided in their ascetic labors. Among his disciples was Gennadius, later Archbishop of Novgorod (1484-1504).

Since in this new place of his sojourn, just as in the monastery of St. Cyril, the Saint was respected and extolled, he again began to grieve, finding it difficult to bear the respect and praise of the brothers, and again he thought of finding a quiet and solitary place for his labors. Previously the Saint had heard of the uninhabited Solovetsk island, which lay in the cold waters of the White Sea, a two-day's voyage from the mainland. Hearing the tales of the uninhabited isle, the Saint rejoiced in spirit and was filled with a warm desire to settle on it in labors of silence. He began fervently to implore the superior of Valaam monastery to let him go. The superior, however, together with the brethren, loved the Saint and, respecting in him one sent by God, did not want to lose such a praiseworthy elder, who was an example of virtue for everyone, and they implored the Saint not to leave them. Condescending to the requests of the Valaam monks, the Saint lived in the monastery for yet a short while, and then, having prayed to God and trusting in His help, he left the monastery secretly at night, unseen by anyone.

**B**EING DIRECTED and preserved by God, St. Sabbatius wended his way to Solovetsk island. Having reached the sea, the Saint met people who lived on the shore opposite the island, and he began to question them about the island. They informed him that Solovetsk island was situated far from the shore, that the way to it was difficult and dangerous, that voyagers scarcely reached the island after two days of sailing, and then only in calm weather. Having inquired in detail about the island, the Saint came to the thought that this was a most convenient place for labors of silence and monastic solitude. He found out that the island was more than seventy miles in circumference; near it there were fishing and hunting for sea animals; on it there were sweet water suitable for drinking, fishing lakes, mountains whose tops were covered with building timber, valleys overgrown with smaller trees, and many different berries. The Saint found out that the island was most suitable for human habitation, and it was uninhabited because of the difficult communication with the shore. Many who wished to settle there could not do so because they were afraid of misfortune at sea. Only sometimes, in good weather, fisherman came to the island, but after catching fish they immediately returned to the mainland.

Hearing all this from the coastal residents, St. Sabbatius was inflamed with an ardent desire to settle on Solovetsk island. Finding out about this

## ST. SABBATIUS OF SOLOVSKI

intention of the blessed one, the coastal inhabitants tried to dissuade him from such thoughts, saying: "O Elder! With what shall you feed and clothe yourself on the island, being in such an advanced age and having nothing? And how will you live in this cold country so far from men, when you already have no strength to do anything for yourself?"

The Saint answered them: "I, my children, have a Master Who makes the nature of an old man young, and likewise brings up an infant to years of ripe old age. He enriches the poor, gives what is necessary to the destitute, clothes the naked, and with a small measure of food satisfies the hungry, as when in the desert He fed to satiety five thousand men with five breads" (John 6:5-13).

Hearing from the Elder words from the Holy Scripture, some of the people were surprised at his wisdom, but others, through their senselessness, mocked him. In the meantime the Saint, casting his care upon the Lord (Ps. 54:22), retired to the river Vyg, where he met the monk Herman,\* who was living there by the chapel. St. Sabbatius lived for some time with St. Herman. From him he found out about Solovetsk island the same things he had already heard from the coastal inhabitants. Having consulted each other and placed their trust in God, both the ascetics decided to go and settle together on the island. Having obtained a boat, and taking with them a little food and clothing, and also some tools for necessary work, they fervently prayed to God and, placing all their hope in Him, they got in the boat and in calm weather began their voyage.

**W**ITH GOD'S HELP, on the third day the Saints reached the island, in the year 1429, and, rejoicing and being glad in soul, they thanked God Who had showed them this deserted spot. On the part of the shore where the boat landed, they placed a cross. After going some distance into the interior of the island, the holy monks saw on the shore of the island a most beautiful mountainous place, where they decided to settle permanently. Here, having built a cell, they began to live for the Lord, dwelling in labors, procuring for themselves lenten food by the sweat of their brow, digging the ground with picks. The Saints labored with their hands, and with their lips they glorified the Lord, drawing near to Him in spirit through constant prayer and the singing of the psalms of David.

After the passing of some time, the inhabitants of the coast which was nearest the island began to envy the holy Elders who had established themselves on the island, and, thinking to banish them from there, said among

\* St. Herman of Solovetsk, †1479, July 30.



## THE NORTHERN THEBAID

themselves: "We are the nearest neighbors of the island, more or less its owners, being the natural inhabitants of the Korelian land, and therefore we, and after us our children from generation to generation, should have part in the ownership of the island."

Some time later a certain fisherman, at the advice of his friends, came with his wife and all his family to that island and settled down not far from the cell of the God-pleasing Elders. Living here, he began, together with all his household, to fish in the lakes. The blessed fathers, however, being concerned about their salvation, remained in solitude and did not even know that the fisherman's family had settled there.

On one Sunday early in the morning, after performing the usual rule, St. Sabbatius, taking the censer, came out to cense the holy cross which he had erected near his cell. At this time he heard blows and moans, as if someone were being beaten. The Saint greatly feared because of these moans and, thinking it to be an apparition, he guarded himself with the sign of the cross, returned, and told the blessed Herman of the blows and moans he had heard. Leaving the cell and hearing the same, St. Herman went toward the noise and saw a weeping woman and asked her what was wrong with her and why she was weeping. With tears the woman told what had happened to her.

"When I went to the lake with my husband," she said, "two resplendent youths met me and, seizing me, strongly beat me with branches, saying: 'Leave this place; you are unworthy to live here, because God has appointed it for the dwelling of monks. Quickly depart from here so as not to perish from an evil death.' After that the resplendent youths became invisible."

The blessed Herman, returning to the holy Elder Sabbatius, told the latter what he had heard from the fisherman's wife, and together they glorified God. The fisherman, taking with him his wife and belongings, without tarrying rowed away to the village where he had lived before. From that time on no one among the laymen dared to settle on the island, and only fishermen came to the island from time to time in order to fish.

After the passage of several years, the blessed Herman left the island to get provisions at the river Onega, and St. Sabbatius with deep faith in God remained alone on the island. The Saint's stay on the island, his fasting, his labors—are known only to the All-knowing Lord, Who looked down upon His Saint, and His holy angels, who visited God's slave Sabbatius, one who in his body imitated the bodiless ones. We, however, can only judge of the labors and privations of the Saint's ascetic life by the very nature of the place where he settled. The holy Elder, remaining alone on the remote island, not visited by anyone, had no other work except occupation in constant labors of prayer and divine vision. And in truth, being deeply engrossed in constant

## ST. SABBATIUS OF SOLOVKI

prayerful conversation with God and turning to Him eyes full of tears, the Saint sighed day and night, wishing to leave the body and be united with the Lord.

**F**EELING IN DEEP old age, after labors pleasing to God, the approach of death, St. Sabbatius began to think of how to become worthy of receiving the Divine Mysteries, of which he had been deprived since leaving Valaam monastery. Having prayed for this to God, he got in a small boat and then, when by his prayer the sea became calm, in two days he crossed to the opposite shore of the sea. Having reached the shore, he walked farther, wishing to reach the chapel on the river Vyg. It happened that at that time at the Vyg there was a certain Abbot Nathaniel, who had come here with the object of visiting the Christians residing nearby.

Going the way designated beforehand for him by Divine care, he met Abbot Nathaniel, who was going with the Divine Mysteries to a remote village to administer Holy Communion to a sick man. After the usual salutation between monks, the wayfarers entered into conversation, and each finding out who the other was, they were glad to see each other. St. Sabbatius was glad that he had found what he was seeking, and Abbot Nathaniel was glad that he was found worthy to see the honorable gray hairs and the holy face of St. Sabbatius, of whose virtuous life he had heard much. And the blessed Sabbatius said to Nathaniel: "Father, I implore your holiness: by the authority given you by God to forgive, remit my sins which I shall confess to you, and make me worthy of the Communion of the Holy Mysteries of the Most Pure Body and Blood of Christ my Master. For many years already I have been inflamed with the desire to feed my soul with this Divine Food. So, holy father, feed me now, because Christ my God has showed me your holiness in order to cleanse me from the sins which I have committed from my youth up to this day, in word, deed, and thought."

"May God forgive you, brother," answered Abbot Nathaniel, and, having become silent, he raised his hands to heaven and with tears pronounced: "Oh, if only I, for the cleansing of my negligence, could have your sins, O holy one!"

St. Sabbatius said to Nathaniel: "I implore your holiness, immediately make me worthy of the Divine Communion, because the end of my life approaches." The Abbot replied: "My lord, Father Sabbatius, go now to the chapel and wait for me there. I am going now to a sick man and shall soon return to your holiness; early in the morning I will come to you."

To this St. Sabbatius said: "Father, do not put it off until morning; truly, we do not know if we shall breathe the air until tomorrow, and all the

## THE NORTHERN THEBAID

more, how can we know what will happen later?" St. Sabbatius said this, foretelling his coming end.

Seeing in Sabbatius one who pleased God, Abbot Nathaniel did not dare to contradict him further, but fulfilling his desire, after performing the confession, he administered the Divine Mysteries of Christ to him, and, giving him the brotherly kiss, said: "Slave of God, I implore you: wait for me by the chapel on the Vyg."

The Saint agreed to wait there for the Abbot. The latter went to the sick man, and St. Sabbatius went to the appointed place, where, having given thanks to God for the reception of Communion and for all His benefactions to him, he entered the cell which was at the chapel, and having closed the door, occupied himself with preparing his blessed soul so as to give it over into God's hands.

At that time a certain merchant from Novgorod the Great, by the name of John, who was travelling the river with his wares, reached the chapel which stood on the shore. Leaving his vessel and coming out on the shore, he bowed down to the holy icons in the chapel and, entering the cell, received the blessing of St. Sabbatius. Having given his blessing, St. Sabbatius taught the merchant from the Holy Scriptures, instructing him in good deeds. The merchant was very rich, had slaves, and wished to reward the Saint with all necessities from his wares. The Saint, however, not wishing to take anything from the merchant, said: "If you wish to give alms, you have the needy, but I do not need anything."

After this, the Saint taught John love of the poor, mercy towards members of his household, and other virtues. The merchant was grieved that the Elder had not taken anything from him. Wishing to console him, the Saint said: "Child John! Pass the night here until morning, and you shall see God's grace and go safely on your way."

However, John wished already to leave on his voyage. And behold suddenly there came a storm with thunder and lightning, and the river and the sea became rough. Seeing the sudden change of weather and the great roughness of the water, John was filled with fear and remained to pass the night there. In the morning he came to the cell, wishing before his departure—for the roughness had subsided—to receive the Saint's blessing. Having knocked with prayer at the door of the Saint's cell, he did not receive any answer. After he had knocked a second and a third time, the door opened and, entering the cell, John saw the Saint sitting in his mantle and hood with the censer near him. And the merchant said to the Saint: "Forgive me, slave of God, because, having love and faith toward your holiness, I have dared to



St. Herman, departing to the mainland for provisions and tools, bids farewell to Saint Sabbatius.



Feeling his end approaching, St. Sabbatius rows across the White Sea to receive Holy Communion before his death.



Left: the Saint implores Abbot Nathaniel to give him Holy Communion before it is too late. Right: he receives Communion.



The repose of St. Sabbatius. The Abbot Nathaniel and the merchant John tell each other of the holy man.

## THE LIFE OF ST. SABBATIUS OF SOLOVKI

Fragments of a 16th-century icon of the Lives of the Solovki Saints: Sts. Sabbatius, Zosimas, and Herman



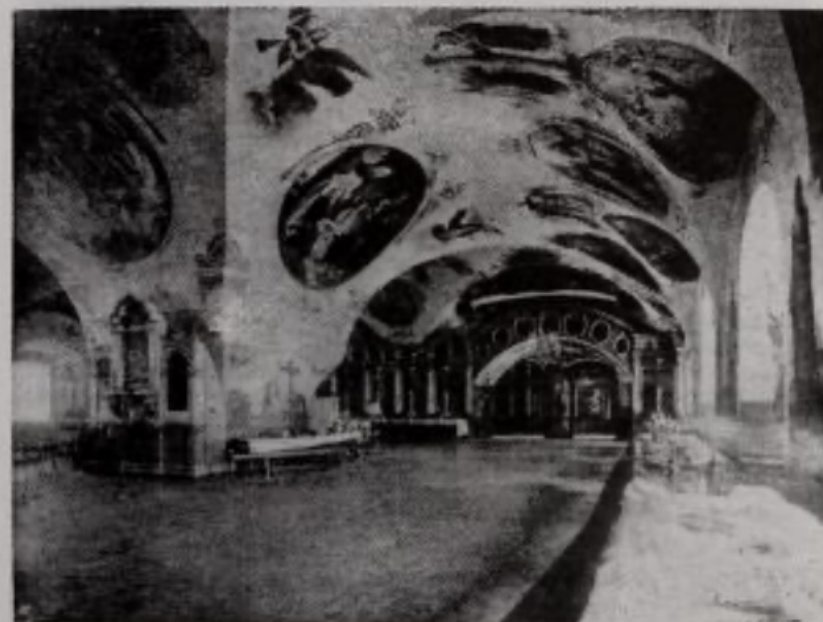


General view of the central part of Holy Transfiguration Monastery, Solovki



The towers of Solovki Monastery in wintertime

Shrine with the holy relics of  
Sts. Sabbatius and Zosimas in  
the main cathedral. Beside it  
the daily cycle of Divine ser-  
vices was conducted until the  
Communists closed the holy  
Lavra of the Far North and  
turned it into an infamous  
concentration camp.



The main refectory church of Solovki Monastery.



HOLY TRANSFIGURATION CATHEDRAL (16th Century)  
AS IT LOOKS TODAY WITH DOMES AND  
CROSSES REMOVED AFTER ITS CONVERSION INTO  
A PRISON BY MILITANT ATHEISTS

The main sanctuary of the northernmost Lavra of Holy Russia was the magnificent cathedral of the Holy Transfiguration, built by the greatest Abbot of Solovki since St. Zosimas, St. Philip, later the martyr-Metropolitan of Moscow. After the satanic Communist regime took over the monastery, it was converted into a truly infernal domain, altars being used for toilets and everything holy being defiled.



THE SOLOVETSKY MONASTERY.

*Nineteenth-century engraving showing the monastery  
at the height of its development as a bastion of Orthodoxy*

come to you. I beg your holiness, give me your blessing for my voyage so that, guarded by your holy prayers, I may travel safely."

When John had said this, in answer there was neither voice nor response, because the holy soul of the Saint had departed unto the Lord, and at that time a strong fragrance spread throughout the cell. Seeing that the Saint did not answer him, and thinking that he was asleep, John came to him and touched him with his hand; but becoming convinced that he had reposed in the Lord, he was filled with awe and at the same time was moved with feeling and warm tears gushed forth from his eyes.

At that time the Abbot Nathaniel returned from the sick man. He entered the cell and, seeing that the Saint had reposed, he wept bitterly and kissed his righteous body. The Abbot and the merchant told each other about the Saint—the former, how yesterday he had been found worthy to administer to the Saint of God the Divine Mysteries; and the second, how he had been found worthy to delight in soul-profitting conversation with the Saint. After the funeral hymns, they buried the holy body of the Saint, returning earth unto earth.

Saint Sabbatius died on the 27th day of the month of September, in the year 1435. On this day his memory is venerated to the glory of God Who is glorified in the Trinity, Father and Son and Holy Spirit, to Whom may there be glory and worship forever. Amen.





## Solovki Patericon



THE YEAR AFTER St. Sabbatius' repose, St. Herman returned to Solovetsk island, this time with another seeker of solitude, St. Zosimas (†1478, com. April 18), who was responsible for the foundation of a cenobitic monastery there. St. Zosimas' holy life attracted many others and the whole group of the Solovki islands became inhabited and adorned by holy monks throughout all these centuries, until in 1922 the God-hating Soviets desecrated it, turning it into a fierce "isle of hellish terror"...

But it was St. Herman who dictated and left for posterity the accounts of Sts. Sabbatius' and Zosimas' holy labors, who collected a large manuscript library, and who generally was responsible for the formation of the Solovki monastic tradition, a tradition whose fruits may be seen in the *Solovki Patericon* of 1873, which lists a whole army of saints, some canonized and others still waiting for their earthly glorification. Among the canonized saints are: the missionary to the Laps St. Theodoritus; the Abbot St. Phillip, who later became a hieromartyr as Metropolitan of Moscow, and his disciples and founders of local sketes, Sts. John and Longinus, Sts. Bassian and Jonah; St. Irenarchus the Abbot and his friend St. Eleazar, founder of the Anzerka Skete, who was worthy to behold the vision of the Most Holy Theotokos Herself; and the simple monk-hermits entirely living in divine vision: Sts. Elisha, Diodorus, Andrew, Sabbas, Nestor, Nicephorus. Of the uncanonized saints it is important to mention the Blessed Job (or Joshua), the founder of the Golgotha Skete; the blessed desert-dweller Theophanes, disciple of Paisius Velichkovsky, and his angel-like disciple Clement; and then the Elders Nahum, Matthew, Gerasimus, Pamphilus, Zosimas, Jerome, and many, many more. There were yet others in the second half of the last century whose names were not entered into the 1873 listing. Indeed, the names of all the saints of Solovki are known to the Lord alone...



Icon of the holy Patrons of Solovki Monastery, Sts. Sabbatius and Zosimas, depicted standing on the island with the monastery churches. (16th-century icon of the Ustiug School, painted at the Solovki icon-painting shop.



SAINT NILUS OF SORA

*Commemorated April 7 and May 7*

TROPARIÓN, TONE 1

**F**LEEING the world as David\* and regarding everything in it as dirt,\* thou didst settle in a place of silence,\* being filled with spiritual joy, O our Father Nilus,\* and didst will to serve the One God in solitude.\* Thou didst blossom as the palm tree and as the fruit-bearing vine,\* multiplying thy children in the wilderness.\* Wherefore in thanksgiving we cry out:\*

Glory be to Him Who chose thee as a praiseworthy rule for anchorites in

Russia,\* glory be to Him Who strengthened thee in the wilderness,\*

glory be to Him Who saveth us by thy prayers.



THE LIFE OF  
*Saint Nilus of Sora*

AND HIS SKETE TRADITION†

**S**AINTE NILUS was for Russian monasticism an instructor and writer such as Sts. Isaac the Syrian, Abba Dorotheus, Barsanuphius the Great, John of the Ladder, Nilus of Sinai, and other Holy Fathers were for Orthodox monasticism in general. He came from the noble\* family of Maikov, was born in 1433, and made the beginning of his monastic life in the monastery of St. Cyril of White Lake,\*\* where he lived under the instruction of the strict elder Paisius Yaroslavov, who was later abbot of St. Sergius' Holy Trinity Monastery and refused the office of Metropolitan. However, the life of the White Lake Monastery had greatly declined since the repose of its holy founder, as St. Nilus indicates in a letter which has come down to us: "Was not my departure from the (White Lake) monastery for the sake of spiritual profit? Yes, for its sake; for I did not see there the preservation of the way of life according to God's law and the traditions of the Fathers, but rather a life according to one's own will and human ideas; and many there were who, acting in such a corrupt way, imagined that they were living a virtuous life."

And so, in search of the true sources of Orthodox monastic life, St. Nilus went to the holy places of the East. Taking with him his disciple and

† From the *Patericon* of St. Sergius' Holy Trinity Lavra, Moscow, 1896.

\* The attempt of some scholars to disprove the generally accepted view of St. Nilus' noble origins is based on a single line from one of the Saint's epistles: "Of myself I dare do nothing, as I am an ignoramus and peasant..." But in all probability the Saint here is not speaking literally, but rather is using a humble figure of speech. It is surely significant that all three of the Saint's disciples who are known to us were of the nobility.

\*\* †1429, June 9. For his Life, see p. 46.



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fellow-laborer, St. Innocent of Komel,\* who was of the noble family of Okh-lebinin, he spent several years on Mt. Athos, where there was the Russian monastery of Xylurgou (near the present Skete of the Prophet Elias), and in the monasteries of Constantinople. Here St. Nilus studied all forms of monastic asceticism, and in particular the form of *skete-life*, which he had not known up to then. Most importantly, he strove everywhere to enter into the meaning and spirit of the so-called *mental monastic work*, the inward self-trial and practice of the Jesus Prayer, applying everything to his own spiritual life. He attentively studied and applied in experience the teachings of the Divinely-wise Holy Fathers; Sts. Anthony the Great, Ephraim and Isaac of Syria, Barsanuphius, John of the Ladder, Abba Dorotheus, Maximus the Confessor, Hesychius, Simeon the New Theologian, Peter Damascene, and Gregory, Nilus, and Philotheus of Sinai.

On Mt. Athos the intention was born in him to start, on returning to his homeland, the new (to Russia) skete form of life according to the example of the Eastern monks. Before him there had been two forms of monasticism in Russia; the cenobitic and the hermitic. St. Nilus made the beginning of the third form: the middle path of asceticism, where a few monks would settle such a distance apart that they could still hear each other's voices but labored each by himself.

Returning to White Lake Monastery, St. Nilus did not remain to live in it, but built himself a cell out of logs not far from it. Later he went some ten miles away, to the river Sorka or Sora. The place which St. Nilus chose for his Skete was wild, dark, desolate. The river Sora barely flows through this marshy, low-lying region, and it resembles more a swamp than a river. There is forest all around. Here, having erected a cross, St. Nilus built at first a chapel and a solitary cell and dug a well; and when several brothers had gathered together to live with him he built a wooden church in honor of the Meeting of the Lord (Feb. 2). Later another wooden church dedicated to St. John the Forerunner was added. Nearby he built a mill.

From this Skete St. Nilus wrote to his friend St. Innocent: "When we were living together with you in the monastery (of St. Cyril), you know how I avoided worldly ties and strove to live according to the Holy Scripture, even though in my slothfulness I did not succeed in this. At the end of my wandering I came again to the monastery, built a cell near it, and lived as best I could. Now I have resettled far from the monastery and have found by God's grace a place according with my ideas, a place little accessible to worldly people, as you yourself have seen. Living in solitude, I occupy myself with searching the spiritual writings: above all I search the Lord's commandments and

\* †1521, March 19.

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their commentaries, and the Apostolic traditions; then the Lives and instructions of the Holy Fathers. I reflect on all this, and whatever I find after reflection to be God-pleasing and useful for my soul, I copy out for myself. In this is my life and breath. As for my infirmity and sloth, I place my hope in God and the Most Pure Mother of God. If there is something for me to undertake, and if I find nothing about it in Scripture, I lay it aside for a time until I do find something. I do not presume to undertake anything at all on my own will and according to my own judgment. Whether you live as a hermit or in cenobitic life, pay heed to the Holy Scripture and follow in the footsteps of the Fathers, or be in subjection to one who is known to you as a spiritual man in word, life, and judgment. The Holy Scripture is harsh only for one who does not wish to humble himself by fear of God and depart from earthly ways of thinking, but rather desires to live according to his own passionate will. Others do not wish humbly to search the Holy Scripture, do not wish even to hear of how one should live, as if the Scripture were not written for us or need not be put into practice in our time. But for true ascetic strugglers in the present time and in all times, the words of the Lord will always be words as pure as refined silver; the Lord's commandments for them are dearer than gold and precious stones, sweeter than honey and the honeycomb."

Both for himself and for his disciples, St. Nilus established the strict rules of skete-life. For the building of the first church of his Skete, a raised place had to be made by filling in the marshy ground, all the more because the monastery's sepulchre was to be under the church. By the hands of the Divinely-wise Elder and the skete-dwellers who lived with him, a high mound was made for the church and sepulchre. Cells were placed on this mound, each a stone's throw from the others and from the church. The skete-dwellers gathered in their church, following the example of the Eastern Fathers, only on Saturdays, Sundays, and feast days; on other days each prayed and labored in his own cell. The All-night Vigil of the Skete continued literally the whole night; after each kathisma of the Psalter there were three or four readings from the Holy Fathers. At the Liturgy only the Trisagion, Alleluia, Cherubic Hymn, and Meet It Is were sung; everything else was chanted, slowly. On Saturdays the monks went to the monastery sepulchre, where a panikhida was served for the repose of the departed.

In his Rule to his disciples, St. Nilus thus depicts the outward side of skete-life: "(1) (The monks) should earn their livelihood by the labor of their own hands, but should not occupy themselves with agriculture, since because of its complexity it is not suited to hermits. (2) They should accept alms only in case of illness or extreme need, but not any alms that might serve to give offense to anyone. (3) They should not leave the Skete. (4) In church

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there should be no adornments made of silver, even for the sacred vessels, but everything should be simple. (5) The young and healthy should wear out the body with fasting, thirst, and labor, while to the old and weak a relaxation is permitted to a certain extent. (6) No women at all are to enter the Skete."

These rules for outward life are not complex. The labor and asceticism of skete-life consist primarily of inward ascetic labor, a strict observation of the conditions of the soul, the purification of the soul by prayer and thought of God. This form of asceticism St. Nilus depicts in some detail in his Rule for his disciples, an extensive work which is called "The Tradition from the Holy Fathers on How to Live," or the "Rule of Skete-life." The characteristic that distinguishes this "Tradition" or Rule of St. Nilus of Sora from all other Rules written by the founders of monasteries is precisely that St. Nilus concentrates all attention on *inward* spiritual life in Christ, on the purely spiritual training of the Orthodox Christian.

**T**HE GLORY OF ST. NILUS shone out far beyond the walls of Russian monasteries. He was known and revered by Russian hierarchs. When the heresy of the Judaizers broke out in Novgorod and the expectation spread everywhere that the world would end in 1492 (the year 7000 from the creation of the world), St. Gennadius, Archbishop of Novgorod,\*\*\* asked Ioasaph, Archbishop of Rostov, to take counsel from St. Nilus (as well as from Paisius Yaroslavov) concerning his idea of these expectations. In 1490 a council was convoked against the heresy of the Judaizers, and the Elders Paisius and Nilus were invited to Moscow to the council. There was another council in Moscow in 1503, and St. Nilus was present at this council also. It is worthy of note that it was St. Nilus who introduced into this council's discussions the proposal that monasteries should be relieved of the governance of patrimonial estates, i.e., the owning of villages. This question raised heated discussions. St. Joseph, Abbot of Volokolamsk,\* an eminent church figure of the time, defended monastery possessions. But the Blessed Nilus, proposing that monasteries should not own villages, demanded that "monks should live in the wilderness and earn their livelihood by handiwork." Many monks of St. Cyril's White Lake Monastery,\*\* and even some monks of other monasteries, joined themselves to St. Nilus' opinion. However, this opinion was not upheld at the council. After the death of St. Nilus, his idea lived on for a long time in the minds of his disciples. One of them, Prince Bassian Kosoi, fought strongly

\*\*\* †1505, Dec. 4.

\* †1515, Sept. 9.

\*\* St. Cyril himself, a hundred years earlier, had refused to accept villages for his monastery, as related in his Life (see page 60).

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for the position that monasteries should have no villages, and with him there were other elders, and also monks from the Holy Mountain, including St. Maximus the Greek.\*

But most important in the life of St. Nilus is that to his very death he remained faithful to his Rule, embodying its principles not only in questions concerning society, such as the question of monastery possessions, but also in his own life and ascetic labors.

Quite some time before his death, St. Nilus, sending his disciple St. Innocent to establish a cœnobitic monastery, prophesied that this monastery would flourish, and referring to his own wilderness Skete he said: "But here, as it was during my lifetime, so let it remain after my death; let the brethren live alone, each in his own cell." These words were preserved as a testament and were observed after the death of St. Nilus. The great Elder departed to the Lord on May 7, 1508, on the third Sunday of Pascha, being 75 years old.

When he was dying, St. Nilus left the following testament to his disciples: "In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. I give as my testament concerning myself to you, my constant lords and brethren who are of my way of life; I beg you, throw my body into the wilderness, that the beasts and birds may devour it, inasmuch as it has sinned much against God and is unworthy of burial. But if you do not do this, then, having dug a hole in the place where we live, bury me with all dishonor. And fear the words which the Great Arsenius gave as his testament to his disciples, saying: I will stand in judgment with you if you give my body to anyone. For it was my concern, in so far as it lay in my power, that I should not be deemed worthy of any honor or glory of this world; as it was in this life, so let it be after my death. And I beg all to pray for my sinful soul, and I beg forgiveness of everyone. And may there be forgiveness also from me: may God forgive us all."

On the part of St. Nilus, this testament serves as an expression of his profound humility before God and men, which is worthy of being expressed in the words of the Prophet David: *I have been humbled, O Lord, exceedingly* (Ps. 118:107).

This desire expressed before his death by the great zealot of poverty and humility was fulfilled: his monastery remained one of the poorest and least populated in the north of Russia; and his holy relics reposed, until late in the 19th century, under a humble wooden church. Once, in 1569, Tsar John the Terrible, having visited and prayed at St. Cyril's monastery, came to St. Nilus' Skete and, having had a moleben served and having praised God and the life of His wonderworker, commanded that a stone church be erected. But at that time St. Nilus himself appeared to him and commanded him not to

\* †1556, Jan. 21.



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build a stone church, and forbade any kind of adornments to be made either in the churches or in the cells, but commanded that there should be only what was needful. After this apparition the Tsar gave a certificate of bestowal to the Skete with his own signature, giving an allowance of grain and money for the upkeep of the brethren.

The Holy Church, in course of time, by indication from above, joined Nilus to the number of the Holy Fathers and established that his commemoration be kept in the Church Calendar on May 7, the day of his blessed repose.

**T**HERE IS a remarkable tradition concerning the sacred iconographic face of the Saint which is painted on the cover of his tomb. A certain wealthy man of the Moscow territory was captured by Tatars and remained in captivity to them for many years. He greatly sorrowed over his family and called on the saints of God to help him. Once at night there appeared to him in a light sleep a resplendent elder who ordered him to paint the icon of St. Nilus, promising to return him to his homeland. Awakening from sleep, he wanted to ask how this could be done; but the elder vanished like lightning from his sight, which was blinded by the bright light. The prisoner began to reflect to himself: Who is this St. Nilus, of whom he had now heard for the first time, and where is he to be found? He began to call on him for help, even though he did not know him. And behold, the next night the same elder appeared to him again and said: "The Nilus who is near White Lake, ten miles from St. Cyril's monastery." Jumping up from his bed, the prisoner wanted to look more closely at the elder's face and question him in more detail, but again, just as quickly as before, he became invisible, leaving behind a ray of light and a fragrance. Then he believed that indeed the Lord had sent this Saint to him, and he prayed St. Nilus that he would reveal his face more clearly to him; and on the third night the Saint again appeared to him and left near his head an outline of his face and spoke to him this word of consolation: "Man of God, take this leaf and go into the Russian land."

Scarcely had the consoled prisoner come to himself than he actually found by his pillow the outline of the Saint's face. With tears he begged the Lord and His Saint to show him the path by which to be delivered from the hands of the unbelievers; and again a voice came to him: "Go at night into the steppe and you will see before you a bright star; follow it and you will escape the Hagarenes." The prisoner, strengthened by faith, boldly set out at night into the immeasurable, unknown steppe, taking with him a little bread, and a wondrous star led him, according to the promise of St. Nilus, until the first rays of dawn. Then he heard behind him the trampling of horses' hoofs and the yells of barbarians seeking their prey. In terror he fell to the ground,

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begging God to preserve him, and the Lord overshadowed him with invisible power from their gaze, so that with cries they passed by.

The prisoner wandered day and night over the shelterless steppe, and then he came to a deep and rapid river, although it was not wide, and there was no one to take him across, and it flowed across the whole steppe. The barbarians knew that it was impossible to cross the river, and they chased him to its banks in the firm conviction that they would catch the fugitive. Catching sight of him from afar, they strove towards him with wild yells and bared swords, and he, seeing no deliverance for himself anywhere, signed himself with the sign of the cross and threw himself into the river. The waters carried him quickly downstream, and the Hagarenes shot arrows at him from the bank in vain, for the mercy of God preserved him. The river carried him faster than their horses could run, and they returned, considering him already drowned. But the river, in a dashing of waves, threw the man out on the opposite bank, and from there he walked across the steppe without hindrance, living on plants and ceaselessly calling in his prayers on the Lord and His Saint, Nilus.

This river was probably the Donetz, which at that time served as the boundary between Russia and the Crimean Horde. The rescued prisoner successfully reached the Russian cities. Before he went to his father's house he sought out an icon-painter in Moscow and ordered him to paint the Saint's face for him from the leaf that had been given him, the size of the cover of a coffin; then he called priests and poor people and, having given them a dinner, furnished them with generous alms, telling everyone how the Lord had delivered him from captivity. And when the icon of the Saint had been painted, he made a great festivity in honor of St. Nilus and sent the honorable icon to his Skete with a faithful servant, giving many gifts and church utensils to the Skete. This icon lay on the Saint's shrine right up to this century and, by the prayers of St. Nilus, healings flow forth from it. The Saint is depicted in schema, in the splendid repose of the contemplation after death which he had begun while still on earth.

Many other miracles occurred through the intercession of St. Nilus after his repose. Here is another remarkable miracle, as recorded by the monks of St. Nilus' Skete: "Once there was living in St. Nilus' Skete a certain hieromonk Adam, and his son Michael lived with him. The hieromonk sent the boy to the sacristan for some church needs, and while he was on his way there suddenly came to him a certain strange man who seized him and carried him, as if on the wind, into an impenetrable forest, bringing him into a large room in his dwelling and placing him in the middle of this cabin, in front of the window. And that old man told the woman there to feed the boy, and they

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brought him every kind of wild plant and tried to make him eat and drink. But the boy ate nothing, but only stood in the same spot where he had been placed, unmoving, weeping and lamenting bitterly. The hieromonk soon began looking for his son and looked everywhere in the Skete and in nearby places without finding him anywhere. And so he came to the Skete and gathered the brethren and went with everyone to the chapel which stands not far away in the forest, where there is the wonderworking Icon of the Most Holy Mother of God Hodigitria, and began to serve a moleben and call with tears on St. Nilus the Wonderworker to help. And at that moment St. Nilus came to the boy's aid and stood before the room where the boy was standing, and when he struck the window-frame with his staff the building was shaken and all the unclean spirits fell to the earth. The boy, standing and weeping, saw St. Nilus the Wonderworker standing under the window and saying: 'O miserable unclean spirits! Why are you attacking my Skete? Take this boy back to my Skete from which you took him and place him in the same spot.' And having said this, the Saint became invisible. And the unclean spirits began to howl among themselves at the one who had brought the boy to them: 'Woe to us who are perishing! Quickly take the boy and bring him back where you took him from!' The same strange one seized the boy and brought him to the Skete like the wind, as far as the Skete's mill, for he did not dare to bring him into the Skete; and placing him on a haystack, he became invisible. The boy began to cry out on the haystack, and at that moment the hieromonk with the brethren, coming from the moleben in the chapel, heard the boy crying out in the forest and came to the sound and saw the boy standing on the haystack; and they glorified God and His Saint, Nilus the Wonderworker, and began to question the boy. The boy told them everything that had happened to him, what he had seen and heard. And from that time this boy became very humble, as if he had been stupefied. The hieromonk out of terror left the Skete with his son. We sinful monks of the Skete saw and heard all this in detail from this boy, and we wrote down a little out of the much that we heard so that our brethren will remember, for the benefit of those who love God and glorify the Holy Trinity, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, now and ever and unto the ages of ages. Amen."\*

\* A. S. Archangelsky, *St. Nilus of Sora*, St. Petersburg, 1882, App., pp. 8-10. If any contemporary reader regard this miracle as "fanciful," he should read the account (which was seen and approved by Starets Ambrose of Optina) of an even stranger demonic "kidnapping" in 19th-century Russia, where a young man, after his mother cursed him, became the slave of a demon-"grandfather" for twelve years. (See S. Nilus, *The Power of God and Man's Weakness*, St. Sergius' Lavra, 1908, pp. 279-298.)



On the road from St. Cyril's Monastery to St. Nilus' Skete: Pilgrims stop to rest by the Cross which marks the beginning of the side-road to St. Nilus' Skete



The entrance-tower of the Skete of the Forerunner, seen from inside





The entrance tower and the walls of the Dormition Skete, seen from inside



The Skete of St. John the Forerunner, showing the old church of the Forerunner, originally built over St. Nilus' grave, and the house built over the well of St. Nilus

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IN ACCORDANCE with the principles of skete-life, the number of monks in St. Nilus' Skete was always small. During his lifetime this number attained no more than one hieromonk, one deacon, and twelve monks. Doubtless the intention of St. Nilus in blessing his disciple St. Innocent to found a crenobitic monastery was to keep his own skete small.

In addition to St. Innocent, another Saint known to have been under the influence of St. Nilus was St. Cassian of Uglich,\*\* a Greek prince from Constantinople to whom St. Nilus wrote two letters which have been preserved. He founded his own monastery on the Volga. The influence of St. Nilus seems also to be present in the Rule of St. Cornelius of Komel.\*\*\*

The direct influence of St. Nilus on Russian monasticism, however, is difficult to trace, and it is actually of secondary importance beside the one undeniable fact that the contemplative monastic tradition of the North is based entirely on the Eastern Fathers of Greece, Syria, Palestine, and Egypt. The Skete Rule of St. Nilus (besides which only a few of his letters and his brief "Testament" survive) is wholly in the tradition of these Fathers and consists largely of citations from them. St. Nilus himself says: "Like a dog picking up scraps from the table, I have gathered the words uttered by those blessed Fathers..."

The subject of the Skete Rule is primarily, as we have seen, not the outward order of the monastery, but the inward activity of the monk. The Holy Fathers call this activity the "mental work," which means the practice of the Orthodox spiritual life, centering on the Prayer of Jesus. After an introduction emphasizing that all outward, bodily labors are precisely for the purpose of purifying the "inner vessel," St. Nilus gives an outline of the inward spiritual battle, which occurs in the mind, in the realm of thoughts. The victory or defeat which the Orthodox Christian sustains here is then translated into the virtues or vices which can be observed outwardly.

Five degrees can be distinguished in the battle as one is led away from God-pleasing purity of mind: (1) A simple thought or suggestion (in Slavonic, *prilog*) which comes to the mind from outside; not depending upon us, such fleeting thoughts are not sinful in themselves, and even the spiritually perfect are not entirely free of them. (2) "Conjunction" (*socbetanie*) or conversation with the thought, granting it permission to come within, receiving and holding it in the mind. This may be done with or without passion, and so may be sinful or sinless, depending on the outcome. (3) "Joining" (*slozbenie*) or accepting the thought, being defeated by it; this is judged more or less severely depending on one's state of advancement in spiritual

\*\* †1504, Oct. 2.

\*\*\* †1537, May 19.

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life and on the basic orientation of one's heart: one may be defeated in thought yet still be determined not to sin in act; or one may accept the thought to such an extent that one is prepared to act according to its suggestion, in which case a penance (*epitimia*) should be given by one's spiritual father. (4) "Captivity" (*plenenie*) is an involuntary attraction of one's heart to the thought, from which state one may be freed and return to oneself with God's help; or, more seriously, the thought constantly settles in one's mind and the mind, carried away from its good orientation into evil thoughts, can no longer return to a peaceful state. (5) "Passion" (*strast*) is an inclination and activity that have nested themselves in the soul for a long time because of habit and become as it were the soul's nature. A man comes to this state at first voluntarily, but ends by being completely enslaved by it. "Passion" must be subject to penance in this life, or it will bring tortures in the future life.

Further, St. Nilus in his Skete Rule describes how to conduct the fight against evil thoughts, indicating also some of the experiences that may come to one on the path to spiritual perfection, and gives certain general rules of life for one engaged in this struggle. Then he names the eight principal passions from which, the Holy Fathers teach, the many others proceed, and tells how to fight the temptations that come with each of them. These passions are: gluttony, fornication, cupidity, anger, sorrow, despondency, vainglory, and pride.

The Rule concludes with separate sections on the thought of death and the Last Judgment; on tears; on renunciation and detachment; and on discretion and moderation in the practice of the spiritual life.\*

THE SKETE of St. Nilus always remained small and humble, as its founder had wished it to be. However, as with all monasteries the state of its spiritual life was not always high, and in the first half of the 19th century in particular the Skete was in a condition of great decay, both spiritually and physically. It was at this time that God raised up a great ascetic who made St. Nilus' Skete once more renowned for its flourishing spiritual life. Even though

\* The Skete Rule of St. Nilus has been translated into English and printed in G. P. Fedotov, *A Treasury of Russian Spirituality*, Sheed & Ward, New York, 1948, pp. 90-132. However, the reader can place no trust in the introductions and comments of the "liberal" scholar Fedotov, who has no understanding whatever of Orthodox spirituality and its tradition and thus looks pointlessly for "originality" in the Saint's "literary work," disdains the "merely traditional accounts" contained in the Lives of Saints of this period (it was precisely from this rich source that I. M. Kontzevitch wrote the best work on the Russian spiritual tradition, *The Acquisition of the Holy Spirit in Ancient Russia*), and finds it significant that St. Nilus was "the favorite saint of the Russian liberal intelligentsia"!



St. Nilus in his  
marshy wilderness  
19th-century  
line engraving



The Golgotha and Gethsemane Chapels in St. Nilus' Dormition Skete





The Dormition Chapel in the Gethsemene Skete built by the great ascetic, Schema-Hieromonk Nilus, seen at the time Schema-Hieromonk John was living in this Skete (1898).



SCHEMA-HIEROMONK JOHN  
1830-1903

The last known great ascetic of the St. Nilus of Sora Monastery, where he spent almost all of his life, dying there on the day of the canonization of his beloved St. Seraphim of Sarov (see p. 102).



General view of Sora Monastery from within. At right: the church of the Meeting of the Lord. In back: the church of the Holy Protection over the entrance gate of the Monastery.



The Protection church and the entrance gate from outside, during a feast-day procession. (These watercolors were made in summer, 1898.)

he did not restore everything according to the letter of St. Nilus' testament, and in one respect acted contrary to his express desire — nonetheless, in his life and spirit, and even in the physical surroundings of his last years of skete-life, after St. Nilus' "chastisement" of him, one may catch a glimpse of the spirit of the great founder of skete-life in Russia and breathe a little of the fragrance of the isolated wooden sketes of the North. Indeed, it is not by accident that this new ascetic of St. Nilus' Skete should likewise bear the name of *Nilus of Sora*.



Schema-hieromonk Nilus of Sora (1801-1870) was born of devout Orthodox parents. His father was in correspondence with Blessed Paisius Velichkovsky, the new zealot of the Holy Fathers and of the monastic "mental work" by no means second even to St. Nilus, and the disciples of Elder Paisius often visited his house. Living in various monasteries, Father Nikon (his name in monasticism) occupied responsible positions in them; but all the time his heart was weighed down with his worldly cares and he sought a more isolated place for ascetic labors. By God's Providence he was directed to the Skete of St. Nilus, which was then dependent on St. Cyril's White Lake Monastery, and the abbot of the latter was only too happy to place him in charge of restoring the Skete.

*Schema-hieromonk Nilus*

The sight that greeted Father Nikon at St. Nilus' Skete was truly a sad one: the two old churches on the mound which St. Nilus had made, as well as the other skete buildings, were in bad condition, some of them falling to pieces; only St. Nilus' mill on the Sora was more or less whole. But what was far worse, the eight monks who lived in the Skete were far from models of sober monastic life, and they were not disposed to being corrected by their new superior. Indeed, just outside the Skete Father Nikon ran into a group of laughing and singing women who had been working in the monastery for the brethren! Nonetheless, the remoteness and desolateness of the Skete, its humble churches, and the grave of St. Nilus (who was buried under the wooden church of the Forerunner) attracted the soul of Father Nikon; and soon St. Nilus himself appeared to him during sleep, conversing with him and commanding him not to refuse to become superior, and promising to help him.





Rasophore-monk John

Becoming superior in 1837, Father Nikon introduced a strict monastic rule and in three years had restored the buildings and built a fence around the Skete enclosure. Some 20 monks joined him. Next to the well and pond which St. Nilus himself had dug, he built a chapel and a small cell for his own solitary labors.

Soon many pilgrims began to visit the Skete, and here Father Nikon succumbed to the temptation which the abbot of St. Cyril's monastery proposed: to build a large stone church in place of the two small wooden ones.

The biographer of Father Nikon does not say so, but it is obvious from the events that followed that St. Nilus, who once had threatened John the Terrible for the very idea of building a stone church in his Skete, chastised those who presumed to act against his express desire. Before the stone church could be finished, the abbot of St. Cyril's monastery was removed from his post and Father Nikon was banished in disgrace and under interdiction to a distant monastery for having kept in his cell without reporting it some human bones (very clean and fragrant, with drops of myrrh, evidently those of a holy monk of the Skete) which had been found when the wooden churches had been dismantled and the whole area of the mound with the old sepulchre had been levelled. Further, during the course of the construction of the stone church, the arches holding up the central dome collapsed, and with them a 16-year-old boy fell from the roof and was buried by bricks; it was by an evident miracle of St. Nilus that he was found under the rubble completely unharmed.\*

In his banishment Father Nikon fell almost into despair, being encouraged, however, by a voice from an Icon of the Mother of God which told him that he would return to St. Nilus' Skete and receive the great schema. And in fact, in three years he was allowed to return to his beloved Skete, but now not to be superior, but rather to retire to his own little skete near St. Nilus' well, to which place Father Nikon had previously removed the dismantled wooden church of the Forerunner which had stood over St. Nilus' grave at least since the 17th century. This church gave the name to this second skete of St. Nilus: the Skete of the Forerunner.

\* This incident is recorded by A. Muraviev, *The Russian Thebaid of the North*, St. Petersburg, 1855, pp. 353-354.

## SAINT NILUS OF SORA

In 1852 Father Nikon received the schema with the name of Nilus, in honor of the great founder of the Skete, and now he began a life which in many respects resembled that of his patron saint. Especially after 1861, when he founded a second, less accessible skete (the Dormition or Gethsemane Skete, dedicated to the Mother of God) farther on in the forest, he led the strict life of a hermitic skete-dweller. Women were never allowed inside the skete enclosure, and even when he should happen to meet women pilgrims outside the enclosure, Father Nilus would never converse with them, but only give his blessing in silence. His contact with the world was limited to writing replies to spiritual questions on pieces of paper which would be delivered by his cell-attendant. His All-night Vigils followed Athosite custom and lasted, as in the days of St. Nilus, the whole night, twelve hours and more. He constantly read the Holy Fathers and made their thought his own; his spiritual instructions to his brethren were filled with references to them. His rule differed from that of St. Nilus in that he served Liturgy every day, for which rarely did more than two or three monks join him. The church and two chapels which he built, as well as the other buildings and the fences enclosing his sketes, were all of wood. In the ancient church of the Forerunner he collected all the old icons and church utensils of St. Nilus' Skete, and he himself painted many new icons in strict Byzantine style—for he had learned this art in his youth. In a word, while St. Nilus' Skete itself became an ordinary cenobitic monastery with a very unremarkable stone church, Father Nilus' small sketes carried on as much as possible the tradition of St. Nilus himself.

Father Nilus labored greatly for the glorification of St. Nilus, painting several icons of him and writing the first service and akathist to him. He also had the intention of writing a service to St. Seraphim of Sarov many years before his canonization; and, as if to emphasize the spiritual connection between the two great desert-dwellers—St. Nilus of the 15th and St. Seraphim of the 19th century—Father Nilus died on the very date of St. Seraphim's canonization, only 33 years before the event (July 19, 1870). In his skete, as remote and desolate as the old sketes of the northern forests, Father Nilus ended his life of great sanctity, revealing gifts of clairvoyance and healing. He appeared after his death to his spiritual father, telling him: "Do not grieve for me; I have been deemed worthy of God's mercy." The Abbess of a nearby convent likewise appeared in sleep to one of the nuns, telling her to inform the sisters that she was now in the blessed dwelling prepared for Elder Nilus.\*

\* The full life of Father Nilus (and briefer lives of some of his co-ascetics) is contained in: Bishop Nikodim (the new martyr), *Lives of Russian Ascetics of the 18th and 19th Centuries*, Moscow, 1908, July volume, pp. 278-379.

## THE NORTHERN THEBAID

A number of other holy ascetics also flourished at this time in St. Nilus' Skete. One of the most remarkable of these ascetics was the *Rasophore-monk John Shaposhnikov* (1802-1863), a cripple who labored in the Skete of the Forerunner and in a solitary cell in the forest. He was chosen of God from his youth, walked on water, vanquished the demons after undergoing ferocious attacks from them, was granted several wondrous visions, and was visited and healed by the Most Holy Mother of God Herself. Once, when he had first come to St. Nilus' Skete and was still sorrowing over being forced to leave the monastery of St. Cyril of New Lake because he was a cripple, he was standing in great sadness in church for the All-night Vigil of a major feast in winter. Suddenly he saw an unknown elder in schema come out of the altar to him and say: "Well, apparently you do not wish to serve me. If so, return to St. Cyril." At these words the elder struck him with his right hand quite strongly on the shoulder. John wished to bow down to him and ask who he was, but he instantly became invisible. Noting that the elder exactly resembled St. Nilus as he is depicted in the icon over his relics, John was filled with great joy, all his grief disappeared, and he firmly resolved to spend the rest of his life in the Saint's Skete. On the place where Father Nilus was soon to build his Dormition Skete, he saw one night a fiery pillar and he heard angels singing, "Glory to God in the Highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men." After beholding this vision for a long time, he prophesied the future spiritual glory of this place, which indeed came to pass.

After the death of Father Nilus, one of his disciples, *Schema-hieromonk John* (1830-1903), continued to live in his Sketes, at first in the Skete of the Forerunner, and then, for the eight years before his death, in the Dormition Skete, whose spiritual glory thus did not cease right up to our own century. He had a great devotion to St. Nilus, especially from the time when, in his youth, he carried the Saint's icon with him while collecting alms for the Skete. Often he would pray for a long time before the icon to the Saint, asking him to help save him from the many temptations that he encountered on these trips. From this icon there were many healings. Father John became widely known as a great ascetic, and many came to him for spiritual advice. In the last year of his life he went into complete seclusion in his cell in the Dormition Skete. His final wish was to live to see the canonization of St. Seraphim, for whom he had great veneration, and to die on that day, which was also the date of the repose of his elder, Father Nilus. And in fact, on the very day of St. Seraphim's canonization, July 19, 1903, after Father John had risen from his sick-bed to serve a moleben to the newly-canonized Saint, he departed to the Lord. (Life in Bishop Nikodim, *op. cit.*, Nov., pp. 262-276.)

## SAINT NILUS OF SORA

Although St. Nilus is unquestionably one of the major Saints of Holy Russia, a Holy Father of Orthodox ascetic literature, the only one of the great spiritual guides of Russian monasticism to be given the honored name of "Great Elder" in ecclesiastical literature, an undoubted wonderworker — still St. Nilus was never officially canonized by the Church, as if in accordance with his own expressed desire not to enjoy the glory of this world. Doubtless his "unfashionable" ideas hindered his official recognition as a Saint. And so it was not the Church hierarchy, but rather the believing people, who glorified him, and his name was entered in Church calendars on the basis of his local veneration as a Saint. A church service (apparently for local use) was composed in his honor within some decades of his death, in the second half of the 16th century, and there were other services later. Of the earliest service to him the troparion (see page 88), kontakion, and ikos (see below) still exist. In the ikos it may be seen that the local tradition of skete-life ("who dwell alone at a distance") was still alive when this was written.

KONTAKION, Tone 8: Having gone far away from worldly tumult for the love of Christ,\* with joyful soul thou didst settle in the wilderness,\* and there thou didst labor well like an Angel on earth, O Father Nilus,\* wearing out thy body by vigil and fasting for the sake of eternal life.\* And now, having been vouchsafed this life, thou standest in the light of the unutterable joy of the Most Holy Trinity together with the Saints.\* Pray, we thy children beseech thee,\* that we thy flock may be preserved from every snare and evil condition brought about by enemies visible and invisible.

IKOS: O come, ye fathers and brethren; come, God-gathered flock of our Father; gather, O God-beloved spiritual regiment; let us come together, who dwell alone at a distance; and being spiritually joined let us fall down before the grave of our blessed Father, and let us call out contritely from the depths of our hearts, saying: O our most blessed desert teacher and instructor in the Lord, Father Nilus, entreat the Most Holy Trinity, Father and Son and Holy Spirit, that the God-crowned autocrat, our right-believing Grand Prince Theodore,† lover of the poor, be granted peace and health and salvation and victory and mastery over all enemies visible and invisible that oppose him. And may we thy humble children, by the scepter of his piety, dwell a distance apart unharmed by enemies, and may we stand before the Most Holy Trinity day and night, saying: Alleluia. † Tsar Theodore Ioannovich, reigned 1384-1398.

And so the spiritual testament of St. Nilus has given abundant fruits, and the Saint himself did not cease to visit the place of his earthly labors. With the coming of the Communist Yoke upon the Russian land, nothing is known concerning the fate of his Skete, although most of its buildings are not likely to have survived. Yet the Saint's example remains ever alive, and his prayers do not cease for the suffering race of Christians. By his prayers may we also find salvation! Amen.





THE LIFE OF  
*Saint Alexander of Svir*  
 BLESSED SEER OF THE HOLY TRINITY\*



**C**VENERABLE FATHERS, as the true slaves of a rich Lord and God, entreat Him that He will grant me from his unfailing treasures a word seasoned with the salt of the Holy Spirit, and a tongue that is comprehensible, that I might boldly speak of the virtuous life of our most blessed Father Alexander, who has most gloriously shone forth now in these latest times. I have received the account of his labors not by hearsay only, but from his own venerable and holy lips, and I have heard of his labor-loving life in God from his disciples who lived with him from the first. All this I leave in writing as a priceless gift and a paternal inheritance so that those who come after us might make profitable use of it.

The parents of the blessed child, our holy Father Alexander, Stephen and Bassa, lived in the boundaries of Great Novgorod, which is now the land of Olonets, and were villagers in the village called Mandera, which is near the Ostrog monastery of the Entrance of the Most Holy Mother of God. In wealth they did not abound, but were satisfied with what they had; but in piety they shone forth above many, and they ever strove in all things to be pleasing to God. Sons and daughters were born to them, but then much time

\* Abridged from the Life written in the Saint's Monastery in the year 1545 by his disciple Herodion, who was abbot after him. Printed in Slavonic, St. Petersburg, 1843.

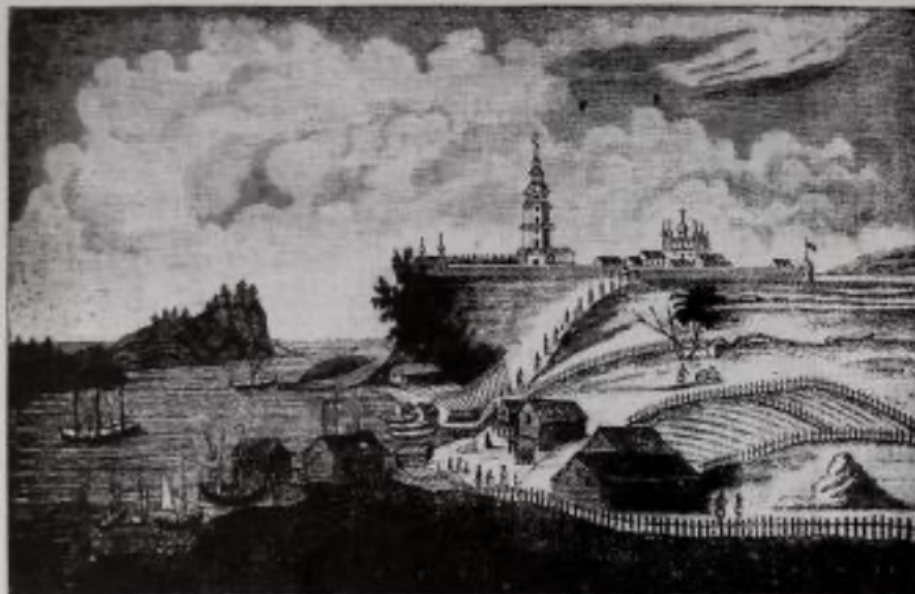


*Ancient icon from Valaam*

ST. ALEXANDER OF SVIR  
 Commemorated August 30

TROPARION, TONE 4

**F**ROM THY YOUTH, O divinely-wise one, with spiritual desire didst thou settle in the wilderness,\* and didst fervently desire to go in the footsteps of Christ alone.\* Wherefore even the Angelic choirs, beholding thee, were astonished\* at how thou didst labor with the flesh against the invisible wiles, O wise one.\* Thou didst vanquish the legions of the passions by means of continence,\* and reveal thyself upon earth as equal to the Angels.\* O Saint Alexander,\* pray to Christ God\* that He may save our souls.



General view of Valaam Monastery (18th-century engraving)



The island where St. Alexander labored while at Valaam

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passed when no more children were born, for which the blessed Bassa was reproached by her husband. But this was according to God's Providence; for it is not possible to give birth to such a treasure, whom God chose before his conception to be an instructor in salvation for many, except by prayer and fasting. After much prayer, the pious couple went to the above-mentioned monastery of the Most Holy Mother of God, remaining there not a little time in fasting, and praying to the Mother of God. And in one night there was a certain Divine manifestation, and a voice was heard to say: "Rejoice, blessed couple; for the Lord has heard your prayer, and you shall give birth to a son with the name of consolation: for God shall grant in his birth consolation to His churches."

And when the days for giving birth were fulfilled, the desired child was born to them, and they called his name Amos. This blessed child was born in the year 1449, on the 15th day of June. After a short time they gave birth to him a second time by water and the Holy Spirit. The child grew well and was filled with the Holy Spirit in the Lord.

When it came time for him to study, his parents gave him over to a certain devout man to study the Divine Scripture. But while his companions learned rapidly, this blessed child learned most slowly; and this was according to God's Providence, so that he might receive understanding from God, and not from men. One day he went to the above-mentioned monastery, to the church of the Mother of God where it was his custom always to come, and fell down before the Icon of the Most Holy Mother of God, with tears and groans begging Her aid, when suddenly he heard a voice saying: "Arise, fear not; and what you have asked you shall receive." And soon he studied the Divine Scripture without difficulty and surpassed all his companions. In addition, he went every day to church, revered and obeyed his parents, and remained in great continence, wearing out his body. Every day he ate only bread, and that not to satiety, while at night he slept little, and astonished his parents greatly because of his continence. The wondrous child applied himself diligently to labor, and never did his mind incline toward the games and light-minded talk usual to children; but rather he walked about sorrowful and downcast, and to the extent that he was instructed in simplicity, so much was his mind enriched with wisdom. He was kind and meek, responsive to all and loved very much the poor, also loving greatly and revering the monastic order.

When he reached full manhood, his parents thought of arranging a marriage for him. But the divine youth was heedful ever to separate himself from all the pleasures of this world and to draw near to God alone, preferring



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to remain most sweetly with him. Having heard of the Monastery of the Lord's Transfiguration which is at Valaam, and being inflamed with desire to go there, he entreated the Lord that he might fulfill this desire. And the Lord, Who is near to the prayer of those who call upon Him in truth, granted in His Providence that certain monks from the Valaam Monastery should come on the business of the Monastery to the village which is near that of the parents of the blessed youth. It happened that he also was passing by this place, and seeing them from a distance standing at the river bank and singing the Psalms, he came to them and, having said a prayer, bowed down to the earth before them, saying, "Bless me, holy fathers." They were astonished at such humility and chastity in the youth. One of them was a clairvoyant elder and filled with the Holy Spirit, and he understood the youth's purity of heart and the grace that was to be manifest in him. The divine youth questioned this elder separately about his monastery and the monks' rule of life, and the elder told him in detail of the cenobitic life of the monastery, and also of the solitary life of silence where two or three lived together in oneness of soul, apart from the others. And the divine youth asked the elder, rivers of tears pouring forth from his eyes: "What must I do, venerable father, in order to flee this world of much disturbance and become worthy of such an angelic life?" The elder confirmed his fervent desire for the monastic life and indicated to him the way to the monastery; then, having gone to the youth's parents and conversed with them to their spiritual profit, he at last said: "Your son shall be great before the Lord and a servant of the Holy Trinity." And thus he departed from them.

The blessed youth, being filled with much zeal, and not putting off the fulfillment of his desire, fell to the feet of his parents and begged their blessing to go to a nearby village on a certain business. Having thus stolen a blessing from his parents, he left their home, having nothing but his clothing and a little bread. Having gone a little way, he stopped and wept for many hours at thus departing from his parents' home; and then he set out on his way, walking quickly and rejoicing greatly.

The blessed youth came to the river Svir, and having crossed the river he continued his way, rejoicing and giving thanks to God. That place was very desolate, and forested, and inaccessible. Night approached, and the holy youth looked about to find where he might lie down for the night. Seeing in the distance a lake, he walked to its shore. The lake was not very large, but quite beautiful, surrounded by forest on all sides as by a wall, the branches of the trees bending down to the water, and it was four miles from the river Svir. The blessed youth rejoiced in soul and stood at prayer, saying: "Lord Jesus

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Christ my God, direct me on the path of salvation." And having prayed for many hours with tears, he fell asleep. Immediately he heard a voice saying to him: "O youth, the path is straight for you to go where you wish to go, to the monastery of the All-merciful Saviour on Valaam; go in peace, and labor there unto the Lord for a sufficient time, and then you will be in this place and build a monastery, and many will be saved by you." With this voice a great light also appeared at the place where the blessed one was resting, and he saw a certain bright ray shining upon him. And he was overcome by a great fear and thought to himself: "What does this mean?" And fountains of tears poured forth from his eyes. Then with joy, giving thanks to God, he went on his way.

On his way he prayed to the Lord that he might find a companion who knew the way well, and the Lord soon heard his prayer, and the blessed one, looking back, saw a man walking on the road. He was going to Valaam also on some business, and the blessed youth rejoiced at finding such a companion. With him he travelled in a few days a road which some travel with difficulty only in many days. And when they neared the monastery and the blessed youth saw the church of the Lord's Transfiguration, he stood at prayer with tears. Then, looking around for his companion, he could not find him; and he understood that his good companion, an Angel, had been sent him by God, and he gave thanks to the Lord God for this.

Coming to the monastery gate, he met some monks standing outside the gate and, bowing to them, he said, "Bless me, holy fathers." They informed the Abbot concerning him, and he ordered the blessed youth to be brought to him. Going to the Abbot, he bowed down to the ground before him and received his blessing. And he began to entreat him with tears to make him a monk. The Abbot, whose name was Joachim, seeing him so young, tested him by speaking of the monks' sorrowful life, full of deprivations. But the blessed youth continued his entreaty, and the Abbot, looking upon him with the eyes of the heart, saw that he was to be a chosen vessel of God, and he said: "Blessed is God, Who wishes all men to be saved. May He grant you, O child, strength and patience according to your desire, unto salvation. From henceforth you will serve the brethren in all patience and obedience." Hearing this from the Abbot, he bowed down to the ground before him. And thus the hairs of his head were tonsured, and with them he put off all vain wisdom that draws one downward, and his name was called Alexander; he was then 26 years old. And having given thanks to God that he had been enabled to flee the agitation of worldly life for the serene harbor of monasticism, he gave himself over entirely to Him, laboring day and night without sloth, wearing

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out his flesh with fasting and prayer. He spent his days in labors for the monastery, and his nights in vigils and glorification of God; he could not be drawn into unfitting conversations, but kept his mind ever upon God alone. And his life was not as that of a man, but of an Angel, so that the Abbot and the brethren were astonished at his great humility and his surpassing obedience toward everyone.

THE PARENTS of blessed Alexander grieved much over being separated from him, and they sought him everywhere. After three years the blessed one's father found out that he had been tonsured a monk at Valaam, and being inflamed with fatherly love, he set out on the long journey in order to see his son. In vain did he try to persuade his son to return home in order to console his parents until their death; rather, the counsel and the fervent prayer of blessed Alexander persuaded his father to become a monk also, and on return to his home he entered the above-mentioned monastery of the Most Holy Mother of God, was tonsured a monk and called Sergius, and died in peace. Likewise, the Saint's mother was clothed in monasticism and called Barbara, and after living a God-pleasing life, reposed in the Lord. St. Alexander, hearing that his parents had reposed, wept much over them; but then, placing his hope in God, he said to himself: "I also am mortal."

And from that time he entered into yet greater labors. Then he was sent by the Abbot to the bakery, and there he remained in humility, prospering in labors above everyone else, carrying water and bearing wood from the forest, wearing out his body, thus laboring ceaselessly every day, and at night praying to God without slothfulness; and sometimes, leaving his cell and exposing his body to the waist, he would stand until morning psalmody, and his body would be covered with a multitude of mosquitoes and gnats. In the morning he was to be found in church before everyone else, and standing in his place, without moving his feet, he would raise his entire mind to the heights of reflection on God, paying diligent heed to the Divine singing and reading; and he left church after everyone else. And all were astonished at his humility and patience, wherefore he was greatly loved by all and greatly revered and glorified.

Seeing himself thus revered and glorified by all, the Saint sorrowed greatly over this and thought of fleeing from human glory into the wilderness, there to labor for God alone, that he might be glorified by Him with eternal glory before the Angels and all the Saints. And so one day he went to the Abbot, according to custom, for blessing and prayer, and confessed to him the



THE ASCETIC LABORS OF ST. ALEXANDER AT VALAAM

Detail of a 16th-century icon of the Life of St. Alexander, showing the Saint hauling wood, fetching water, baking bread in the monastery bakery, and, in a secluded place deep in the woods, stripping to the waist and exposing his body to be eaten by mosquitoes





A 19th-century engraving of Valaam Monastery pilgrims on the way to "Holy Island," where Valaam tradition indicates the very site of St. Alexander's labors while a monk at Valaam.



A Valaam artist's drawing of the path leading up from the shore to St. Alexander's cave on "Holy Island," showing the Cross which the Saint himself made.



The Cross of St. Alexander, and the steps leading to the cave where he lived and prepared his grave. Photographed before the 2nd World War.

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sorrow of his heart and his thought, and falling to his feet, he entreated him to bless him to go into the wilderness. The Abbot, however, forbade him, saying: "No, child, do not say this, for you are young, and it is not the time for you to touch the highest stage of solitary silence, before having made your feet firm on the foundation of the first stage of the common life and obedience." St. Alexander submitted to the will of the Abbot, and begging forgiveness of him, he remained in obedience, laboring with the brethren, and if he saw someone unable to work, he helped him. And thus he served the brethren ceaselessly every day, and at night he remained without sleep, standing and praying to God. And the Abbot and the brethren were astonished at his hard life and his manful patience.

After this, one night St. Alexander was praying to God and His Most Pure Mother, entreating Her to instruct him on a way in which he might be saved, when suddenly he heard a voice saying: "Alexander, depart from hence and go to the place which was shown you before, in which you can be saved." With the voice a great light also appeared. The Saint opened the window of his cell and saw a great light shining toward the east and south, and by a voice, as by a finger, was pointed out that place whereon now by God's grace his monastery stands. From this voice and vision the Saint was filled with great joy and gave thanks to God that He had not disdained his entreaty. Soon he went to the Abbot, confessed to him the apparitions which he had seen on the way when he was walking to Valaam and now in the monastery. And the Abbot, hearing this and understanding that he was to be a certain chosen vessel, said: "May the will of the Lord be done in you, child." And the Saint, having received a blessing from the Abbot from whom he had received the monastic tonsure, was filled with great joy and tears, and going to his cell prayed for hours. And when night came, he arose and departed from the monastery, having nothing except the garment which he wore, and by God's favor he came in the year 1485 to the place which had been shown to him before. And he loved it very much, and having prayed he said: "Behold my repose unto the ages of ages; here I shall settle, for the Lord has desired it." And again: "Blessed be God from now unto the ages, Who has heard my entreaty." Having gone about that place, and seeing a beautiful spot and a certain bright ray of light illuminating it, where the monastery is now, he built a small hut there. And he began to live in that place alone, where no one before had lived, and paid heed ever to God alone. Ceaselessly, day and night, he showed forth his correction before God, remaining in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, in

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prayer and in vigil, and in extreme fastings, and in temptations and sorrows, as an unwavering pillar, being consoled with the hope of receiving future goods.

ONCE, WHEN he was going from his hut to fetch water and was singing the songs of David, as it was his custom ceaselessly to sing and pray, suddenly he heard a voice from heaven saying: "Alexander, as you have kept My commandments from your youth, you have fervently passed through a narrow and most sorrowful path; wherefore, I have prepared for you a countless multitude of people, as before I told you. Do not refuse them, but receive them with outstretched arms, and you shall be their instructor unto salvation." Hearing this, the Saint fell with his face to the ground, his mind, however, touching heaven, sending up songs of thanksgiving to God, entreating Him with tears that he might not receive glory from men, but remain in the wilderness and in silence. But the Lord did not desire that this great luminary should be hidden in the wilderness.

Not far from this wilderness, some nine miles, there lived a certain nobleman by the name of Andrew Zavalishin. Once he went out hunting with a company of his men and with dogs, and they came to a thicket of the forest, when suddenly a deer appeared before them. Andrew had his company chase the deer, but it ran very swiftly and the dogs could not catch up with it. In the pursuit Andrew became separated from the rest and chased it by himself. At last the deer became invisible in the thicket, and Andrew had turned to seek out his company, when he saw a small hut with human footprints around it, and he greatly rejoiced, thinking that some slave of God must be living here in silence. And going up to the hut he said a prayer and knocked on the door. St. Alexander came out and was frightened, thinking he saw a spirit; for he had never seen a man in that wilderness. The Saint, however, blessed him, and Andrew told him what had happened, adding: "And I believe that it was not a deer which I was pursuing, but a certain power of God that brought me to your holiness, that I might receive your holy blessing and prayer. For I should inform you that previously when I have gone out hunting in this wilderness, many times I have seen right on this spot, sometimes as it were a fiery pillar standing, and sometimes a certain Divine ray shining, and sometimes a bright smoke ascending from the earth to the heights. Many times I have attempted to come to this place to find out about this, but I could not, until God permitted it." And he asked the Saint about his life in the wilderness. Hearing this, St. Alexander was greatly grieved that he could not hide himself from

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men, and, making him promise with an oath not to tell anyone of him before his death, he told him of his life in this wilderness, where he had lived for seven years without seeing a man, living on plants alone, of how he had suffered greatly in the beginning from the difficulty of such a life, and of how he had been healed of a pain in the stomach by an Angel who appeared and made the sign of the Cross over the afflicted spot. Andrew, hearing this from the Saint, glorified God; and bowing down to the ground before him, he received his blessing and went to his home rejoicing.

After a little time the rumor of St. Alexander went about through all the neighboring region. For the pious Andrew did not wish to be silent about the greatness of God, but strove to glorify the Saint everywhere. Hearing about St. Alexander, his own brother in the flesh, John, came to him, for he had sought him for a long time. St. Alexander received him with love and greatly rejoiced over his coming; for from the time when he received the monastic mantle he had not seen him, and what is more, John in his life and manner was similar to St. Alexander. And they agreed to remain together in keeping God's commandments, following the words: *Where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them* (Matt. 18:20). And thus they greatly forced themselves, for the sake of the hope of the resurrection and the enjoyment of future goods, remembering the virtuous life and correction of many saints of old, striving to follow them, and ascending as by a ladder of good ascent to the heights. Then they began to build cells for those who wished to live with them; for many, emulating their angelic life, left this vain world and came to them. After a short time the Saint's brother John died, and his soul departed to the Lord Whom he had loved; and his body St. Alexander buried in the inner wilderness with psalms and spiritual songs.

Those who wished to live with him the Saint consoled with sweet teaching and strengthened for ascetic labor, his lips being informed by the Holy Spirit, saying: "Do not fear, O brethren, painful continence and the labor of fasting, nor this desert place and the narrow and sorrowful life! The present labors, bodily chastisement, and narrow life, and restraint of desires, and everything sorrowful which is for the sake of God, and tender feeling, and tears, and confessions of sins—prepare us to receive the enjoyment of those future goods." And all were filled with sweetness listening to his teaching, each striving with zeal according to his strength. And the number of the brethren increased, and each remained alone separately in silence, following their good pastor and teacher.



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After a little time Andrew Zavalishin again came to St. Alexander together with his children, bringing a load of bread and rye and barley, asking the Saint's blessing and prayers. The Saint blessed him and spoke to him for some time for his spiritual profit, before dismissing him in peace.\* Then he called the brethren together and showed them everything and said: "See, O brethren, how God cares for us His slaves who live in this wilderness, and how He has not forgotten us poor ones to the end, and will never disdain this place and those who live here faithfully serving him." From that time the Saint began to hew wood, and till the earth, and sow, and he ate from his own labor, and fed the poor and travellers, and gave generously to those who asked. And God gave him yet more increase, inasmuch as He wished to glorify His Saint.

A certain monk by the name of Nicephorus, having heard of St. Alexander, came to him and bowed down, asking his blessing. The Saint, seeing him, rejoiced, for he had heard of him as being of great life. This monk wore a great weight of iron about his whole body, and his loins were girt with much chain. The Saint entreated him to remain with him; and he, seeing the great fervency of the Saint, and his meekness of soul, and warm love, remained with him for some years. And St. Alexander, seeing him shining in virtues, received great profit for himself from him, and he thought that his arrival was truly a visitation of God to him. Finally this monk left, despite the entreaties of the Saint, to go to the Kiev Caves Monastery; and to the Saint he said, prophesying: "On this spot God wills that a stone church be built by you, and that the monastery be extended, and that in it His holy name be glorified in the whole land." And thus he went on his way.

**ST. ALEXANDER** began then to exercise himself in labors beyond the power of man, in hunger and thirst and endurance of cold, hoping by the brief frost of winter to escape the eternal fire to come. But the demons, seeing themselves pressed by the Saint, and understanding that they were about to be banished by him, attempted beforehand to frighten him, appearing sometimes as beasts and sometimes as serpents who rushed upon him with whistling and beastly ferocity, and causing him many other vexations. One night St. Alexander was walking to his solitary hermitage, where it was his custom to pray

\* Andrew Zavalishin (St. Adrian of Ondrusov) later became a disciple of St. Alexander and then founded his own monastery. He is commemorated by the Church on August 26 and May 17.

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by himself, when suddenly there appeared to him a countless multitude of demons, as it were a great army, leaping at him with great rage and gnashing their teeth, and a great flame seemed to come out of their mouths, and with great pride they cried at him: "Depart, depart from this place, flee quickly from here lest you die an evil death." But the Saint, like a good warrior of Jesus Christ, being armed with prayer, was not at all frightened by them, knowing their infirm power; and the prayer of St. Alexander came out of his mouth as a fiery flame and scorched all the impotent legions of demons, and then they became invisible.

St. Alexander came in that hour to the solitary hermitage, and there he performed his usual prayers to the Lord God. And suddenly an Angel appeared to him in a most bright garment. Seeing him the Saint was filled with fear and terror and fell to the ground and lay there like a dead man. The Angel took him by the hand and appeared to him as a man, saying: "I am an Angel of the Lord, sent by God to preserve you from all the deceptions of the cunning devil and to remind you of the Divine visions which came to you before in this place where you have settled, that His command may be executed: for the Lord has chosen you to be a guide for many to salvation. I declare to you that it is God's will that you build a church in this place in the name of the Holy Trinity, and that you gather brethren and establish a monastery." And having said this, he became invisible. St. Alexander, however, loving silence desired to remain in it all the days of his life, and all the more did he pray to God to deliver him from every deceit of the enemy.

Once, when the Saint had gone away from his hut some distance and was praying, as was his custom, for some hours, suddenly the Angel of the Lord again appeared to him, saying: "Alexander, as I have said before: build a church, and gather brethren, and establish a monastery; for many will come to you desiring to be saved; instruct them on the path of salvation." Having said this, he again became invisible.

And then, in the year 1508, the 23rd year after the Saint's coming to the wilderness, one night St. Alexander was standing in his solitary hermitage, praying to God according to his custom, when suddenly a great light appeared in the cabin where he stood. The Saint was astonished and thought to himself: "What does this mean?" And suddenly he saw three men coming to him in most bright garments and clothed in white, beautiful in purity, shining more than the sun and illuminated with unutterable heavenly glory, and each holding a staff in his hand. The Saint, seeing them, was all trembling; for fear and terror seized him. And coming to himself a little, he understood,

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and strove to bow down to the ground before them. But they, taking him by the hand, raised him up, saying: "Have hope, O blessed one, and do not fear." And the Saint said to them: "My Lords, if I have acquired grace before you, inform me who you are who, being in such glory and brightness, have not disdained to come to your slave; for I have never seen anyone in such glory as I see you." Answering him, they said again: "Fear not, man of desires, for the Holy Spirit has been pleased to dwell in you because of the purity of your heart, and just as I have said to you before repeatedly, so now I likewise say, that you shall build a church, and gather brethren, and establish a monastery; for I have been pleased to save many souls through you and bring them to the knowledge of the truth."

Hearing this, the Saint again bent his knees, and being drenched with tears, said: "My Lord, who am I, a sinner, the worst of all men, that I should be worthy of such a matter as that of which Thou hast spoken to me; for I am unworthy to accept such a mission. For I, unworthy one, did not come to this place for that concerning which Thou commandest me, but rather to weep over my sins." This the Saint said, and lay upon the ground. And again the Lord, taking him by the hand, raised him up, saying: "Stand upon your feet, be able, and be strengthened, and do all that I have commanded you." The Saint answered: "My Lord, be not angry at me, that I have dared to speak before Thee; inform me by what name this church shall be called which Thy love of mankind desires to build on this spot." And the Lord said to the Saint: "Beloved, as you see the One speaking to you in three persons, build the church in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, the Trinity One in essence." Then He said again: "I leave you My peace, and My peace I grant unto you." And suddenly the Saint saw the Lord with spread wings going on the ground as if by feet, and then He became invisible."

And St. Alexander was overcome with much joy and with fear, and he gave great thanksgiving for this to God the Lover of mankind. He began to think about how and in what spot he should place the church. After thinking much of this and praying to God, one day he suddenly heard a voice speaking to him from above. Looking upward, the Saint saw an Angel of God in a mantle and hood standing on the air, having outstretched wings, in the same way in which once he appeared to the great Pachomius,\* with his arms stretched upward and saying: "One is Holy, One is Lord, Jesus Christ, unto the glory of God the Father. Amen." And then he said to the Saint: "Alexander, let

\* St. Pachomius the Great (†348, com. May 15), to whom the Angel appeared and gave the first Rule of cenobitic life.

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the church be built on this spot in the name of the Lord Who appeared to you in three persons, Father and Son and Holy Spirit, undivided Trinity." And having said this, he signed that place with his hand in the form of a cross, and then became invisible. St. Alexander greatly rejoiced over this and glorified God that He had not disdained his entreaty, and on this spot he erected a cross.

**T**HEN DID St. Alexander undertake greater labors, taking care for the building of the church, and for the gathering of brethren, and for the establishment of a monastery. The number of brethren increased, and the monastery was well on its way to being built by the good favor of Almighty God, but there was then no priest in the monastery; and the brethren considered this very grievous and entreated St. Alexander to accept the priestly rank. The Saint, however, refused, saying: "This matter is above my strength." But concerning this the brethren entreated Archbishop Serapion of Great Novgorod, that he might command St. Alexander to accept the priestly rank. And Archbishop Serapion exhorted him to accept the priestly rank, having heard of his virtuous life. The Saint, even against his will, yielded to the exhortation of the Archbishop and the entreaty of the brethren, and by the laying on of the Archbishop's hands was made worthy of the priesthood. The Archbishop gave the Saint also his blessing to build a church, and having conversed with him for some time from the Divine Scriptures as to what a shepherd should be, and concerning much else that was of spiritual profit, he dismissed him in peace. And St. Alexander came to his monastery and took yet greater care for his flock of Christ's sheep which had been entrusted to him, and he undertook the building of the church. Coming with the brethren to the place previously indicated by the Angel, he prayed and began to build a small wooden church. And when the church was finished, the Saint sent two of his disciples, Theodore and Tikhon, to Great Novgorod, to entreat the Bishop concerning the sanctification of the church and concerning those things needful for the sanctification. And he gave them his blessing and what was needful for the sanctification. And thus the church of the Holy Trinity was sanctified.

St. Alexander ever blossomed in virtues; even though he had received the chief place, he did not change his rule but rather undertook yet greater labors, and yet more was he adorned by humility, making of himself an example for all. Wherefore, the monastery expanded, and the number of the brethren increased, and many of the nobles came to him for his blessing and prayers and gave him of their possessions for the building of the monastery. As for



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the rest of his labors and his advancement in virtues, it is not possible to speak here in detail; for he shone like a great lamp by the grace of the Holy Spirit which dwelt in him, and blossomed like a fragrant rose with spiritual fruits. And the Saint was seen as an Angel dwelling in the flesh, and he labored every day in the monastery's labors, working with his hands. He also went to the bakery, mixing the dough and baking bread, and making himself equal to the bread-bakers.

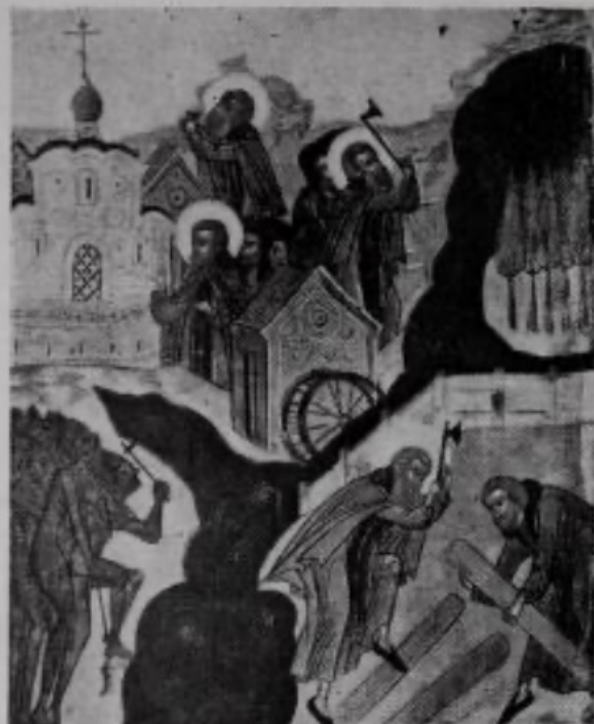
Once, when the feast of the Most Holy Trinity was at hand, those who were preparing what was needful for the guests found that there was no water at hand. The cellarer, whose name was Romanus, went to inform St. Alexander, so that he might command some of the brethren who were idle to bring water. But the Saint himself quickly arose and began to bring water from the lake to the kitchen. One of the brethren, seeing the Saint carrying water, went quickly to inform the brethren who were idle, and they went out with fervor, begging forgiveness of him, and carried water until there was an abundance. Again, it happened that there was no firewood in the kitchen for cooking. The cellarer went to inform the Saint, so that he would command one of the brethren who was idle to prepare firewood. Hearing this, the Saint said to him: "Brother, I am idle" (for he had ordered the brethren to go on some work); and taking an axe, he began to cut firewood. Certain of the brethren, seeing from their cells the Saint thus laboring, also took their axes and cut the wood according to need.

Sometimes the Saint would go at night to the workroom where the brethren milled grain for bread, and, the brethren being still asleep, he would see the portion of grain prepared for each brother, and taking it he would mill it and put it back in the same place, and go out to his cell. Thus did the Saint do many times. For the Saint had a rule for the brethren, that at night each would mill his own portion of grain before morning psalmody, and then they would begin the psalmody; and afterwards each would go out to the work assigned to him, and then again gather to sing the hours and hear the Divine Liturgy; and afterwards they would again go out to work. And laboring thus every day, they remained in love and fear of God, emulating in everything their spiritual shepherd and teacher. And he, as a true shepherd, showed himself as an example to them of all virtues, for he had true humility and great meekness, emulating in everything the Chief Shepherd, Christ. He considered himself to be one of the least ones and endured all sorrows with meekness. He was the first to be found in church and left the last of all. Never did he lie on a rug or pour water upon his body, but only washed his hands. His garment was



THE APPARITION OF THE HOLY TRINITY TO ST. ALEXANDER

This 17th-century icon from the icon-painting school of the Olonets area, is very likely a product of the icon workshop of St. Alexander's monastery.



THE BUILDING OF THE MILL ON THE SVIR RIVER

Detail of a 16th-century icon of the Life of St. Alexander, showing the Saint (top left) praying concerning the plan of it, then (top right) felling trees for the building of the mill, (left) with prayer stopping the rushing of the waters while his brethren watch in awe, and (bottom) building the fence around it out of logs

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simple and crude and much-patched. And many, seeing him unbecomingly clothed, thoughtlessly reproached him, reviling him. But the Saint accepted this reproach with joy.

The Saint had the custom every night to go about all the cells, desiring to find out how each one lived. And if he noticed anyone praying, or reading books, or performing handiwork in silence, he glorified God for such a one. But if anywhere he heard two or three gathered together and talking, there he would knock on the door, thus announcing that he had come, and then go away. And the next day he would call them and chastise them. He did not accuse them at once, but would speak to them as from a distance by means of parables, wishing to ascertain the warmth of their soul toward God. And if the brother would have a pure heart and open faith toward God and warm love, he would soon acknowledge his guilt, and falling down would beg forgiveness of him. But if the brother's heart should be covered over by a diabolic darkening, he would stand and think that he was talking of someone else, considering himself pure, until the Saint would accuse him and, having chastised him meekly from the Divine Scriptures and laid a penance on him, let him go.

Thus did the Saint ever have great care for the flock entrusted to him by God. He taught the brethren ever to pay heed to the salvation of their souls, and to pray diligently to God, and not to converse after the prayer of Compline, and not to go from cell to cell, but to remain in their cells in silence, and pray to God for the salvation of their souls and for all men, to have handiwork and have ever the Psalms of David on their lips. Chastising them, the Saint would speak to them with exhortation thus: "It befits us, brethren, who are called monks, always to weep over our sins and offer a pure repentance to the Lord God Who is powerful to cleanse us of our sins; for there is no sin which conquers God's love of mankind. Wherefore, brethren, let us fall down before Him often with tears and confess to Him our sins, and He will save us with eternal salvation. For repentance is the way and the key to the Kingdom of Heaven, without which no one can enter into it. Let us keep to this path, O brethren; for the path now in this short life is narrow and sorrowful, but later in that endless future life there shall be abundant and unutterable rewards." And the brethren, as earth thirsting for water, received the word of his instruction, bringing forth the fruits of their labors to God, some a hundredfold, some sixtyfold, and some thirtyfold. And their life was like that of Angels, for they emulated in everything, each according to his strength, their shepherd and teacher.



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The rumor of their good life spread through all the neighboring region, and many Christ-loving people came to St. Alexander, some to confess their sins to him and receive great benefit from his God-inspired teaching; others desiring to receive his blessing; still others to ask concerning matters which perplexed them; and others seeking healing for various infirmities and sorrows. And the Saint, being filled with the grace of the Holy Spirit, gave inexhaustibly what was profitable for them, according to their desire, and not one did he send away empty; wherefore they gave him of their possessions for the feeding of the brethren and the building of the monastery.

**T**HE SAINT came to the wilderness desiring to live alone in silence, and so when, by the Providence of the All-seeing God, the brethren chosen by Him had increased and the monastery had become quite large, there was no place near the monastery convenient for the building of a mill, of which there was great need, for at the time of harvest the monks milled their own flour by hand. For this reason some of the brethren murmured against the Saint, that because of his lack of forethought they were burdened by so much labor. The Saint replied to them with meekness: "Brethren, I wished to live alone in this place in silence, but God has been pleased to erect a monastery to His glory. Wherefore I entreat you: labor in your prayers and do not grow faint, and let us allow God to take care for us."

Then the Saint began to think to himself how he might build a mill according to God, for the need and the repose of the brethren from many labors. Now there was below the monastery a deep lake, with much water, and another lake level with the monastery high up the mountain, which likewise had much water and was not far from the monastery. The distance between the lakes was as the distance an arrow might be shot, or twice that far. And at a favorable time the Saint took the eldest among the brethren and went down the slope of the hill with them into the thick of the forest, from the edge of the upper lake, and from there, after praying, he began to dig, making a way for a river toward the monastery from the upper lake to the lower. And he commanded all the brethren to take their shovels and dig. And while they were digging, suddenly the water rushed down in its descent from the upper lake to the lower with a great noise and roaring, as if it were going to gouge a great pit below the monastery. The Saint and the brethren, seeing such an extraordinary rushing of water, thought that the monastery would be washed away. And bending his knees, the Saint began to pray to God, saying: "O God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, we sinners pray to Thee: hear us, Thine unworthy slaves, in this hour; reveal Thy power as Thou didst perform

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the miracle in Colosse through the Archangel Michael by Thy powerful right arm, restraining the rushing of much water within a small rock;\* likewise now reveal Thy power, restrain these waters, that all may understand how Thou hearest those who fear Thee and glorify Thy thrice-holy name of Father and Son and Holy Spirit, now and ever and unto the ages of ages. Amen." Then he called in a loud voice on the name of Christ our God, and made the sign of the Cross with his right hand over the rushing rapids of the waters; and immediately the water stopped in its course. The brethren and all who saw this rejoiced exceedingly and glorified God Who had given grace to His Saint to perform a most glorious miracle; and they built on this stream of water a mill together with a crusher to serve the brethren and the monastery's need.

Then again the monastery expanded, for the sake of the virtuous life of St. Alexander and the miracles which he performed. For the Saint went from strength to strength, as if having a certain natural power of growth, and he became glorified with yet greater glory. And God put into his heart the good thought of building a stone church to the honor and glory of His thrice-holy Divine Name. But the brethren, hearing of this from him, began to be displeased with the Saint, saying: "Do you not know, O Father, that this place is sorrowful and poor, and how shall we have such boldness to prepare what is needful for such an undertaking?" The Saint, however, was not at all disturbed by this, nor did he grieve, but rather exhorted them with meekness, saying: "I only entreat you, brethren, that we make the beginning of this undertaking, and God Who loves mankind will grant us inexhaustibly all that is needful; for it is man's to begin, but God's to complete." And coming to a certain place, he prayed to God Who had favored his monastery to be built, and began to dig the earth, and he found clay quite near the monastery. And he rejoiced greatly, and guarding himself with faith and placing his hope in God, he began to make bricks, and likewise to prepare other necessary supplies for the construction. Then he sent three of his disciples, Anthony, Leontius, and Herodion, to the Autocrat himself, Great Prince Basil Ioannovich, with the petition that he might send skilled workmen for the building of the church. And the Christ-loving Great Prince with joy gave an abundance of what was needful for the building of the church and monastery, and skilled workmen, and a supervisor for the work.

\* When pagans attempted to destroy the church of the Archangel by directing a torrent of water against it, the Archangel himself appeared and with a blow of his staff opened a fissure which swallowed up the water. This event is commemorated by the Church on September 6.

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And thus the wise shepherd, St. Alexander, expanded the monastery yet more, and commanded that cells be built in the form of a square, and the church was in the center of the monastery on the place where in the beginning the Angel of the Lord had commanded him to build a large church in the name of the Holy Trinity, and it was visible from everywhere as in a mirror. Then he entreated Archbishop Macarius of Great Novgorod concerning the sanctification of the church, and by his command the church was sanctified. Then he built surpassingly a refectory and other buildings needful for the brethren.

**D**IVERSE ARE the gifts of the Holy Spirit, as the divine Apostle says, and to everyone is given what is for profit, according to his faith (I Cor. 12). Thus also our holy Father Alexander acquired much faith toward God and exhibited before Him many and various virtues. Therefore he received from Him much grace and diverse workings in the Holy Spirit: for he gave comfort to the sorrowing, healing to the infirm, correction to sinners, and understood what was hidden, and prophesied the future as if present, and gave inexhaustibly every benefit to all; for there was in his heart a source of living water.

In the year 1525, the fortieth year after the Saint's coming to the wilderness, a certain man by the name of Daniel came into a terrible affliction. He was pious and filled with the fear of God, and he was a spiritual son and benefactor of St. Alexander, living twenty miles from his monastery. His affliction worsened, and for seven days he was as if dead. On the eighth day he moved on his bed and began to groan and be frightened; but he could not say anything, and thus he remained for eight days, and then he began to speak. And he began to tell those who were present how that, on the seventh night of his terrible affliction, two Angels had come for his soul, but then had been forbidden to take it by a voice from above. "And I began to entreat them: 'O holy Angels of God! Have mercy on me, and show me in what rank our holy Father and teacher Alexander is, and in what place is the eternal dwelling prepared for him.' And they, so that I would not grieve, carried me to the east, to a certain bright and most glorious place, filled with all joy and fragrance, and they showed me there the dwellings prepared by God for many Saints. And again, taking me from there, the holy Angels carried me to another most glorious and beautiful place, filled with all good things which it is impossible to express in words. And I saw in the midst of those beautiful

The unexpected encounter of St. Alexander and St. Adrian, then Prince Andrew.

A popular 19th-century illustration from *The Russian Pilgrim*.



ST ADRIAN, ABBOT OF ONDRUSOV MONASTERY

A popular 19th-century lithograph-icon showing St. Adrian praying for his monastery as it appeared at the turn of this century.





The Holy Trinity Cathedral in St. Alexander's Monastery



The Reliquary of St. Alexander in the Holy Transfiguration Church

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things a wondrous city, built of pure gold and precious stones, and in it winged men were singing terrible and most sweet hymns, and there was joy and rejoicing unutterable. And the Angels led me into that great joy and into the most bright city; and suddenly I saw in the midst of that city our holy Father and teacher Alexander sitting on a throne in great glory, and on his head was a crown of gold adorned with precious stones and diverse flowers, and his face shone as the sun, and his garments were white as the light; and about him were his rejoicing disciples as well-speaking swallows, and their garments were also white as the light. And I, when I saw him sitting in such glory, was all the more overcome by terror and joy, and I came with fear and bowed down to the ground before him, and said: 'Bless me, my holy Father and spiritual teacher.' And he, looking upon me and blessing me, said to me: 'May God bless you, child Daniel; what have you come here to ask?' I replied to him: 'I also would wish to be here, if you have mercy on me, my holy Father.' And he said to me: 'If you wish to be here, go back and labor in asceticism.' And again the Angels took me back to a certain place on the bank of a river [which was near his village] and showed me there a new church, and then became invisible. And I found myself again on my bed."

And when the Lord had relieved this Daniel of his affliction, he came to the monastery and informed the Saint in detail of what he had seen. When he heard this, St. Alexander smiled a little, and then burst into tears and said to him: "Yea, my child Daniel, you saw a holy Angel who appeared in my form; but I am sinful, and how can I receive such a gift from God as He has prepared for His Saints? I say to you, my child: preserve what you have seen as long as I shall be alive." And receiving the blessing of the Saint, Daniel returned to his home, rejoicing and glorifying God Who had glorified His Saint. And on the place where the Angels had placed him he built a church in the name of St. John Chrysostom, in the form which had been shown him then by the Angels. This vision occurred eight years before the repose of St. Alexander.

But the more God glorified His Saint, the more did the latter humble himself before God and men, knowing that not otherwise will one inherit future eternal glory than by first subduing the pride of the flesh under the feet of the soul's humility of wisdom. Therefore, he labored in all the monastery works like the least servant of the monastery; and he was clothed in a garment so poor and old that visitors could not recognize that he was the abbot but took him for one of the poor ones.

SUCH WAS THE LIFE of blessed Alexander, and such was the grace of God which was active in him. A few years before the repose of this marvellous wonderworker, God placed in his heart the good thought of building a splendid stone church to the honor and glory of our Most Holy Lady Mother of God and Ever-Virgin Mary, in the name of Her honorable and glorious Protection. And thus he began the work, and entreated the help of the Autocrat for the building of the church, and having received this, soon placed the foundation of the church.

Then one night, the Saint was praying his usual rule before the Icon of the Most Holy Mother of God, and he prayed long and with tender feeling and tears. He sang also the canon of thanksgiving, which is the Akathist. After this he sat a little to rest, and he said to his disciple Athanasius: "Child, be sober and vigilant; for in this hour there will be a wondrous and terrible visitation." And suddenly he heard a great voice: "Behold, the Lord comes, and She Who gave Him birth." The Saint went quickly to the balcony of his cell, and a great light shone upon him and likewise upon the whole monastery, brighter than the sun's rays. And the Saint, looking up, saw the Most Holy Mother of God upon the foundation of the church of Her honorable Protection, in the place of the Altar, as a Queen sitting upon a throne, holding our Lord Jesus Christ as a child in Her arms, and around Her a multitude of Angelic choirs stood and shone in unutterable brightness. When the Saint saw this wondrous vision, he fell down upon the ground and could not look at that unutterable light, being seized with fear and terror. But the Most Holy Mother of God, speedy helper of all Christians, said to him: "Arise, chosen one of My Son and God; for I have come to visit you, My beloved, and to view the foundation of My church; the prayer of your lips has been heard, sorrow no more. And as you have prayed for your disciples and for your monastery, behold, from henceforth they shall abound in everything; and not only during your lifetime, but after your departure also, I shall be always with your monastery, giving what is needful inexhaustibly. Behold and see carefully, how many are the monks who have come into your flock, who are to be instructed by you in the path of salvation in the name of the Holy Trinity." The Saint arose: seeing and being astonished at the unutterable apparition of the Mother of God, he saw a multitude of his monks going to the foundation of Her church, some bringing stones and some bricks and some other things for the building of the church. And again the Most Holy Mother of God said to him: "My beloved, if anyone bring even a single brick for the building of My church in the Name of Jesus Christ My Son and God, he will not lose his reward." And having said this, She became invisible.

The Saint, from the fearful and unutterable vision and from hearing the voice of the Mother of God, was terrified and was all trembling from fear, and scarcely coming to himself, he found his disciple Athanasius lying on the ground from fear, like a dead man, and he raised him up. His disciple began to weep and lament and to throw himself at the Saint's feet, saying: "Inform me, Father, what kind of wondrous and terrible vision this was, at which my soul all but separated from its union with the flesh because of that unutterable, brilliant light." And the Saint, greatly rejoicing in soul, his face radiant from this joy, could say nothing but: "Wait, child, while my spirit trembles from this wondrous vision." And standing, he marvelled at the vision; and in a little while he said: "Go, child, and ask my spiritual father Isaiah to come." And when Isaiah had come, he confessed to him everything in detail. Hearing this, Isaiah was filled with great joy, and praised God. The Saint remained that whole night without sleep, paying heed within himself to the unutterable vision. And he confessed it also to me, humble Herodion, as if it had occurred to someone else and not himself.

At last this earthly angel and heavenly man, our holy Father Alexander, who had travelled with love of labor from his youth in the steps of Christ's commandments, and had drawn near to the Lord Whom he loved by a narrow and sorrowful path, attained an honorable and great old age. And a year before his departure from this brief life into eternal life, having foreseen his approaching death by the Holy Spirit, he called together the brethren, saying to them: "Behold now, O brethren, the end of my life approaches, and my departure from this world is near. I give you over into the hands of the living God and the Most Pure Mother of God. May He preserve you and confirm you in His love; and may the Most Pure Virgin Mother of God, by Her superb intercession, deliver you from all the attacks of visible and invisible enemies." And they, hearing such words from the lips of their beloved teacher, grieved sorely and were filled with lamentation and tears. And the Saint, as a child-loving father, comforted them and said: "Even if I am departing from you in body, yet in spirit I shall be inseparably with you. And may you understand this: If I have acquired grace before God, this monastery after my death also shall not at all grow poor, by the prayers of our Most Blessed Lady the Mother of God and Ever-Virgin Mary, if you shall remain in the commandments of God and there shall be love among you. I leave you in place of myself four brethren who are priest-monks, Isaiah, Nicodemus, Leontius, and Herodion, and of these whichever God desires and Archbishop Macarius shall bless, may he be abbot for you in my stead. Submit to him and do everything according



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to his command, and remain void of offense in Orthodoxy, and have oneness of mind toward each other, and preserve purity of soul and body."

And again, when the time came for his departure to the Lord, he instructed the brethren much for their spiritual profit, saying: "Behold, I am departing from you; but I entrust you to Almighty God and His Most Pure Mother: may She be for you a refuge and wall from all the attacks of the enemy." The brethren wept and lamented at the separation from their most sweet teacher. And they asked him, where they should bury his honorable body after his repose. And he commanded them, saying: "My beloved brethren, I entreat you to do this: bind my sinful body by the feet with a rope, and drop it into the midst of the marsh, and having put it into the moss, trample on it with your feet." But they said: "No, Father, we cannot do this." And they entreated him with tears that they might bury his body in the monastery near the church of the Holy Trinity. Then the Saint said to them: "If, brethren, you will not do this, then bury me near the church of the Lord's Transfiguration." (That church was in the Saint's solitary hermitage, one or two arrows' span from the monastery.) And having prayed to the Lord for the peace of the world, and for the good condition of the holy Churches, and for his monastery, and having bestowed upon the brethren his last kiss, he spoke his final words: "O Lord, into Thy hands I commend my spirit," and he reposed; and his holy soul ascended to the Lord Whom he had loved from his youth.

And all the brethren who were in the monastery wept and lamented greatly, not being able to bear the separation from their good shepherd and teacher. And they sorrowed over him so much that, if it had been possible, they were ready to die together with him. His honorable body which had labored so much in life, they placed honorably and reverently upon a couch, and they accompanied it with psalms and hymns, pouring out fountains of tears. And the face of the Saint shone, not as is usual for the dead, but as if he were alive, showing his purity of soul and the reward which he had received from the Lord. And thus they buried him honorably, weeping and lamenting, and reverently singing the funeral hymns, in his solitary hermitage near the church of the Transfiguration of the Lord, at the right side of the Altar. The Saint had lived for 85 years in all, and he reposed in the year 1533, on the 30th day of August. And this precious treasure, his honorable and holy body, remained in the heart of the earth, and it gives forth, like an ever-flowing spring, an un-failing stream of healings for all who come with faith to his honorable grave. May this account of his life and miracles be for the benefit of those who hear it and to the glory of the Holy Trinity, Father and Son and Holy Spirit, and to the praise of this marvellous new wonderworker, our holy Father Alexander. Amen.



The St. Alexander of Svir Monastery (18th-century engraving).  
Left: the Church of the Transfiguration, where the Saint's relics reposed.  
Right: the original monastery with the church of the Holy Trinity.

## St. Alexander's Disciples

BY 1547, fourteen years after his death, there was already a church service in honor of St. Alexander, and in 1559 a wing of a church in Moscow was dedicated to him.

Under Abbot Theodoritus (1615-1628) the monastery of St. Alexander with its churches was destroyed by the invading Germans and Lithuanians, and 27 of the monks, together with 32 lay servants of the monastery, received martyrs' crowns at this time. As soon as order was restored to Russia, however, by order of Tsar Michael Romanov the monastery was re-established and a new church of the Holy Trinity was built. In 1641, in place of the destroyed church of the Transfiguration, a new stone church was built, and while excavations were being made for its foundation, on April 17 of that year, the relics of St. Alexander were uncovered and found to be incorrupt. In 1643 a silver reliquary was built for them, in which they reposed until the Revolution.

St. Alexander had many holy disciples. Among them may be mentioned: ST. ADRIAN OF ONDRUSOV (Aug. 26) was the very Andrew Zavalishin who discovered St. Alexander in his wilderness. Under the Saint's influence he left the world and became a monk in Valaam Monastery, where he spent several years. Later, with the Saint's blessing, he led a hermit's life on a peninsula of

## THE NORTHERN THEBAID

Lake Ladoga, where disciples soon joined him. His holy life converted the chiefs of two nearby robber bands. He died a martyr, being killed in the wilderness by robbers (1549). After two years he appeared in sleep to several of his disciples, who found his body incorrupt (May 17).

ST. ATHANASIIUS OF SYANDEM (Jan. 18, † after 1550) was a disciple of St. Alexander on Valaam, and later he rejoined the Saint in the monastery of the Holy Trinity. He was present when the Mother of God appeared to the Saint. Later he founded a hermitage not far from St. Adrian, with whom he was in close contact, and died as a hermit on an island in Lake Syandem.

ST. GENNADIUS OF VAZHE LAKE (Jan. 8 and Feb. 9, † 1516) was St. Alexander's disciple when the latter was still living alone. After several years the Saint blessed him to live as a hermit, and he spent the rest of his life laboring in a cave-cell not far away, on Vazhe Lake. Near the end of his life he accepted a few disciples, and the Lord revealed to him that later there would be a church and a monastery on this site.

ST. NICEPHORUS OF VAZHE LAKE (Feb. 9, † 1550), mentioned in St. Alexander's Life, joined the Saint after the latter's monastery had been founded and was once sent by the Saint to spend eight days in spiritual converse with St. Cyril of New Lake. After a pilgrimage to Kiev, St. Nicephorus returned to found a monastery on the site of St. Gennadius' labors. He gathered many brethren and died in peace.

ST. MACARIUS OF OREDEZH (Aug. 9) founded the Dormition Hermitage not far from his Elder's monastery, on the river Oredzh; he died peacefully in the year 1532.

STs. IGNATIUS, LEONID, DIONYSIUS, THEODORE, THEOPHAN, CORNELIUS, AND ATHANASIIUS of the Oyat Hermitage near the Svir River. This monastery was erected on the place where the parents of St. Alexander were buried.

ST. MACARIUS THE ROMAN (Jan. 19 and Aug. 15; † 1550) came from the West seeking the true Church, and he found what he sought as a disciple of St. Alexander. Later he lived as a hermit, and disciples gathered around him. (See *The Orthodox Word*, 1972, no. 1.) See icon and illustrations on opposite page.

The monastery of St. Alexander continued to flourish during the following centuries, and it even survived the 18th-century persecution of monasticism which Peter I and Catherine II perpetrated through their reforms. But a new period of spiritual revival began for the monastery with the arrival of Schema-monk Theodore, the disciple of Blessed Paisius Velichkovsky and the elder of Starets Lev of Optina, the spiritual link between Blessed Paisius and Valaam Monastery:



ST. MACARIUS THE ROMAN OF NOVGOROD, disciple of St. Alexander, and the Dormition church of his monastery, where his relics were treasured until 1932, when the monastery was destroyed by the Soviets.



The board pathway leading through the marshes to the little island where St. Macarius built his first cell and laid the foundation of his monastery.





## ST. ALEXANDER OF SVIR

**SCHEMA-MONK THEODORE** (†1822), the disciple of Blessed Paisius, after many years of wanderings found peace in St. Alexander's monastery, where he was granted wonderful revelations foretelling his repose. His relics subsequently were found incorrupt. Next to him were buried his holy disciples:

**SCHEMA-HIEROMONKS MELETIUS** (†1877) and **ANTIOCH** (†1832), **MONK IGNATIUS**, and **HIEROMONK BARTHOLOMEW** (1864); the latter received the tonsure in Blessed Paisius' Niametz Monastery and then lived on Valaam.

**ARCHIMANDRITE AGATHANGELUS** (1909), a monk from Valaam, after being made Abbot, labored much for his beloved St. Alexander's Monastery. He was instrumental in preserving contact with Valaam's "Holy Island" Skete of St. Alexander, where there dwelt many recluses and schema-monks, such as the unknown schema-elder seen on the opposite page. (This photograph, taken before 1900, shows the cave and the Cross of St. Alexander.)

**NEW-MARTYR ABBOT EUGENE** (†1918) and with him five leading Fathers of the Monastery met a martyr's death, as testified to in 1922 by Prof. Jacob L. Barskov: "During the Paschal period in 1918 a band of armed Red Army soldiers broke into the holy Monastery with cursing and blasphemies and demanded from the Abbot, the treasurer and the steward the keys to the Monastery treasury. The Fathers tried as much as they could to reason with them and protect the Monastery's belongings. The band did not like this, and they condemned the monks to be executed by shooting. They forced the six Fathers to dig a pit as a grave for themselves right in the middle of the Monastery court. When the pit was dug, the victims were placed next to it and the soldiers aimed their guns at them. It was the third day of Pascha. The martyrs asked their executioners to allow them to sing 'Christ is Risen'; this not being allowed, they began to sing anyway, and just at this time the soldiers began to shoot. The monks fell dead into the pit. The father steward had a large black beard, and it at once turned gray as he was standing before the pit. Then the band went to the church, where they sacrilegiously took the holy relics of St. Alexander and burned them. All this was seen by the Korelian novice John, who had hidden in the attic and saw everything from there."

The Monastery was subsequently closed, being turned at first into a "Pedagogical Technical Institute" (as an excuse to confiscate the whole library and other valuables), and then into a concentration camp with a slave-labor sawmill, where at one time Orthodox clergy abounded, especially members of the catacomb Josephite Church.

Thus St. Alexander endured martyrdom even after his death in his holy relics, thereby partaking of the suffering of Orthodox Christians under the inhuman, anti-Christian Communist Yoke.



THE LIFE OF  
*Saint Anthony of Siya*

DESERT-DWELLER OF THE NORTHERN DVINA\*

Commemorated December 7

SAINT ANTHONY OF SIYA is one of the many Saints who looked upon St. Cyril of White Lake and his testament as an example for emulation. Following in everything St. Cyril and the ascetics of the Northern Thebaid, he was, just like them, a follower of the hesychast school of "sobriety," and this is underlined in his Life, where the "inward activity" (of Jesus Prayer) is mentioned, to which the Saint "paid diligent heed." For the sake of silence and vision he went to a desert island. All of his instructions, words, and the facts written in his Life bear witness that the Saint was penetrated through and through with the Gospel teaching. In him there stands out a trait characteristic of all the Saints of St. Cyril's school: unacquisitiveness.

Like the other ascetics of the Northern Thebaid, he sought out a location which might inspire in the soul an elevated feeling, a feeling of God's presence. Yet the same wilderness that moved and exalted the soul was at the same time a threatening power, full of every possible danger. However, he lived even in the midst of wild beasts unharmed, having attained the state of dispassion. He lived in the midst of deep snow "as in a cave."

Where did St. Anthony and others acquire such strength that they could thus conquer the very laws of nature? Even as earlier St. Paul of Obnora, he was "a chosen vessel of the Holy Spirit." And here is the key to the Saint's supernatural life: he lived, as St. Seraphim of Sarov was to explain it centuries later to Motovilov, having acquired the grace of the Holy Spirit...

IVAN M. KONTZEVITCH

\* The Life has been compiled and translated from the condensations of the ancient Life which are to be found in the Russian *Lives of Saints* (Supplementary Volume, Dec. 7) and in the periodical *Russky Palomnik*, 1895.



ST. ANTHONY OF SIYA

KONTAKION, TONE 8

FROM THY YOUTH, O Saint, thou didst refine thy flesh in fastings and prayers,\* and taking up thy cross, thou didst follow after Christ.\* Wherefore thou didst joyfully finish thy course even to the heights,\* where with all the Saints thou dost stand before the Holy Trinity;\* and now, visiting thy flock, remember those who honor thy holy memory,\* that we all in thanksgiving may cry out to thee:\* rejoice, O divinely-wise Anthony, instructor of the desert.





On the wide Northern Dvina River, in the vicinity of St. Anthony's wanderings: fishing boats in the midnight sun of summer



An old engraving of the city of Archangelsk



*Thou wast born in a humble hut and  
didst walk as a citizen of the Heavenly  
Jerusalem. Simple wast thou, a tiller of  
the land, namesake of the First-called  
of the Apostles and emulator of him.  
Akathist to St. Anthony: First Ikos*

**S**AINTE ANTHONY of Siya was born in the year 1477 in the village of Kecht, which is thirty miles from the city of Archangelsk on the banks of the Dvina River, and in holy Baptism he was called Andrew in honor of the holy Apostle Andrew the First-called (November 30). The parents of the Saint of Christ, whose ancestors were from Novgorod, were peasants who were quite well-to-do by the standards of that time. His father's name was Nicephorus and his mother's Agatha. While laboring in their occupation, they nonetheless did not give themselves over entirely to worldly cares, but they found time for prayers and good deeds. Keeping strict watch over the purity of their hearts, and preserving a God-pleasing order in their family life, the pious couple often visited the temple of God, made large contributions for its benefit, and fervently entreated the Lord that He might give them children. The Lord heard their prayer and gave them a first-born son, Andrew. Later they had other children also, sons and daughters, but they all yielded the first place to Andrew, both in mental and moral qualities and in outward appearance. Andrew was handsome of face, tall, and had good health. The moral qualities of his meek soul disposed the hearts of his near ones in his favor.

From his earliest years Andrew was quiet, mild, and meek, and it is not astonishing that he was very much loved by his parents. When he was seven years old his parents sent him to learn reading and writing. To the astonishment of his teacher, the child quickly learned reading and writing and came to

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love the reading of Divine books. And besides this, his loving parents gave him the opportunity to study the painting of icons. Farm labors no longer attracted Andrew; but with greater love and zeal he gave himself over to his beloved occupations—he painted icons and read whatever books of a spiritual and instructive nature he could receive in his village. With certainty one may assume that in these years he became acquainted, in addition to the service books, with other writings of the Holy Fathers as well; he could encounter these in the collections of Holy Fathers which were widely circulated at this time. It is known that later, in his monastery, there was a large library, and the writings of the Holy Fathers occupied the first place in it. These occupations strengthened in the soul of Andrew even more those pious habits and dispositions which were instilled in his childhood by his parents.

The time came when his parents grew old and, sensing the approach of death, they gathered all their children together and exhorted them to live piously. "Children," they said, "behold, we have come to deep old age, and severe afflictions have come upon us, as you see yourselves, and death already stands before our eyes. We entrust you to God and His Most Pure Mother. They will take care for you throughout your life and will be your Helpers in all your deeds. And you, children, live in all respects in the way in which you have seen us living. May the mercy of the Lord be with you unto the ages." With special love and in detail they instructed also their first-born son Andrew, and then in peace they departed to the Lord, having travelled the earthly path irreproachably. At this time Andrew was 25 years old.

After the death of his parents the blessed Andrew settled in Novgorod and spent five years there, serving a certain nobleman. This nobleman was likewise pious and a good man. He came to love the labor-loving Andrew very much, and he gave him his own daughter for a wife. But it was not for long that the Lord ordained this pious union to continue: within a year the wife of Andrew died. Soon his father-in-law died also. The loss of these dear ones served as a sign for the orphaned-one of the Divine Will: that he, having left the world, should entirely follow Christ. Having become a stranger to everything worldly, to worldly joys and entertainments, and having become accustomed to spending his life in attending church, the thought of God, and labor, Andrew again went home. But he did not remain long in Kech. Having sold his part of his parents' possessions, and having given the proceeds to the poor, he left his native place for good.

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*By mind and by experience didst thou come  
to know entirely the vanity of temporal  
sweetness, and having come to the age of  
perfect manhood, like unto the Founder of  
thine ascetic labor, at the age of thirty didst  
thou give thyself over to the service of the  
Lord.*  
Second Ikos

THE BLESSED ONE came to the bank of the river Kena, where, near Lake Keno, St. Pachomius\* had founded a monastery dedicated to the Transfiguration of the Lord. When the future ascetic, on the way to this monastery, was overtaken by the darkness of night not far (three miles) from it and lay down to rest, and after he had prayed fervently to God to be shown the path of salvation—he was made worthy of this vision: in a light sleep there appeared before him a dweller of heaven, a shining elder with grey hairs; he was clothed in white garments and in his hands he had a cross. He said to the blessed one: "Take up your cross and follow after me; labor and do not fear the devil's nets, for you will be a man of spiritual desires, an upbringing of the wilderness, and you will be an instructor for many monks." The elder signed him with the cross and, after saying: "By this conquer the evil spirits," he became invisible.

The heart of the blessed one was filled with spiritual joy. Awakening after this, he spent the entire night in prayer of thanksgiving to God, and in the morning, entering the monastery with tears of joy, he prayed again before the icon of the Saviour which was on the gates, and falling down at the feet of the superior, he humbly entreated him to receive him into his flock. St. Pachomius, the founder and superior of the Monastery of Keno, did not conceal from Andrew the difficulties of the monastic life and pointed out to him what severe labors he would have to undergo in this monastery which was being established; but nothing frightened the chosen one of God. He only increased his entreaties and indicated his past life, in which one could not but see indications from Above to leave the world. For an experienced ascetic and clairvoyant elder such as St. Pachomius already was, the Divine fore-choosing of Andrew could not be doubted, and he clothed the blessed one in the monastic garb, changing his name to Anthony in honor of St. Anthony the Great (January 17). This was in the thirtieth year of St. Anthony's life, 1508.

\* † about 1515; commemorated the first Saturday after Theophany.



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The Elder Pachomius entrusted the beginning monk for his ascetic upbringing to no one else, but took this labor upon himself. The zeal of Anthony was very great. Guided by St. Pachomius, while zealously attending the Divine services he manfully fought against the passions, slept extremely little, and fasted strictly, taking food every other day and even that in a very moderate quantity. For a year he labored in the bakery, fervently working for the brethren. He was distinguished by every virtue and firmly resisted every temptation from the evil spirits. All the brethren loved the Saint, but he was humble and meek, and praises were for him a burden.

It came then to pass that there no longer remained a hieromonk in the monastery. The choice of St. Pachomius and the brethren rested upon St. Anthony. And so the Saint had to go to Novgorod and accept the rank of priest. This fact, after he had returned to the monastery, yet more inspired the Saint to increase his labors of continence. In the monastery of St. Pachomius there was an infirmary, and St. Anthony labored not a little time in it: he prepared water, washed the sick, and cleaned their clothing, mixing his deeds with words of love and comfort. And the prayers and thanksgiving of the infirm monks served for him as the best reward.

In general St. Anthony, since he was sound in body, accompanied the spiritual activity with increased physical labors, and often he labored in the fields. By this path he purified his soul and mind from the passions, and mortified the flesh and every attraction toward the world.

And then there came the time for the Saint to leave the monastery which had raised him up, and himself to serve for the salvation of others, preparing himself for this by the labor of solitude. With deep humility he began to entreat the blessing of St. Pachomius for this. The latter, seeing his perfection, gave him all needful counsels and blessed him, saying: "May the Lord bless you, my child; may whatever the Lord wills be done!"

*From the monastery didst thou depart into the wilderness, where thou didst erect a church, and there for seven years by unceasing labors, prayers and fasting, didst thou please the Lord.* Fourth Kondak

**H**AVING RECEIVED the blessing of the superior, St. Anthony, together with two other pious monks, Alexander and Joachim, departed from the monastery of St. Pachomius and, after travelling along the river Onega to

## ST. ANTHONY OF SIYA

the stream Shelksna, they went along this stream, through forests and impassable thickets, until they came to the river Emsa, into which the Shelksna flows, to the cataracts which are called the Dark Rapids. This place greatly pleased the anchorites. They built a cabin here, and after some time they built also a small wooden church dedicated to the Wonderworker St. Nicholas, and some cells.

For seven years St. Anthony lived in this place far from the noise of the world, serving God, when the silence of the wilderness was broken only by the sounds of the inspired monastic prayers and the singing of the feathered inhabitants of the forest. But then the local inhabitants rose up against the Saint and his disciples, the number of which had increased by four; for by this time Isaiah, Elisha, Alexander (another), and Jonah had also come to St. Anthony. The local inhabitants feared that with the foundation of a monastery their land would be taken away from them, and they began to drive away the monks. St. Anthony accepted this trial with submission to the Will of God, and he meekly went away from his persecutors together with his disciples.\*

*Hearing the noise and the hindrances of the nearby inhabitants, thou didst remember the words of Christ, to flee from persecutors, and thou didst bring with thee thy disciples.*

Fourth Ikos

And so the monks went about the northern lands which lie in the region of the Dvina, passing through the impenetrable forests, gorges, and swamps which lie near the White Sea, and the mossy places and inconstant marshes and the many lakes, seeking a suitable place, wherever God might instruct them to stay. Once, at this time, St. Anthony stood at prayer; the monks were praying humbly and the Saint, as their intercessor, stood before them with his hands raised on high. At this very time a hunter whose name was Samuel came out to the place where the monks were standing. For a long time he did not dare to go up to them. The wondrous picture of the praying monks in the midst of the forest astounded the hunter. Finally, being convinced that what he saw was real, the hunter went up to the Saint and received his blessing, and when the

\* Up to the time of the Russian Revolution there was a chapel dedicated to St. Nicholas the Wonderworker at this place. The local inhabitants until very recent times lived in extreme poverty, and according to the common opinion this was because of their unjust treatment of St. Anthony; however, in the 19th century, when they began to venerate the Saint with faith, their condition became much better.

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receive healing. Besides the church of the Holy Trinity, St. Anthony built two other churches: one dedicated to the Annunciation of the Most Holy Mother of God, with a wing dedicated to St. Sergius of Radonezh, to whom the Saint often appealed in his prayers; and another in honor of St. Andrew the First-called. The Annunciation church was heated, and it had a refectory.

When the monastery was completed the brethren entreated the Saint to take upon himself the rank of abbot. For the salvation of those who entreated him the humble Elder accepted this rank, and for several years he governed the monastery.

In governing the monastery the Saint gave to everyone a good example. Daily he was in the church of God, and standing at the Divine service from beginning to end, he did not lean on his staff or against the wall. And he watched over the brethren so that they would observe good order in church: that they should not go from place to place and would not go out except out of extreme necessity. He ordered that the brethren should without fail perform their cell rule of prayer also. At the end of prayer the Saint was the first to begin work, and here he gave the brethren an example of love of labor. He loved also divine books, and he collected many volumes of the Fathers and Teachers of the Church. Spending his nights in prayer, the Saint rested only for a short time, forgetting himself in sleep after the meal. His food was just as meager as that of the brethren. His clothing was old, covered with patches like the clothing of paupers, so that no one from outside could recognize the Saint as the Superior of the monastery. With concern he supervised the monastery labors, the kitchen and bakery; he encouraged the brethren who were bearing these difficult obediences and counselled them to avoid idle conversations. With special love he visited the monastery infirmary, instructed the sick monks to bear their infirmities with gratitude and to pray unceasingly, remembering the approaching hour of death. The Saint appointed a special supervisor to take care of the sick.

The strict cenobitic life was established in the monastery; food and clothing were common and equal for everyone. Intoxicating beverages were totally prohibited; it was ordered that they should not be received from visitors either, and that those who brought them should not even be allowed in the monastery. And by this rule the blessed one was able to chop off the head of the serpent of drunkenness and uproot it entirely. The Saint was also much concerned for the poor brethren; he advised the monks to give unstinting alms and he himself not infrequently did this in such a way that the brethren might not know, fearing to evoke their complaints.

## ST. ANTHONY OF SIYA

Hearing of the Saint's strict life, many began to come to him asking his prayers, and some entered the brotherhood. Some seventy monks were gathered together in the monastery. Many among them were distinguished by the sanctity of their lives and their spiritual labors; one of them, Jonah, later wrote the Life of his spiritual father and instructor.

In the monastery of St. Pachomius St. Anthony died to the world; his life in the wilderness by the Emsa River was a preparatory school for him; and his life in the Monastery of Siya was the time when the God-pleaser, the man of spiritual desires, served his Lord, laboring for the salvation of his lesser brothers. He was in truth "an instructor for many monks," as the shining elder had prophesied. Not being satisfied with his own instructions, the Saint gave the monks the opportunity to learn for themselves the essence and ways of the spiritual activity, by gathering in the monastery library the works of many of the Eastern ascetics and Fathers.

*Considering every glory from men to be the  
cause of losing the glory of God, thou didst  
secretly go away to an island alone, where thou  
didst give thyself over to unceasing prayer,  
labor, and fasting.* Ninth Kondak

*Yet further didst thou flee into a gorge, and  
didst settle in the depths of the mountains and  
undertake the severest labors, despising the demons'  
fearsome spectacles.* Tenth Kondak

SAINT ANTHONY was weighed down by the glory of men. After several years of governing the monastery, having chosen in his place Theognostes, a man experienced in spiritual life, he left the abbotcy and, together with one simple monk, he departed from the monastery into a solitary place. At first St. Anthony settled on an island in Lake Dudnitsa, two miles from the monastery, upstream on the river Siya. This island was very beautiful and convenient for desert-dwelling. The Saint went about the island, examined it entirely and came to love it: the island was surrounded by the lake, on whose shores impenetrable forests grew, and on the island there was an extensive swamp, overgrown with moss. St. Anthony settled here, built a small hut and a chapel dedicated to St. Nicholas the Wonderworker, and he began to labor in silence, unceasing prayer, and labors even more zealously than before: he felled trees, cleared a place for sowing, dug the earth with his own hands, sowed wheat, and lived by his own labors; and the wheat that was left over went to the monastery. At night, after the evening rule of prayer, the ascetic



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Saint asked him to show them a place convenient for monastic labors, he brought him with his disciples to a distant lake, which was called Michailov, into which the river Siya flows. This place was even more remote than the place where the monks had settled before, having impenetrable gorges and dense forests, and great thickets and swamps, and mossy places and inconstant marshes, where there dwelled wild beasts, bears and wolves, deer and hares and foxes, a great multitude of them, which were like herds. There were many lakes round about, and they were very deep. And the place was surrounded by waters as by walls. There were not many paths which had been trod by human feet, and one could enter or leave only by one way. About the holy monastery there were many lakes, and the river Siya flowed from one lake to the next, and they were as if bound by the river Siya in a kind of union, so that visitors, when they saw this, marvelled at the unutterable wisdom of God.

No one had ever lived in this region; but hunters, when they visited this place, often heard the sound of bells and the singing of monks, and they even saw monks cutting the trees. Therefore the people living closest to this place were convinced that it had been appointed by God Himself as a place for a monastery.

*Thou didst become like to a God-guided star,  
leading thy companions to the place whereon  
thou wast the first to erect the Cross of the Lord,  
and with tears didst thou pray to the Master  
Christ to preserve thee from enemies visible  
and invisible and confirm thee in patience to  
bear thy cross.* Fifth Kondak

THE PLACE on Lake Michailov was very pleasing to the soul of St. Anthony. Here he built a chapel and cells. This happened in the year 1520, in the 42nd year of St. Anthony's life; and thus the foundation of the Monastery of Siya was laid. Until 1524 the monks had nothing. The Saint himself, together with the other monks, cut trees and worked the earth, and by this means they obtained for themselves a scant living. They also ate wild plants: berries, roots, herbs, and mushrooms. Often they endured severe hunger. Once their hunger was so great that the brethren of St. Anthony murmured against him and were prepared to separate. At this time there came to them an unknown man who brought oil, flour, and bread and gave money for the building of the monastery. Having received the blessing of St. Anthony for his further journey to Novgorod, the benefactor departed and never returned again. Having received this unexpected help, St. Anthony began fervently to put the monastery in order; and at this time the following trial occurred.

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The collector of taxes for the ruler of Novgorod, Basil Beber, thinking that the builders had much money, hired thieves and wished to plunder the monastery. But the Lord preserved His chosen one. When the evil-doers wished to attack the monastery, it seemed to them as if it were surrounded by a multitude of armed men. They told the collector of taxes about this, and he, knowing that the monks had no defenders, understood that the elders were being preserved by heavenly beings, and he repented of his evil thought and, falling at the feet of St. Anthony, begged forgiveness. The Elder meekly forgave the guilty one, and this served as a cause of great glory for the God-pleaser. From this time on many people began to come to the Saint and, receiving the tonsure, comprised a considerable community.

Seeing the increase of the brethren, St. Anthony sent two of his disciples, Alexander and Isaiah, to Moscow to the Grand Prince Basil Ioannovich, with the request to allow the establishment of a monastery and to give land for this. St. Anthony had been known to the Grand Prince even earlier as a man of holy life. Therefore he was kindly disposed to this request, and not only did he allow the establishment of the monastery, but he also awarded lands to it, and gave everything necessary for its beginning. With joy Alexander and Isaiah returned to their teacher, and the whole brotherhood fervently prayed for the health of the good Tsar. This was in the year 1544.

The Elder, rejoiced by this, energetically undertook the building of the monastery. Thus he built a church in honor of the Life-giving Trinity. St. Anthony himself painted the main icon of the Holy Trinity and entreated that this icon, being preserved in the monastery, would remind the brethren of his soul.

But the church that had been built with such effort soon burned in a fire caused by a candle which the candle-lighter had forgotten to extinguish before one icon. The fire could not be put out, for when the church burned the brethren, apart from the sick and the servants, were all laboring in the fields. The monks only saw with sorrow in place of the church a pile of ruins, and they wished to separate. But the Saint, even though he was saddened, nonetheless trusted in the Will of God and persuaded the monks to remain; and increasing his prayers and fasting, he began to build new churches. The monastery buildings apart from the church remained unharmed. At the same time the Lord visibly consoled his chosen servant. The church burned, but the icon of the Holy Trinity which had been painted by the Saint was found in the midst of the monastery completely unharmed. And it was triumphantly brought into the church of the Life-giving Trinity when its building was completed. Soon from this icon, by the prayers of the Saint, the infirm began to

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milled grain until time for Matins; during the summer nights he stripped to the waist and gave himself over to be eaten by mosquitoes.

The Lord granted to the ascetic the gift of clairvoyance. A young monk of the Monastery of Siya, Philotheus, being engaged in warfare by the tempter, thought of going into the world, renouncing his monasticism, and getting married. But the good thought came to him to go beforehand to the Saint in the wilderness and receive a blessing from him. Seeing Philotheus, the ascetic turned to him with these words: "How is it, my child, that you have come here being disturbed by an evil thought? You wish to go into the world, to renounce monasticism, and you think you can conceal it from me."

Hearing this secret from the mouth of the Saint, Philotheus became terrified, fell at his feet, and acknowledged everything. The ascetic raised him up, encouraged him, and after instructing him let him go back to the monastery.

After some time St. Anthony went away to another solitary place three miles from the previous place. This place was in the mountains and was surrounded by mountains as by walls; and in the valley between these mountains was a lake, which was called Padoun. At the base of these mountains stood the cell of the Saint, and around it were twelve birch trees, as white as snow. On the mountains there grew such a tall forest that from below it seemed to reach to the heavens. Most melancholy was this place, so that one coming to see this wilderness would have great contrition, for the very sight of the place could bring the beholder of it into tender feeling. Here the Saint made a raft out of logs, and from it he fished on the lake for his food. While he was fishing he would bare his head and shoulders to be eaten by mosquitoes and gnats: whole hives of the insects would fly to him and cover his body, and the blood would flow along his neck and shoulders; but the ascetic would stand unmoving, not touching them with a single finger.

In the winter the Saint's cell was covered with snow, and he lived under the snow as in a cave, and sent up to God his fervent prayers with warm tears. Paying diligent heed to the inward activity, he joyfully strove toward the heights, remaining much in silence, removing his mind from all cares, and conversing purely with God, sending up his prayer like incense to heaven.

Thus did the Saint spend two years outside his monastery in both of these wildernesses.

In the meantime Theognostes renounced the abbotcy. The brethren entreated the Saint to be their abbot again, saying: "Father, do not abandon us, your children," the brethren said with tears. "Come to your monastery and remain with us. And if you do not come, we will all scatter like sheep that have no shepherd."

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St. Anthony yielded to their entreaties. Again he began to govern the monastery, giving to all an example of pious and ascetic life. From old age he no longer had the strength to perform physical work, but he did not grow drowsy in prayer nor weak in fasting. And then there appeared in St. Anthony the gift of working miracles — the reward of his holy life.

Before the very feast of the Transfiguration, the monks labored the entire night at fishing, but they caught nothing. Saddened, they came to the monastery, but the Saint encouraged them and again sent them to the lake, to the Red Cape, saying: "Children, show obedience and you will see the glory of God, for the Lord is merciful: the Life-giving Trinity will not forget your labors and will not abandon the brethren who faithfully serve the Lord in this holy place and who are hungry on the great feast."

The monks set out for the place that was indicated to them, let out their net, and caught such a multitude of fish that they were eating it for a long time after the feast. From that time on they began to call this fishing place "Anthony's."

From his severe ascetic labors and from old age the body of St. Anthony withered and grew weak. His sight grew dim, his legs grew swollen, and the monks had to lead him to church. Like an olive tree under the burden of its fruit, he bent down towards the earth, bent over by his years and labors. His bodily powers declined; he had accomplished his earthly path, and his purified spirit was already prepared to arise into the heavens towards our Saviour, Whom he had served for his entire life. The repose of the Saint approached.

*Finishing thy luminous life, like a child-loving  
father thou didst order everything carefully in  
thy monastery; thou didst confirm in writing  
the rule of common life; in vigil and prayer  
thou didst not taste of repose, until thou didst  
give over to the Lord thy holy soul.*

Eleventh Ikos

SEEING THE INFIRMITY of their instructor and expecting that he would soon die, the brethren entreated the Saint to give them a written rule and indicate to them a successor in the governing of the monastery. The Saint fulfilled the entreaty of his sorrowing disciples. He appointed as the builder of the monastery Cyril, and as abbot in his own place Gelasius. Gelasius at that time was beyond the White Sea, on the river Zolatitsa, having been sent there on business. Cyril was in the monastery, and the Saint addressed himself to him with his final instruction: he exhorted him to preserve the monastic rule



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inviolate, concerning the church services, concerning food and drink; to love the brethren equally and to be the servant of all; to judge concerning monastery matters with all the brethren at trapeza, and to do nothing without taking counsel of them, so that there might be no dissatisfaction in the monastery; he prescribed that the sick brethren should be visited and that special care should be taken for them.

Then the Saint turned to the assembled brethren and exhorted them not to grow faint in prayer, to have mutual love and oneness of mind, to remove themselves from anger and evil words, to submit to the elder, to preserve purity in body and soul, to have food according to the rule of the monastery and to flee drunkenness entirely, and to preserve without any infringement the cenobitic rule of the monastery.

So that his instructions might have greater force, the Saint gave the brethren a testament written with his own hand, which contained also the rules of monastic life. Here we quote these rules of the great Saint of Siya:

"And whichever of the brethren are complainers and schismatics (that is, violators of brotherly unity) and do not wish to live according to the monastic order nor submit to the abbot and brethren, should be banished from the monastery so that the others will have fear." However, after sincere repentance they should be accepted again and kept as brethren, as also were to be those who had left the monastery during the lifetime of the Saint and took from the monastery's funds, if they have repented. "Before everything else may you have the fear of God in your hearts, that the Holy Spirit may dwell in them, and that He might instruct you and set you on the true path. Among yourselves have love and submission in Christ to one another, by which you will cover up your many sins. In the common life live in equality both in body and spirit, in food and clothing, according to the commandment of the Holy Fathers. Do not give the abbot in the refectory anything in food or drink above what the other brethren receive. Let there be the same equality also in clothing and shoes. Do not keep intoxicating beverages in the monastery and do not receive them from visitors. Women should not spend the night in the monastery at all, and likewise men from the world should not spend the night with the brethren and should not live in the cells. Give the poor sufficient to eat and drink and give them alms, lest this holy place should come to know want. And the brethren who are well should not be left without monastic obedience for the sake of their salvation, with the exception of the sick. Do not allow the peasants to make fields and yards near the monastery, except for a place for cows, and let that be beyond the lake. Preserve this, I entreat you, and may



St. Anthony's Monastery reflected in the waters of the Siya River



The Catholicon (Main Church) of St. Anthony's Monastery



THE RELIQUARY OF ST. ANTHONY OF SIYA

At the Saint's head (left), the Icon of the Holy Trinity which he painted himself; at his feet (right), his Abbot's staff (as preserved before the Revolution).



RARE ICONS IN SIYA MONASTERY

The icon-painting school of Siya, started by St. Anthony himself, was known for its exquisite beauty, as is evident from these two icons from a 17th-century "Siya Gospel." At left, icons from the Church calendar for the month of March; at right, a symbolical icon of the Evangelist Matthew.

## ST. ANTHONY OF SIYA

the mercy of God be with you." Then, having entrusted his monastery to the Mother of God and St. Sergius, St. Anthony prepared for his end.

When the brethren asked where his body should be given over to burial, the Saint replied: "Bind my legs and drag my sinful body into the wilds and trample upon it in the moss in the swamp, that it may be eaten by beasts and reptiles, or else hang it on a tree to be eaten by birds, or else throw it with a stone into the lake."

But the monks said outright that they would not do this, but would honorably bury his body. On the eve of his repose the Saint received communion of the Holy Mysteries of Christ. On the next day, 7 December, 1556, before Matins, having bade farewell to the brethren, when the monks Andronicus and Pachomius had offered incense in his cell and at their teacher's word had left the cell, the Saint of Christ, having folded his arms in the form of a cross, peacefully gave his soul unto the Lord. In all he had lived 79 years, of which 37 he had spent in the region of Siya, both in the monastery and the wilderness. The orphaned brethren honorably buried his holy relics in the church of the Life-giving Trinity, on the right side near the Altar. The brethren adorned his grave with icons and candles, and every day they came to pray for the repose of his soul, and believing in his boldness before God, they asked his intercession.

The priest of the nearby village, Chariton, had envy towards the memory of St. Anthony, and once he expressed himself sacrilegiously regarding him. After this Chariton suddenly became blind, and soon he understood that the Lord was chastising him for his blasphemy against the Saint. Then he began to repent for his transgression, and he fervently prayed and his sight was restored. Giving thanks to the Lord and His Saint, Chariton went after this to the Monastery of Siya and labored in monasticism.

During his lifetime St. Anthony loved to paint icons. Even up to this century there were preserved holy icons painted by his own hand. And even after his repose he was a patron of those who undertook this God-pleasing work. Thus the abbot of the Monastery of Siya, Pitirim (1577-1586), being concerned over the proper adornment of the monastery, painted many new icons and restored old ones. Once Pitirim became ill. His infirmity increased all the time, and death began to threaten him. The sick man prayed to the Life-giving Trinity and St. Anthony. And behold, once at night, falling into a light sleep, he saw how a magnificent elder, adorned with gray hairs, was walking from the tomb of the Saint with a sack.



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"Do you wish to be well and finish what you have begun?" he asked Pitirim. "I wish to, but I cannot," replied the sick man. To this the elder said: "The Holy Trinity heals you, do not grow faint in your work; I, the Abbot Anthony, have come to visit you in your affliction." The Wonderworker touched the sick abbot. Pitirim felt himself to be well and with new zeal he began to occupy himself with icon-painting and the adornment of the churches of the monastery.

A merchant from Holmagor whose name was Carpus was sailing on the sea off the shore of Tersk, beginning from the river Varzuga. In his boat, among other goods, there was a supply of fish for the Monastery of Siya. A great storm arose; the waves rose like mountains and lashed the boat; and the oarsmen already despaired entirely of salvation. Suddenly Carpus saw not far from him an elder who spread out his mantle over the boat and protected it from the waves.

"You called on many for help," said the wondrous elder to the astonished merchant, "but you did not call on me. Yet in your boat there is a part also for our monastery. But God will grant stillness."

"Who are you, O man of God?" asked the merchant. "I am Anthony, the Abbot of the monastery at Lake Michailov, on the river Siya," said the elder, and became invisible. From this time the storm began to grow still and a favorable wind arose. Coming safely to the Monastery of Siya, Carpus gave thanks for his salvation to St. Anthony, and soon received the monastic tonsure in his monastery.

A certain Timothy, whose surname was Ryabok, who lived seven miles from the monastery, became blind and could see nothing for two years. The feast of the Life-giving Trinity approached, and pilgrims were going to the Monastery of Siya. When the blind man heard the movement of people he wept bitterly that he was unable to go with the God-fearing people. Praying warmly to the Most Holy Trinity and the Saint, Timothy asked that he be conducted to the monastery, and the whole way he continued to pray mentally. Suddenly he felt that he began to see a certain faint dawn, and then he began to see green: this was the forest through which he was walking. Rejoicing, Timothy feared to believe his healing and did not say anything to his companions. Desiring to test his eyes, he began to examine the road on which he was walking, and he could make out the path. His heart was filled with joy and rapture, but he restrained himself and did not yet speak about his healing. Coming to the church of the monastery, Timothy saw the wonderworking icon of the Life-giving Trinity and other icons, and he saw the burning candles: and then in the hearing of all he gave thanks to the Lord and His Saint for his miraculous healing.



St. Anthony's second hermitage amid twelve birches on Lake Padoun



Holy Cross Church at St. Anthony's first hermitage, on Lake Dudnitsa, where the Saint settled in order to escape the noise and bustle of communal life and give himself over to Divine vision in the absolute silence of the forest wilderness. This photograph, together with the one on the previous page, was taken in 1895. There is hardly any hope that it still exists today, since the whole of northern Russia is densely settled with Soviet slave labor camps (Gulag).

#### ST. ANTHONY OF SIYA

The following four miracles were preserved in the Siya Monastery archives and were published separately in the periodical *The Russian Monk*, 1913, no. 9, a publication of Pochaev Monastery.

A short time passed after the blessed repose of St. Anthony, and there remained in the monastery few reliable witnesses who remembered him well. At that time one of the brethren of the St. Anthony of Siya Monastery became very interested in the devout life of God's saints, and being filled with reverence toward the great ascetic labors and miraculous deeds of the life of St. Anthony, he was greatly sorrowed that his Life remained unwritten owing to the negligence of the brethren. Fear came upon him when he imagined to himself the heavenly chastisement which could come upon him if he, having a perfect opportunity, having known the life and labors of the Saint, did not describe it for the saving instruction of future generations. Being moved by such pious intentions, this labor-loving monk called in prayer upon St. Anthony's help, and he began with fervor to write his Life.

His good intention was greeted by dissatisfaction and murmuring by the brethren of the monastery. "Before, no one dared to write, and is this one going to start composing Lives of Saints?" said some of them in their dissatisfaction. Others even allowed themselves to make offensive remarks about the Saint. All of this astonished and disturbed the compiler of the Saint's Life, and he left off his work; but then, in his perplexity, he was enlightened by a special vision of the Saint. Once, in his cell where he was writing the Life, during a light sleep the monk saw the Lives of Saints written, as it were, on icons, and in the choir of the many glorified Saints, higher than any of them, there was St. Anthony the Great. By him there was another monk unknown to him who, pointing to St. Anthony the Great with his finger, said, "Why do you have doubts, and why are you faint-hearted? The one of whom you have begun to write the Life was like this Saint. He has the same name and he was an imitator of his life; therefore, put off all doubts and begin this matter without disturbance." Being encouraged by this, the monk, without any more wavering at all, began to write the Life of the Saint.

Many years after the death of St. Anthony, his holy monastery was subjected to a terrible trial. One after the other, all the great ascetics and disciples of the Saint died, apart from the Hieromonk Titus, and among the new monks there were few who were disposed to support the previous ascetic spirit of faith and piety, so that the monastery began visibly to decline. The situation



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worsened especially when, because there was no worthy candidate, an abbot was chosen from another monastery.

The new superior turned out to be of impure behavior and he was given quite strongly to drinking wine. Together with two monks who had come with him, he was constantly drunk, and by this he violated the very chief commandment of the founder of the monastery. The young monks, being themselves infirm in monasticism, were scandalized and took from him a bad example.

Certain of the monks who remained faithful to the testament of St. Anthony were deeply grieved over this, and often, when they came to the Hieromonk Titus, they would beg him forcefully, since he was a close disciple of the reposed Abba, to remind the abbot who had forgotten his responsibility, that the holy founder of the monastery had strictly forbidden any alcoholic beverages to be kept in the monastery, and all the more had he forbidden that they be drunk. In his simplicity and meekness the meek Titus for a long time refused to fulfill the entreaty of the brethren. And then the Saint himself gave him a threatening reminder.

Once, late in the evening after the usual rule of prayer, Titus lay down to sleep and he saw St. Anthony coming to him into his cell, accompanied by two of his disciples who had died not long before this. In his right hand the Saint held the superior's staff and in the hands of his companions there were huge bundles of switches. Titus saw himself serving the Saint, who began to reproach him angrily: Why, seeing the impure life of the abbot, and knowing the strict testament of the founder of the monastery about alcoholic beverages, did he not remind the abbot about this and keep him from this shameful way of life which corrupted the brethren? After this, turning to one of those who accompanied him, the Saint commanded him to bow Titus' head and hold it in this position, and his other companion he commanded to beat him mercilessly with the switches until he bled. With tears Titus began to entreat him to forgive him this sin, and for the future he promised not to give himself over to a faint-hearted silence. The Saint's companions likewise began to entreat fervently for his forgiveness and even gave their word for him. Only then, yielding to the fervent pleas of his disciples, did St. Anthony change his anger to mercy and, once more strictly ordering Titus to speak to the abbot, he became invisible.

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After this the Hieromonk Titus no longer wavered, but boldly went to the abbot and told him in detail about his vision, and with tears implored him to cease his impure way of life. The abbot was deeply moved by what he heard, sincerely repented, and with God's help, by the prayers of St. Anthony he completely changed his way of life.

When Gelasius, the successor of St. Anthony, was abbot of the monastery, there worked for a long time on the monastery farm the laborer Simeon, a man who was dishonest and cunning. He often stole the monastery's dairy products without chastisement and unnoticed, and sold them outside for his own profit. Knowing how to cover up the traces of his crime and having no fear of having to give an answer at God's Judgment, this laborer not only did not think of stopping his evil deed, but on the contrary, the longer he acted in this way the more decisive and bold he became. Thus the theft of monastery property continued for several years. But then the heavenly patron and founder of the monastery stopped the criminal activity of this sinner and converted him to the right path.

Once, on a Sunday, together with other monastery laborers, Simeon came to Matins and saw St. Anthony, who had entered the church. Leaning on his staff, he walked up to the abbot's place and stood at the right side of Abbot Gelasius, his disciple. After having stood for a short time in one place, he put his staff against the wall, took the censer, and began to cense the church, the abbot, and the brethren, and then again he went up to the place of the superior, and taking the superior's staff in his hand he began to go around to the brethren. Approaching one of the monks, whose name was Bassian, who at that time was the monastery's cellarer, St. Anthony began furiously and mercilessly to beat him on the shoulders and to reproach him angrily because he, the cellarer, had such a careless attitude toward the performance of his duties and looked poorly after the servants and laborers who were negligent in their work and were taking profits for their labors as did, for example, this laborer here. At these last words he pointed to the laborer Simeon and, leaving the cellarer, the Saint approached him. Wrathfully he said, "And why did you come here and not cease to rob the Most Holy Trinity and our worthiness, and do much evil, evoking murmuring among the brethren?" He spoke these threatening words and, lifting Simeon, the Saint pushed him with great force against the church railing and became invisible. Being thunderstruck by such

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a frightful vision, the laborer Simeon cried out, became dumb, and was completely paralyzed.

Since the vision was seen by the chastised one alone, the abbot and the brethren were in extreme perplexity. The laborer was taken to the grave of the Saint, and after Matins a moleben was served for the healing of the sick one.

Being chastised from Above and undergoing torments, the laborer Simeon fervently beseeched the Lord for the forgiveness of his sins and for healing, and his prayer was heard. After three days St. Anthony again appeared to him, exhorted him as a father to sin no more in the performance of his responsibilities, and gave him complete healing. "Now you are well," the Saint said to him; "see to it that you sin no more, lest something worse come upon you. And now go and tell the abbot and the brethren everything that has happened to you."

Simeon, rejoicing over the miraculous healing and filled with tears, went to the abbot and the brethren, offered sincere repentance, related concerning the chastisement which had occurred to him and of the healing given to him through the Saint. Those who heard this glorified God Who had given such great grace to His Saint, Anthony of Siya.

One of the brethren of the St. Anthony of Siya Monastery, whose name was Cyrion, was sent on a monastery errand to the village of Siya which was nearby. Staying there for a while, he had the habit, because of his old age and his infirmities, of going frequently to the bath. For this excess care over his corruptible body he once received a threatening warning through a vision. Two men appeared to him with whips in their hands who beat him cruelly until he had wounds, inspiring him by this to discontinue this habit, which was not fitting for monks — to be much concerned over his body when his chief concern should be for the salvation of his soul.

Many other miracles also occurred by the prayers of this great Saint of God to the glory of the Holy Trinity.

The numerous miracles performed at the grave of St. Anthony inspired the brethren of the monastery of Siya under the above-mentioned Abbot Pitirim to petition Tsar John the Terrible that the Saint be joined to the choir of Saints. This was done just 23 years after the death of the Saint, in the year 1579. Thus was St. Anthony joined to the choir of Saints venerated by the whole Russian Church.

## St. Cornelius of Komel

THE SAINTS of the Russian Thebaid in the 16th century are innumerable; but here it is impossible not to mention at least *St. Cornelius of Komel* (†1537, May 19). After passing through difficult ascetic struggles in the White Lake Monastery, he undertook a life of wandering and went finally to the forest of Komel. After being ordained priest, he lived in the forest as a hermit for 19 years, and only at the age of 60 did he build a church and found a monastery.

Almost in every Life of the Northern Saints we see a repetition of the same thing: when one of God's chosen monks, after going through outward asceticism in a monastery, ripens for a life of silence, then, being blessed by his abbot or elder, he goes away into the forest denseness, and like a swimmer who throws himself into the boundless sea, subjects himself to the abyss of dangers and sorrows which are bound up with the solitary life in the wilderness, something which is possible only with a fullness of faith and a total giving of oneself over to God's Providence. And there, after he has gone through the school of inward perfection, he again enters into contact with men. But at the first opportunity he again strives and thirsts to continue his life of silence. So it is in the life of St. Cornelius: having built his first monastery, he goes away to Lake Sura with his disciple Gennadius. Then, having returned again to his monastery at the insistence of his brethren, the Saint "felled trees and sowed fields, not merely so that they might eat their own bread, but so that they also might feed those that had none." The Life gives the teaching of the Saint on the preserving of purity, on mental prayer, self-observation, and the battle with passions. Especially did the Saint insist on the two highest commandments of the Gospel: love for God and neighbor. Like his older contemporary St. Nilus of Sora — and indeed like all the great Saints of the Northern Thebaid — St. Cornelius belonged to the Greek Hesychast school.

Five disciples of St. Cornelius are known: *St. Gennadius of Kostroma* (†1565, Jan. 23), who continued the Saint's monastery on Lake Sura; *St. Herodion of Lake Ily* (†1541, Sept. 28), who was commanded by an angel to build a church; *St. Philip of Irab* (†1537, Nov. 14), who left St. Cornelius for a life of silence alone for 15 years, then for five years counselled the people who flocked to him; *St. Cyril of New Lake* (†1532, Feb. 4), a clairvoyant wonderworker who had a revelation of the approaching "Time of Troubles" for the Russian land; and *St. Adrian of Poshekhonye* (†1550, Mar. 5), who founded a monastery after a Divine revelation, and then was killed by robbers.

IVAN M. KONTZEVITCH





THE LIFE OF  
**Saint Euprosynus**  
 MARTYR-CONFESSOR OF BLUE-JAY LAKE\*

Commemorated on March 20

**W**ILD AND DESERTED is the site of the Blue Jay Lake Hermitage. It is far from populous cities and villages, and the gaze of the occasional pilgrim comes to rest now on the broad, muddy and scarcely passable marshes which stretch out far and wide, now on the dense green forests which abound, now on the whole network of lakes large and small, sometimes self-contained, sometimes joined by streams and rivers. There are about eighteen lakes in all, and one of them (Savino) is remarkable in having at its bottom a funnel-shaped pit into which, every certain number of years, usually in the summertime, the waters together with all the fish disappear with a loud noise; and then, after another definite period of time, the waters again return to their place through the same pit. Of the streams one may mention Mill Stream, named after the monastery mill which was located on it, and the Gvozden, on whose banks the blessed founder of the Hermitage, St. Euprosynus, first settled.

Brighter than the luminous stars above shine forth the Saints of God, illuminating the path to the everlasting life beyond the grave. With their holy and God-pleasing life on earth they teach us how to please God, and with their prayers in heaven before the Throne of the Pre-eternal God they help us pass successfully through the burdensome path of life. By raising up at an opportune time His chosen ones, the Lord manifests through them diverse miracles and signs in order to make wise those who have gone astray. Just as the sky is adorned with glittering stars which enlighten the earth through the darkness of night, so also our Orthodox Church is adorned with wondrous Saints who have pleased God by their virtuous lives.

\* Translated from the Lives of the Saints, Moscow Synodal Edition, Supplementary Volume 2, 1916; and *Russian Pilgrims*: 1902, p. 642; and 1912, p. 558.



17th-century Icon, gift of Tsar Alexei Mikhailovich to the Saint's Monastery

ST. EUPHROSYNUS OF BLUE JAY LAKE

TROPARION, TONE 4

**H**AVING DIRECTED thy mind towards God from thy youth by renouncing the world,\* O blessed Euprosynus,\* thou didst settle in an impassable wilderness,\* in which thou didst dwell valiantly in abstinence, in prayers and fasting, as is fitting,\* being strengthened by God,\* and didst finish thy life by innocently suffering murder at the hands of the enemies' sons.\* Wherefore, thou hast been crowned together with holy monks and martyrs,\* with whom thou dost stand before the Throne of the Most Holy Trinity.\* Pray, we entreat thee,\* that we may be given remission of our sins\* and may be granted great mercy.



#### ST. EUPHROSYNUS

Above: St. Euphrosynus beside the Cross and the earthen cave where he first settled and where he suffered martyrdom on the shores of Blue Jay Lake.

At left: The Schema-epitrachelion (above) and the cowl and prayer-ropes which the Saint was wearing when he was martyred and when his incorrupt relics were uncovered.

#### ST. EUPHROSYNUS OF BLUE JAY LAKE

The holy Martyr Euphrosynus, schema-monk and desert-dweller of Blue Jay Lake, was born in the second half of the 16th century. In the world his name was Ephraim, and he was from the region of Karelia. His father Simeon and his mother, whose name is not known, lived near Lake Ladoga. The nearness of Valaam Monastery exercised an influence on the religious outlook of Ephraim. He left his parents' home and lived for some time at the monastery. Here he acquired knowledge of the typicon of divine services and developed a kinship to the severe conditions of the monastic life. But for the time being Ephraim did not become a monk. He moved to Novgorod the Great and lived there for quite a long time, and then he went away to the Novgorod region, to a place called Bezhet'sk, and settled in the village of Doloska, some fifteen miles east of the city of Ustiuzhna of Zhelezopolska. In this village, at the church of the Holy Great-martyr George, Ephraim served for a long time as a Reader. He had come to mature age when the grace of God touched his heart and ignited in him an unvanquishable desire to undertake monastic labor. After putting his house in complete order and making provision for his property, Ephraim went on his way, having nothing with him apart from the garment which he wore. From that time on his thought did not return to the house he had left but strove only towards God so that, once having put his hand to the plough, he no longer looked back (Luke 9:62).

With the firm decision to become a monk, Ephraim came to the Dormition Monastery of the Tikhvin Mother of God and implored the superior and the brethren to vouchsafe him the tonsure. His mature years, his account of his youth spent under the shelter of Valaam Monastery, and his many years of service in the Church of God as a Reader, gained for him the trust of everyone, and his entreaty was soon fulfilled. Ephraim was clothed in the Angelic Habit and at his tonsure was given the name Euphrosynus. Having attained to that for which his soul had striven for so long, St. Euphrosynus with zeal gave himself over to monastic labors. Enlightening his mind with the Word of God, which he read with love and heedfulness, and confirming his heart on the rock of faith, he subdued his flesh by fasting and continence, by humble obedience to the abbot and the brethren, by fervent labor in the works which he was given to do, working not for the sake of men but for God, in purity of conscience and unhyppocritical love. In the midst of labors and ascetic exploits he always kept in mind the end of life and the future reward from the Judge Who is no respecter of persons.

Having lived for a certain time in the Tikhvin Monastery, the Saint felt a great and irrepressible desire to go away to the wilderness into solitude, and there to labor for God in a severe life of fasting and silence. He went to



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the abbot, told him about his desire, and entreated his blessing for this plan. The superior blessed him, gave him instruction about the desert life, and let him go in peace from the monastery, saying, "Go, child,<sup>\*</sup> and may God be with you." This was in the year 1600.

Being deprived of any kind of possessions at all, but with a heart overflowing with joy, the Saint set out on his way. He was drawn to the place he knew, the above-mentioned region of Bezhet'sk, where he found a desert for himself surrounded by ravines and forests in the midst of moss-covered swamps and inaccessible marshes. Rivers and lakes surrounded him like a wall and made the desert little accessible to men. Here, in a wild dense forest near the river Chagoda, on the shores of Blue Jay Lake, ten miles from the village of Doloska and 35 miles from Ustiuzhna, the Saint chose a place suitable for solitude, sufficiently large for the foundation of a monastery, and he settled there. With fervent prayer he gave thanks to God Who had given him a new dwelling place, and he was like a bird which had acquired a house for itself, or a swallow which had sought out a nest for herself.

"Look down upon this place," the Saint cried out to the Lord, "and bless it, and enable me to serve Thee in this place all the days of my life; for that is why I came here, so as to labor for Thee, that in me Thy Most Holy Name may be glorified."

In this chosen place St. Euphrosynus planted a Cross, dug a cave for himself, and began to lead a severe ascetic life, spending his time in prayer, vigils, psalm-singing, often not blinking his eyes the whole night in prayer. His labors in fasting and continence were unceasing. For two whole years he did not see a human face, being hidden by the forest ravines from the attention of the neighboring residents, and therefore also for both of these years he did not once eat bread. His food was what grew in the forest — berries and mushrooms. Often he had to eat white moss, which was called *yago lnik*. He also had handiwork: he wove fishing nets. Having lived a year in the cave, St. Euphrosynus made a small cell and continued his solitary life, which consisted of prayer, ascetic labors, work and deprivations. For a year more after this he hid himself from the eyes of men; but then he was discovered.

Some time passed, and the glory of his ascetic and virtuous life spread abroad through all the neighboring villages. Pious people began to come to him for instruction, prayer, and counsel. Others, being zealous for his virtuous life, came to him in the desert to learn the labors of piety, and they settled next to him. Little by little a spiritual flock gathered around the Saint and already in the first year after his way of life had been discovered it was necessary to build a larger dwelling so that all the brethren could pray together. And so a church was built, being dedicated to the Annunciation of the Most Holy

## ST. EUPHROSYNUS OF BLUE JAY LAKE

Mother of God. St. Euphrosynus and his fellow ascetics undertook the work themselves, clearing the forest, hewing timber, and erecting a log church. Around the church they built their little log-cabin cells; and thus a monastery was established. Its location was about three miles from the original site of St. Euphrosynus' labors, which was later to be called the Old Hermitage. Since the blessed Elder, because of his profound self-denial and humility, did not have the priestly rank, the consecration of the newly-built temple was performed by the priest-monk St. Gurias,<sup>\*</sup> founder of a monastery at Shalatsk, a man of holy life, a friend and co-laborer of the desert-dweller Euphrosynus. This was done with the blessing of the Archbishop of Novgorod, who at that time was Isidore (1603-1609). St. Gurias would occasionally visit the desert-dweller of Blue Jay Lake for common prayer and spiritual converse, and undoubtedly also to give him communion of the Holy Mysteries. The road between them, more than forty miles long, lay through quicksand, mossy swamps, and little-accessible bogs; up to the present century this road was still pointed out by the local inhabitants. On one of these visits St. Euphrosynus received at the hand of St. Gurias the tonsure into the great angelic order, the holy Schema, retaining his former name.

After the consecration of the church the Saint continued to labor with zeal, leading others on the path to salvation. In all he lived here seven years, and God granted him the gift of clairvoyance.

In those years the Russian land was undergoing the difficult "time of troubles." After the death of Boris Godunov in 1605, the Roman Catholic Pretender was enthroned in Russia, and after his speedy overthrow, during the four-year governance of Basil Shuisky, the government remained without a Tsar, being subjected to internal quarrels, disorders, and civil war called forth by new pretenders, and external dangers from the Poles and Swedes. The Catholic Poles occupied Smolensk and Moscow itself, and the Protestant Swedes occupied Novgorod. Bands of Cossacks and bandits, as well as detachments of Poles and Lithuanians, wandered about, laying waste the land and killing the inhabitants. At the beginning of 1612, in Nizhni-Novgorod, at the appeal of the Holy Trinity-St. Sergius Lavra, a regiment was gathered from among the people, and it, under the leadership of Cosmas Minin and Prince Pozharsky, was to free Moscow from the Poles and give peace and calm to the Russian land, which had suffered so much from the time of troubles, and to the Orthodox Church. But still the troubles and evil deeds held sway in the whole Russian land. During these disturbances St. Euphrosynus also was destined to die the death of an innocent martyr.

\* Abbot since 1603 of the Dormition Monastery, 24 miles from Ustiuzhna.

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A certain band of Polish Latins, who probably belonged to the Lisovsky Regiment, reached the neighborhood of Ustiuzhna with the aim of pillaging and robbing. The inhabitants, being frightened by the robberies, plundering, and acts of violence of these foreigners, for a long time had been used to hiding in the forests in the midst of the swamps and quicksand. The monastery of St. Euphrosynus was a convenient and safe refuge, being far away from the dwellings of men and surrounded by rivers, lakes, and mossy swamps. Therefore, many people gathered there, not only the simple people but also some of the nobles, hoping to hide from the foraging Poles. But the monastery was destined to suffer sacrilege from these heretics. St. Euphrosynus foresaw the approaching calamity and warned the residents of the monastery and everyone who had sought protection in it. On March 19, 1612, the Saint revealed to them that armed enemies were approaching, and he advised them to take care for their own safety. "My brethren and beloved children in Christ," said the Saint: "Whoever wishes to escape certain death, leave the monastery of the Most Holy Mother of God and save yourselves from the great calamity, for it is pleasing to the righteous judgment of God that evil enemies will soon come to this holy place."

Many did not believe him. "And why do you yourself not leave this holy place?" they asked him. The Elder replied: "I came here in order to die for Christ." However, some considered this reply to be insincere, and they continued to think that the Elder was speaking in this way out of ill will towards them, desiring to save himself alone from the sword of the enemy. But those who obeyed the Saint indeed were saved, while those who did not believe him all perished by a cruel death from the Latins.

Among the residents of the monastery was a certain monk whose name was Jonah. Being frightened by the Saint's clairvoyance, which he considered to be from the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, he wished to flee together with the others. But St. Euphrosynus separated him from the others and kept him with himself, enkindling in him zeal for the house of God and a readiness to remain here unto death.

"Brother Jonah," said the Saint, "why do you allow faint-hearted fear into your soul? When there is to be a battle, then is the time when one must show manliness. If God is with us, who is against us? And *who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or anguish, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?... Neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature* (Romans 8:35, 38-39). None of these things can do this. Why have you become frightened, brother? There is nothing frightful in that which threatens us. Death? But it is not frightful, since by its means we are



The Monastery of St. Euphrosynus, reflected in the waters of Blue Jay Lake

departing for the harbor. Robbery? But *naked I came, naked I will depart* (Job 1:21). Confinement? But *the earth is the Lord's, and all the fulness thereof* (Psalm 23:1). Should we fear slander? But *when men shall say all manner of evil against you... great is your reward in heaven* (Matt. 5:11, 12). I saw a sword, and the heaven covered with lightning; I expected death, and thought on what is mortal; I contemplated the sufferings of earth, and thought of the honors above and the crown on high as the end of labors, and





**ST. EUPHROSYNUS' BLUE JAY LAKE HERMITAGE**

The main 17th-century edifices  
as treasured in pre-Revolutionary Holy Russia.

Top: The Annunciation Church.

Left: The Belfry.

Bottom: The Church of St. John the Theologian.



The belfry and the churches of St. John the Theologian and the Annunciation



The reliquary of St. Euphrosynus,  
located in the belfry-chapel  
of St. Nicholas



The roof built over the  
remains of a linden tree  
planted by St. Euphrosynus



The Iconostasis of the 17th-century church of the Annunciation

for me this was sufficient consolation and contrition. May the will of God be done! Let us not be afraid of some passing fear, for the sake of Christ's love. It is for this that we were called and offered our vows to the Lord, in order to die in this place for the sake of His Holy Name. With laymen it is something else; they are not bound by a vow. They must preserve themselves also for their children."

Thus did the Elder instruct the monk Jonah. The monk was encouraged, became inflamed in spirit, and placing his hope in God, decided not to leave the monastery, but to die here in the wilderness with his Elder, Euphrosynus. The Saint, having informed those present about the approaching calamity, immediately dressed himself in the Schema and began to pray to God and the Most Holy Mother of God that They might grant to him the lot of the righteous. He spent the whole day and night without sleep, singing and glorifying God with tears.

Everything happened according to the word of the Saint. On the following day, March 20, there appeared, no one knows from where, blood-thirsty enemies, and they surrounded the monastery, and everyone they found here they slew with the sword.

## ST. EUPHROSYNUS OF BLUE JAY LAKE

The martyr's death of the holy Elder Euphrosynus, wonderworker of Blue Jay Lake, is described in the original *Life of the Saint* by another monk Jonah (in 1650) thus: "Our holy Father Euphrosynus came out of his cell to meet the enemies in his complete monastic habit, the Great Schema, showing them thereby his heartfelt striving toward God, regarding all fear as nothing and offering himself as a lamb for slaughter. He came to the precious Cross which he himself had planted, placing his hope in the Life-giving Cross of the Lord... The sons of the evil one leaped at the holy Elder like demon-possessed dogs, saying to him: 'Give us the possessions of the monastery.' The Elder Euphrosynus, having neither gold nor silver, nor any material things save for necessities, said to them: 'All the possessions of the monastery and of myself are in the church of the Most Pure Mother of God,' thus showing them his true treasure which could not be stolen, and placing all his hope in God. And the sons of Cain rejoiced, thinking he was speaking about corruptible goods. One bloodthirsty killer hit St. Euphrosynus' neck with his sword, cutting it halfway through, and the Elder fell to the earth, dead. Then the Cain-like ones ran to the church, and finding nothing there, one of them returned to the body of St. Euphrosynus, carrying an axe, and with it struck the precious head of our holy Father, Abba Euphrosynus, penetrating to the brain, thus completing the suffering of this new sufferer who gave up his soul into the hands of God... The martyrdom of this holy Father, Abbot Euphrosynus, occurred near the precious and Life-giving Cross of the Lord which he himself had planted, in the year 7120 (1612), on the 20th day of the month of March, the day of commemoration of our Holy Fathers who were slain in the Monastery of St. Sabbas the Sanctified."

Such was the martyr's death of St. Euphrosynus. The monk Jonah, whom the Saint had prevented from fleeing, died together with the Saint.

It was God's will that one of the eyewitnesses of the death of St. Euphrosynus should remain among the living. There lived in the village of Doloska a pious peasant, John, whose surname was Suma, with his son Emilian. Both of them had reverence for the monastery of the Most Holy Mother of God and greatly revered the Elder Euphrosynus, and the Elder also loved them for their piety. Together with others, John and his son sought refuge from the Latins in the monastery, and on March 20, when the enemies came, John was in the cell of the Saint. Emilian, as it happened, was outside the monastery. In their work of murder the evil-doers gave John also a blow, and he fell among the dead. When the Latins came outside after searching the church and not finding anything there, one of them, looking at the corpses, supposed that John was still alive and gave him a second wound. After the departure of the marauding Latins, he regained consciousness and told his son, who



## THE NORTHERN THEBAID

had returned, what had happened. Having recovered from his wounds, John Suma lived two years longer and was buried beside St. Euphrosynus. From them the nearby inhabitants found out about the devastation of the monastery and the martyr's death of the holy Elder.

Only after eight days, on March 28, did the brethren who had returned from hiding find the body of St. Euphrosynus and give it over with honor to the earth, next to the Cross by which he had been martyred. All the inhabitants of those parts who revered the virtuous life of the Saint gathered for the burial. On the same day they buried the monk Jonah and the others who had died by the swords of the Latins.

In the monastery annals there was preserved an exact description of the outward appearance of St. Euphrosynus; he was of medium height, had wide shoulders and a broad chest; his hair was brown, adorned with gray, and he had a rather long beard which divided into two at the end.

Five years after the Saint's repose the monastery was rebuilt, and these beautiful structures were cherished with love for all the centuries after. In 1655, with the blessing of Metropolitan Macarius of Novgorod, the relics of St. Euphrosynus were uncovered, found to be completely incorrupt, and before a great multitude of the faithful there was solemnly performed the translation of his holy relics to a new reliquary. The relics were buried under the belfry and an elaborate reliquary was placed above them. The old Schema in which he had been buried was removed and a new one put on. A church service was composed in his honor, only fragments of which have come down to us. Icons were painted of him, including one presented to the monastery by the monarch himself, Tsar Alexei Mihailovich Romanov.

There have been many remarkable miracles and signs testifying to the Saint's unquestionable sanctity. Some of these comprise an appendix to the original Life written by the monk Jonah. A later more detailed work by the priest Iakovsevsky (*The Life and Miracles of St. Euphrosynus*, Novgorod, 1901), lists 27 healings, while other collections of miracles, still unpublished by the time of the re-establishment of his veneration in 1912, only emphasize the undeniability of his sanctity.

In 1764, however, during the persecution of monasticism, when two-thirds of all monasteries in Russia were forcibly closed by Catherine II, services to St. Euphrosynus were forbidden to be celebrated and were replaced by memorial services, and the monastery was closed. After this the local inhabitants often appealed to the Church Authorities for the re-establishment of his veneration as a glorified Saint. Finally, in 1912, Metropolitan Arsenius of Novgorod, himself a great lover of the ancient true Orthodox traditions, triumphantly re-established the veneration of St. Euphrosynus, as described below.

## ST. EUPHROSYNUS OF BLUE JAY LAKE

THE DAYS OF JUNE 25th to 29th, 1912, will be long remembered as days of a special spiritual solemnity: June 29 was the day designated for the triumphant glorification of the Monk-martyr Euphrosynus of Blue Jay Lake, who had been martyred 300 years earlier by the Latins during the terrible "time of troubles."

This spiritual solemnity was headed by Archbishop Arsenius of Novgorod himself. On the way to the Blue Jay Lake Hermitage, the Archbishop visited all the churches from Borovich to the city of Ustiuzhna, coming to the latter city on June 25. After the triumphal meeting of the bishop at the Cathedral, with a great number of people present, the Archbishop visited several churches and the seminary.

Five o'clock in the afternoon of this day was the time designated for the coming together of the processions with all the holy objects of the local churches and monasteries; they were to meet at the Ustiuzhna Cathedral in order to set out the next morning for Blue Jay Lake. These processions came from the Modensk Monastery, the Philaretus and Shalocha Hermitages, and the church at Chiretsk, which were on the way of the processions as they went toward the city from the villages.

The city-dwellers and peasants from nearby villages came in multitudes toward the Kazan Cemetery, where the first coming together of the separate processions was to take place. From beyond the forest appeared banners and a great crowd of pilgrims, over the head of whom were holy icons shining in the sun. The procession was accompanied by the Abbot of the Modensk Monastery, together with a hieromonk and a hierodeacon, and the choir from the Chiretsk church. In front were the singers, and behind them the clergy. On the way Akathists were read and sung, the priests dividing the reading among themselves.

Here the first joining of the processions occurred, and it was very moving. Many wept at the sight of such a solemnity. Many came out of their houses to accompany the procession a mile or two and, being attracted by the religious fervor of those present, walked to the city itself, nine miles away. This was a true example of a solemn procession with everyone singing, in the best Orthodox Church tradition.

In the square before the church of Ustiuzhna, the cathedral clergy had gathered with their holy objects, the miracle-working icons, and here a crowd of thousands of people waited for the processions to arrive.

## THE NORTHERN THEBAID

The moleben began. It was sung by the choir of the Chiretsk church, which was joined by others among the people, and in the end everyone was singing. Then a priest gave a sermon of greeting to the pilgrims. Exactly at six o'clock the Cathedral bell sounded. After the meeting of the Archbishop, the triumphant All-night Vigil began.

The Divine service proceeded with special solemnity, the choir repeating the stichera phrase by phrase after the canonarch. All were caught up in the spirit of the service. The All-night Vigil ended only at 11 p.m.

On June 26, at 7 a.m., the bell sounded for the Divine Liturgy, which was celebrated early so that the people could accompany the procession, which was to leave early and spend the night at the village of Mizga, on the way to Blue Jay Lake. The Liturgy proceeded triumphantly, followed by a moleben of thanksgiving, with everyone singing the Creed, the "Meet it is," and the "Our Father." At the Liturgy the Archbishop gave an instructive sermon.

After the Liturgy, the moleben was served on the square outside the Cathedral, and then the procession got under way with a crowd of many thousands following. Here one of the many lakes of the region had to be crossed. Having made the sign of the Cross in all four directions with the Holy Cross, the Archbishop with bared head went under the icon that was being held and got on the barge and blessed those who were following the procession. The Archbishop stood in prayer until the barge reached the opposite shore. And there a crowd of thousands was already waiting so as to begin the rest of the journey. The stop for the night was at the village of Mizga, 16 miles from Ustiuzhna. On June 27 in Mizga, the missionary Archimandrite Barsanuphius served the Liturgy and then, at the first hour of the day, the procession again got under way, going to the village of Doloska, where St. Euphrosynus had first served as a Reader. Here the procession was joined by processions from Okhona, Kyrovo, and other places. Archbishop Arsenius served the All-night Vigil in the church of Doloska. The evening was quiet and clear, and the service was wondrous and triumphant. Everyone felt that the Archpastor and the people were of one heart, praying and thanking the Lord with one mouth for His unutterable mercy. At the Magnification of Matins the Archbishop went outside the church. A crowd of several thousand people surrounded him and stood with lit candles. It was so calm that the flames of the candles did not even waver. The All-night Vigil ended about midnight, but no one felt tired, and the spirit of fervent prayer took hold of everyone.

On June 28 the Divine Liturgy was celebrated by the Archbishop. After the Liturgy the Archpastor blessed the procession to continue its way.

At the village of Doloska the hospitable landowner of this area received the Archbishop, the Governor, and all the clergy at his estate. For the



The beginning of the services of glorification in 1912: The Procession starts in the town of Ustiuzhna, where St. Euphrosynus served as a Reader

banner-carriers and pilgrims some roofed estate buildings were set apart, and tea and meals were prepared for the whole time that the pilgrims were in Doloska.

On June 28, at about 3 p.m., the Archbishop arrived at Blue Jay Lake Hermitage. His entry was triumphant. Bishop Joannicius of Kirilov arrived also, and he was met by a procession from Doloska which came to the Hermitage at about 5 o'clock. This same evening, the All-night Vigil was celebrated in the open air. Archbishop Arsenius celebrated together with the archimandrites and priests who had come with the processions. The weather was warm and calm. All the clergy, with the Archbishop at their head, were placed on a specially-built platform under a tent roof. Ten thousand pilgrims had gathered for this solemnity, and they took a most active part in it. All along the platform there were rows of hundreds of banners and the chief icons of the churches of the region. In front, on the platform, the holy objects were placed—the wonderworking Icons of the Mother of God and St. Nicholas,





The Divine Liturgy outdoors (under the tent at right), celebrated at Blue Jay Lake Hermitage on June 29, 1912, by Archbishop Arsenius of Novgorod



The Procession with the Holy Gifts around the belfry where the holy relics of St. Euphrosynus were located

#### ST. EUPHROSYNUS OF BLUE JAY LAKE

and the locally-venerated icons. The All-night Vigil ended about midnight. Archpriest Peter Seeling gave a fiery sermon, and his fervent faith in his own local Saint was involuntarily transmitted to the whole people.

The next day, June 29, was the day of the commemoration of the Chief Apostles, Peter and Paul, and the early Liturgies were celebrated in the local churches of the Blue Jay Lake Hermitage before a multitude of pilgrims and communicants. The triumphant late Liturgy was celebrated in the open air. The holy Altar-table was placed on the platform. The Liturgy was celebrated by Archbishop Arsenius, together with Bishop Joannicius and the archimandrites and other clergy. The service was distinguished by a special solemnity. The weather was favorable. The heavens themselves seemed to be rejoicing with the people.

The end of the service drew near. Greetings were read and gifts accepted from distant monasteries. All that was lacking was the participation of the heavenly elements of rain, thunder and lightning — and they were not slow in manifesting themselves. From the south a cloud appeared; a wind sprang up, and from this little cloud a large cloud was formed; lightning flashed, thunder roared, and a great and blessed rain fell. The Archbishop finished his sermon to the people and began to conclude the Divine service. The approach of the elements was so unexpected for the people, who were dressed as for a feast, that the faint-hearted were disturbed, and many began to go home. At this moment one had to admire the Archpastor of Novgorod. Suddenly he turned to the people, demanding that they stop immediately and continue to participate in the prayers that followed. His eyes were filled with anger, and his thunderous voice drowned out the noise of the elements. The people came to their senses, obeyed the voice of their Archpastor, and, despite the fact that the elements roared with yet greater power during the procession around the place where St. Euphrosynus had been martyred, still the people walked behind their Archpastor and prayed fervently. At the end of the moleben, the storm suddenly became quiet, and within two hours there was wondrous, clear weather. From this it is apparent that the hand of God gave an evident proof to the people that at the glorification of Saints not only men but also all the elements rejoice, and each of them in its own special way expresses its joy and its thanksgiving to the Creator, the Lord.

Wondrous moments were experienced in these days by everyone who gathered for the glorification of God's Saint, Euphrosynus. Wonderworker of Blue Jay Lake. It was evident to all that Holy Russia was still alive, and that love for God's Saints still burned in the hearts of the Orthodox people. If St. Euphrosynus unjustly suffered neglect for a time, let the glory of his sanctity now shine all the brighter among those who truly love God, so wondrous in His Saints!



THE LIFE OF  
**St. Diodorus of George-hill**  
 AND THE DESERT-DWELLERS OF THE UTMOST NORTH\*

Commemorated November 27

**T**HE ONEGA RIVER territory, with its myriads of glassy lakes azurely reflecting the beautiful northern landscape, provided breadth and freedom for Holy Russia's seekers of God. This region of the Northern Thebaid, with the city of Kargopol for its center, has adorned the Orthodox Church with great Saints. Some of the predecessors of St. Diodorus in this region in the 14th to 16th centuries were; St. Lazarus of Murom, the Greek who conversed with the Most Holy Mother of God; St. Cornelius of Paleh Lake, a monk of Valaam; St. Jonah of Klimenetz, the rich merchant who was converted to monasticism overnight; St. Cyril of Chelmogor; St. John the Hairy; St. Alexander of Oshevensk; and many others.

Our holy Father Diodorus was born near the end of the 16th century in the prosperous village of Turchasovo, which was located about half-way between Archangelsk and Kargopol, on the river Onega. Since all of Russia's foreign trade at that time went through the northern port of Archangelsk, whence foreign goods were transported south on the rivers to Moscow, the village of Turchasovo was an important trading center; but more significantly, it was also an important spiritual center, with beautiful churches and other edifices which bore witness to the spiritual and cultural height of Holy Russia. The Saint's father was called Hierotheus, and his mother was Mary. In holy Baptism he received the name Diomedes. When he was fifteen years old, having received the blessing of his parents, he set out on a pilgrimage to Solovki Monastery; this occurred between the years 1600 and 1606. He never returned

\*Translated from the "Life of St. Diodorus of Yuriegorsk" (i.e., "George-hill"), in the *Lives of Saints*, Supplementary Vol. I, Moscow, 1908, pp. 423ff, with details added from the *Solovki Patericon*, St. Petersburg, 1873, pp. 74ff.



SAINT DIODORUS OF GEORGE-HILL

TROPARIUM, TONE 1

**A** LOVER of those who dwell in the desert,\* thou wast aflame with zeal to imitate their virtues.\* And coming after many trials and sorrows to the barren desert,\* thou didst water it with thy tears and make it fruitful in true strugglers of Christ.\* Wherefore, we glorify thee, O holy Diodorus,\* and call out in thanksgiving for the grace that was given thee:\* Glory to Him Who granted thee strength in the wilderness,\* glory to Him Who crowned thee for thy labors,\* glory to Him Who worketh wonders through thy holy prayers.





Turchasovo Village, the home town of St. Diodorus



Two beautiful  
17th-century  
churches of  
Turchasovo:

at left,  
the Annunciation;  
at right, the  
Transfiguration.

#### ST. DIODORUS OF GEORGE-HILL

home. He came to love the monastery life and labored in the renowned monastery for three years, passing through various labors with complete obedience, without any contradiction or murmuring, for which he was beloved by all. With fear of God and humility Diomedes stood in the temple of God, listening to the sacred singing and reading. Most of all he preserved his body in chastity and avoided those among the brethren who were careless in this virtue. With his whole soul the young ascetic longed for the Angelic habit, and when he turned nineteen years old, he tearfully begged Abbot Anthony (1603-1612) to deem him worthy of the monastic tonsure. Seeing the humility and tears of the youth, the Abbot gave the blessing for him to be tonsured, and he was given the name Damian in monasticism. Then the newly-tonsured monk was given over to the spiritual direction of an elder experienced in the monastic life, Hieromonk Joseph, a native of Great Novgorod.

**H**IEROMONK JOSEPH was a great lover of the desert, that dwelling place of anchoritic monasticism, and not infrequently would he tell his young novice how that right there in the thickets of the forest of Solovki Island many desert-dwellers were still struggling, working out the salvation of their souls.

#### THE UNKNOWN ANCHORITE

There were then hermits on Solovki whose names are known to God alone. One monk of Solovki — to take an example that was recorded in the Solovki Patericon of this period — was going about the island on some monastery business; becoming fatigued, he wished to rest beside a steep hill. Intending to lie down on the ground, he crossed himself and pronounced aloud the Jesus Prayer. Suddenly from the top of the hill, from within a cleft, he heard "Amen." Not believing his ears, he pronounced the prayer a second and a third time, and again he heard the same "Amen." "Who are you, a man or a spirit?" asked the monk in astonishment. "I am a sinful man," answered the unseen one, "and I am weeping over my sins." "What is your name and how did you come here?" "My name and how I came here God alone knows." "Are you alone here?" "Near to me there live two elders. There was also a third one, but he departed to the Lord and we buried him." "And what do you live on?" "Remember, brother, the word of the Lord: *Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth from the mouth of God.* He nourishes and warms the inward man. Remember how in earlier times holy men and women dwelt in mountains, caves, and caverns of the earth. God the Creator fed them, and is He not the same God Who is now? If you wish to find out with what the Master feeds my corruptible body, take this." With these words he threw a piece of something, and the

### THE NORTHERN THEBAID

monk took it and ate it. It was dried moss with cranberries. "This is what my Master feeds me with," said the desert-dweller. The monk began to entreat him to tell him how many years he had been in this place and how he spent his time. "I have been here ten or more years," replied the anchorite. "The first year I suffered terribly from the fearsome spectacles of the demons. The demons, appearing in the form of robbers, frightened me, beat me mercilessly, dragged me out of my cell, and demanded that I go away from the island or return to the monastery. Having tortured me, they left me hardly alive. Then two holy men with prosphora in their hands came to me. They said, 'Arise, brother, and signing yourself with the Sign of the Cross, say the Prayer of Jesus. Do not fear the snares of the enemies; have courage and be strengthened, and God will help you. Taste of this prosphora, and we will visit you.' No sooner had I tasted the prosphora than immediately I felt myself to be well and joyful. In the first year, when the demons especially attacked me, the elders often visited me, carried me into the hut and strengthened me. The second year, the attacks of the demons became weaker, and now, by the grace of Christ, I am out of danger from all the attacks of the enemy. But the elders sometimes visit me and bring prosphora and bread."

When the monk said farewell, the desert-dweller begged him to bring incense on a certain day. The monk promised, but he was unable to do this on the day designated, and later he was no longer able to find the desert-dweller. The next year, however, the monk again came to the same place where he had conversed with the desert-dweller, and, having labored much, he lay down to rest. In a vision during sleep the anchorite appeared to him and said, "Now you have come in vain," and gave him a prosphora.

At this same time, when the young Father Damian was listening to such accounts in the cell of his elder, there came to his spiritual father, Elder Joseph, a certain Basil of Keno Lake who loved to go away for solitude into deserted parts of the island; this Basil told of a meeting with the marvellous desert-dweller *Andrew*.

### THE BLESSED ANDREW

"It once happened," he began his narrative, "that I went far away from the monastery and, having lost the road, I wandered lost without food or drink. Suddenly in the distance there appeared to me, as it were, the shadow of a man. I went towards it, and the shadow hid in the denseness of the forest. I continued to run and I saw a small path, and I went on it as far as a very dense thicket in which there was a narrow entrance just large enough for one man. Having gone through this entrance, I saw a mountain, and on it the footprints of a barefoot man. In the cliff there was a small

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opening. I prayed and then entered this dark cave. After making the Sign of the Cross, I stretched out my hands and felt a man, and in terror I said a prayer; to this the cave-dweller replied, 'Amen.' I fell at his feet. 'Why have you come here and what do you need?' the unknown one asked me. 'Forgive me, holy Father; I have become lost and thus came here. I entreat you, have pity on me and show me the way to the monastery.' The hermit brought me to a different cave in which, on the southern side, there was a window which lighted the interior. Then I examined the unknown one. He was naked, with a small beard, and his body was dark. In the cave there were four stumps; on them were placed two boards and two carved wooden bowls; in one of the bowls was water, and in the other, dried grass. The desert-dweller gave me the grass to eat and the water to drink. Having tasted what was offered, I felt life and strength return within me. Then I asked the elder to tell me of his life. He said, 'I was a laborer of this monastery of Solovki. My name is Andrew.' Thus he began his account. 'Having come to the monastery of Solovki, I labored in the salt-works, boiling the salt. At that time the abbot was Barlaam (1571-1581, later Metropolitan of Rostov). Soon the thought of my sins was aroused within me and the desire was born to leave everything and labor for God alone. I did not want to postpone this, so I went into the wilderness, found this dark cave, and settled in it. I suffered from hunger and thirst, I ate berries and mushrooms, and many times I endured the attacks of devils, beatings, insults, and afflictions. I fought with thoughts as with wild beasts. Many times I repented that I had gone into the wilderness, considering all my hermitic life fruitless. Often I even left the cave in order to go to the world, but thunder resounded from heaven, rain poured down, and I would be forced to return to the cave. Here a quiet coolness gave me repose. Sometimes I would come up out of the cave in the wintertime, but the frightful frost, which would have crushed all my bones, did not give me any possibility of going more than five steps. For three years this difficult battle continued. After a trial of three years I found peace, and all the unpleasant attacks ceased. Then there appeared to me a certain holy being who said, 'Be firm, do not leave the path to God which has been indicated to you.' He gave me this grass, saying, 'Eat it, and drink water from this lake.' So for 38 years I have eaten this grass.' Having heard this account, I fell at the feet of the elder, begging his prayers. Andrew brought me out of the cave, showed the way to the monastery, and having blessed me, said, 'Go in peace, and tell no one about what you have heard from me while I am alive.' I went, and it seemed to me that it was no more than half a mile to the monastery." Thus Basil concluded his wondrous narrative.



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The account of Basil sank deeply into the soul of Damian. After some time, Basil set out to seek the cave of Andrew, and Damian accompanied him. But having spent a whole week in the search, they found neither that dense forested place, nor the mountain, nor the cave.

SUCH ACCOUNTS AS THESE kindled in the young monk the ardent desire to settle in the forest with the desert-dwellers and to imitate their struggles. He ceaselessly thought only about this, but, nevertheless, he diligently fulfilled all the difficult monastic obediences that were laid upon him in the bakery and the kitchen. Then, one day, while he was working with the brethren in the bakery, the Saint looked out at the lake which is located right next to the monastery, on the east side, and exclaimed: "Look, brethren; a desert-dweller is walking on the water as if on dry land." The brethren looked, but saw nothing. The Saint thirsted for hermitic life, but he continued to work in the place where kvas was made, laboring very hard, giving no rest to himself, and fervently praying to the Lord both in church and in his cell.

Many years did Damian struggle thus in the monastery, until his own father, Hierotheus, came to him, to the Saint's great joy; having received the monastic tonsure, he remained in the monastery until his death. The Saint buried his father with his own hands. After his father's death, the Saint was again inflamed with the desire to leave the noisy monastery and go into the desert in order to lead in silence there the difficult life of an anchorite. This time he went out from the monastery deep into the island seeking desert-dwellers there so as to be edified by their converse, and even hoping to live together with them. For forty days he walked about the island, eating only grass and dew, but he found no one. He became faint from hunger, and finally, scarcely breathing, he lay down under a tree. Here his brethren from the monastery found him, having come so far to gather plants and berries. They took the Saint for dead, placed him on a stretcher of sorts, brought him to the monastery building which was in this area, and called his spiritual father to him. "What has happened to you, Damian?" asked the elder. Damian could scarcely answer: "Forgive me, Father; from the time when I left the monastery I have not seen bread, and have 'liven' only on grass." The brethren thus understood what had happened and gave him bread and kvas, and Damian thus recovered.

This unfortunate incident did not keep the Saint from fulfilling his cherished desire; soon he set out anew and settled in a deserted cell which had been abandoned by some unknown hermit. Later, when the Saint succeeded in meeting two anchorites and conversing with them, he came to love

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the hermitic life still more. Now he built a hut for himself in the forest and lived in it, laboring during the day and spending the night in prayer.

But his earlier thought to visit all the anchorites of the island, all the unknown strugglers and true slaves of God who were concealed from the eyes of men in the forest thickets, did not leave the Saint. Having prayed to the Lord and the Wonderworkers of Solovki, Sts. Sabbatius and Zossimas, for the fulfillment of his cherished desire, Damian began to walk throughout the desert. And the Lord did not disdain the prayers of His servant. He deemed him worthy to see a multitude of anchorites — monks and laymen who were working out their salvation on Anzersk, Solovki, and other islands. Desiring to help them in their labors, the Saint began often to go to the monastery and bring back food for them, and by his visits he brought them much consolation. He buried those who had died.

### THE BLESSED NICEPHORUS

Once during winter he met in the desert the anchorite Nicephorus, a layman from Novgorod. The anchorite was completely naked. Turning to the Saint, he said: 'Keep visiting, Damian, keep visiting, so that God will visit you also.' And he ran away. The Saint wanted to converse with the hermit, but he could not overtake him. Nicephorus was a great holy man, the son of a priest of Novgorod. He had come to the monastery of Solovki when he was still young, and he had grown to love monastic life. He entreated the Superior to tonsure him, but because he was young and handsome, his desire was put off. This refusal only increased in the youth his zeal for monastic life. Together with some pilgrims from Novgorod he received a letter from his parents, in which they called him to return quickly home. "Tell my parents," he replied to those who gave him the letter, "that they will no longer see me in this life; we will meet there beyond the grave." Nicephorus continued to labor for the monastery together with others, observing a strict fast. He never lay down to sleep, but rested a little sitting up. In his free time he loved to read the Life of St. Mark the Anchorite of Thrace.\* The image of this early desert-dweller was deeply impressed on him and drew him to the anchoritic life. Once, in front of everyone, Nicephorus jumped up from his chair, signed himself with the Sign of the Cross, took off his belt and his sandals, and in a single gray shirt fled into the forest, remaining in the desert, on the island of Solovki, for twelve years, in fasting, prayer, and prostrations. Then a certain desert-dweller tonsured him. Spending three more years in monastic labors, he died in 1603, on Palm Sunday.

\* For this Life, see *The Orthodox Word*, 1966, no. 1.

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### THE BLESSED TIMOTHY

Another time Damian visited a still more perfect anchorite, was deemed worthy of conversations with him, and found out who he was. His name was Timothy, and he was a native of Aleksin in the Tula region. He left his parents' home and fled to the desert during the Time of Troubles, in the reign of the Pretender Demetrius. Seeing the strife and disorder in the Moscow Government, he left the cities behind and set out in a small boat from Archangelsk on the Arctic Sea. Reaching the desert of Solovki, he built a hut for himself and settled in it. For three years Timothy endured hunger and difficult temptations, until a radiant heavenly elder appeared to him and showed him the grass he should eat and the water he should drink. Inspired by his life, Damian decided definitely to settle in the desert, living with Nicophorus and Timothy. "Slave of Christ," said the Saint to Timothy, "pray God that He might deem me also worthy of living together with you both, that He might strengthen our life together and help me to bear this most difficult struggle for the salvation of my soul."

Now the Saint began often to go to both the anchorites; he would bring them all necessities, entreat and exhort them to continue their lofty labor, and comfort them in their sorrows; he himself promised to keep the monastic vow even unto death, and without fail to dwell in the desert. His example inspired others to imitate him.

### THE BLESSED EPHRAIM AND OTHERS

In the Life of St. Diodorus the following hermits whom the Saint met are also mentioned: the elder *Ephraim* the dark, then *Alexius* of Kaluga, *Joseph* and *Tikhon* of Moscow, *Theodulus* of Ryazan, *Porphyrus*, *Tryphon*, *Joseph the Younger*, *Sebastian*, and many others. With heartfelt love Damian attached himself to them and began frequently to visit them and bring them what they needed from the monastery.

Besides these desert-dwellers whom St. Diodorus knew in the wild forests of the island of Solovki, tradition names many other ascetics who sought salvation there in the 17th century in a life of the strictest silence. Among these was *Adrian*, who lived near the lake in the very center of the island, a mile and a half from the cell built by Abbot Irenarchus, and who led here a strict ascetic life. Here he died and was buried in the desert. The layman *Sabbas*, who was one of the monastery's laborers, went away into the forest on Solovki Island and labored for eleven years, known only to God. He died during the abbacy of Raphael and was buried near the cell of Dam-



### ST. PAUL OF THEBAID SOUGHT OUT BY ST. ANTHONY THE GREAT

St. Diodorus followed the ancient example of the Egyptian desert Fathers by seeking out holy hermits and receiving spiritual benefit from discourse with them, thus likening himself to the great Saints.

*Fresco in the Refectory of the Holy Trinity Monastery near Jordanville, N. Y.*  
BY ICONOGRAPHER ARCHIMANDRITE CYPRIAN.





View of the Solovki islands wilderness, the desert haven of the Northern Thebaid's severest ascetics, as seen from the hill of the Golgotha Skete, with the Arctic Sea on the horizon



When this wilderness became peopled with holy men, the Mother of God appeared to St. Job, on June 18, 1712, and said: "This mountain henceforth shall be called Golgotha; a church will be built on it and a Crucifixion Skete; and it shall become white with innumerable sufferings." This prophecy was fulfilled when millions of innocent martyrs were slaughtered by the Communists on this hill.



A typical desert-dweller's hut, made of grass and branches, during summer.



Golgotha Skete in the Solovki forest during winter.



THE HOLY MONASTERY OF SOLOVKI

A 17th-century illustrated title page for the Life of Sts. Sabbatius and Zosimas, produced in the Solovki calligraphy workshop. This type of publication was very popular in St. Diodorus' youth and spread the monastic ideal.

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ian. Near the cell of Sabbas, the monk *Nestor* lived as a hermit, laboring day and night in prayer and fasting. When he died he also was buried near the desert of Damian.<sup>†</sup>

NOW THE BRETHREN of Solovki Monastery began to murmur against Damian, who received the Schema with the name Diodorus about this time. They said: "He is disrupting the monastery and building up the desert with the monastery's property. The desert is filling up with brethren whom he is leading away from the monastery; now they no longer labor for the monastery, and others also are deceived. If now we shall indulge him, he will seduce many and bring much harm to the monastery."

At this time the cellarer Cyricus went out from the monastery to the desert of St. Diodorus, and thereby the brethren of the infirmary were offended. With tears they begged their abbot, St. Irenarchus,\* to command that Cyricus be brought back from the desert, together with the anchorite Diodorus. "Cyricus has saddened us by his departure," they told the abbot, "be cause no one is able to comfort us as well as he. We are saddened now."

Hearing this complaint, the abbot and all the Solovki brethren were greatly angered at St. Diodorus. They sent some of the monastery workers to search for the Saint and other anchorites. They found them, seized them, and brought them to the monastery like criminals, after destroying their cells. St. Diodorus, as the chief evil-doer, was brought bound. All the hermits were ordered to live in the monastery, and the Saint was placed in irons and thrown into the infirmary. Here he remained for five and a half months in strict confinement, not having the possibility to go out either to church or to the brethren. Finally, having been freed from bonds by God's mercy, the Saint secretly left the monastery, this time for the last time, and went away to his former desert. All the cells and habitations of the hermits had been destroyed; the Saint saw this and lamented, praying with tears: "O merciful Lord, O Master, Lover of mankind! If this be pleasing to Thee, may Thy will be done!"

<sup>†</sup> There exists a whole Solovki Patericon of this period, published in the 17th century, republished in the 19th, but it was not available to the editors.

\* St. Irenarchus of Solovki, abbot from 1613-1626; commemorated July 17. A great wonderworker and a lover of the desert himself (spending the last two years of his life in silence alone in the forest), he blessed his close disciple St. Eleazar to establish a skete on Anzersk Island. Many anchorites settled there under St. Eleazar's guidance, thus avoiding the temptations which sometimes occurred when hermits lived without sufficient spiritual direction. St. Eleazar of Solovki (†1656, January 13), one of the greatest Saints of the Northern Thebaid, was deemed worthy to converse with the Most Holy Theotokos Herself.



## THE NORTHERN THEBAID

For a long time the brethren of Solovki Monastery diligently sought St. Diodorus, but they could not find him, for the Lord covered His servant. For six months the Saint abode in the desert and unceasingly entreated the Lord and the Solovki Saints that he might find a more suitable and safe place for the life of silence. It seems that only one of the Solovki brethren knew the place of St. Diodorus' desert solitude—his own brother, who sometimes visited the hermit. Once he came to the cell of his brother; having received no answer to his prayerful greeting, he entered the cell and saw the Saint lying unconscious on the ground, greatly swollen. The Saint explained that he had been beaten by demons.

After this, St. Diodorus decided to leave in order to struggle in another place. He sailed across the sea in a boat, and coming out on the shore at the mouth of the river Onega, he gave thanks to the Lord, Who had helped him to row safely across the depths of the sea. From there he rowed south upstream, seeking a place in which to settle. And so he came to his native territory and passed his home town Turchasovo, which towered over the beautiful wide river. Round about was a vast, still deserted wilderness, ideally suited for desert-dwelling. He rowed further along the familiar banks, searching and praying. The Saint liked very much a certain deserted place on the river Kena just before one reaches Keno Lake, and he decided to settle there. Having prayed, he set up a Cross, felled trees for a cell, and gave himself over to his usual struggles, adding labor to labor, offering to the Lord the sweet-smelling incense of his prayers. But here also trials were in store for the zealous hermit. Near this place the peasants trapped animals. Upon encountering the Saint, they beat him mercilessly, burned his cell and boat, mocked him, dragged him by his feet, and left him barely alive, yelling at him: "Why have you settled here? Surely you wish now to establish a monastery? You are scheming to take away our land and our fishing rights. If you do not leave this place, we will kill you."

The Saint left, praying to the Lord for his offenders. Then, coming to the river Onega, he approached the bank and stood at prayer, as was his custom. It happened that at this very time the wealthy Moscow merchant, Nadeya Svetechnikov, arrived at this place in a carriage. On seeing the Elder, he bowed down to him and asked who he was and where he was from. "I am a wandering beggar," the Saint humbly answered. When the merchant questioned him persistently, St. Diodorus told him of his misfortunes. The merchant became angry at the peasants, felt sorry for the Saint, who had been injured unjustly, and said to him: "I shall inform the Tsar about all this, and he will take vengeance on your offenders." But the Elder did not desire this and entreated his defender: "No, my lord, do not do this; do not inform

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the Tsar." The merchant promised to do the will of the meek Elder, but on arriving at the village of Keno Lake, he told the local magistrate about the settlers who had beaten the holy man and threatened to inform on them. The guilty men became frightened; they sought out the Saint and, falling down at his feet, begged him to return to his previous place, agreeing to build a cell for him and to comfort him in everything.

But St. Diodorus withdrew from them to Zabolody Lake and found there a desert place called George-hill, on Lake George. This place was exceptionally beautiful and seemed to the Saint to be suitable for anchoritic life. And the hermit rejoiced, gave thanks to the Lord, erected a Cross, built a cell, and gave himself over to his usual desert struggles, labor, and prayer.

For seven years St. Diodorus struggled here completely alone; and then a certain monk Prochorus came to him. He saw the Saint's labors, was amazed at his supernatural life, and remained to live with him. Many times the two hermits heard the ringing of bells at that place, and the laymen who came there also heard the ringing and told the holy Elder about it. The Saint glorified the Lord for this. And then once a resplendent man appeared to him and said: "It is pleasing to the Lord that at this place a temple be built in the name of the Life-giving Trinity, another in the name of the honorable and glorious Entry of the Most Holy Theotokos, and a third in the name of Sts. Zosimas and Sabbatius, the Wonderworkers of Solovki; brethren will gather here and the community will increase."

But the Saint was not thinking about making a monastery, and so he did not attach any special significance to this vision. When the vision was repeated, together with the heavenly command, St. Diodorus began to take counsel with Prochorus and said to his co-dweller: "I am perplexed as to how I can build a cenobitic monastery with three temples, when I do not have a single copper coin." When the Elder was thus wondering and was in perplexity about this, the following night the resplendent man appeared to him a third time and said: "Why do you wonder in your heart, and why are you perplexed? Are you worried that you have nothing? Understand that God's judgments are unsearchable, and that with God all things are possible. Now do not think about anything." Later this radiant man sent the Saint to Moscow to see the cellarer of the Holy Trinity Lavra, commanding him to tell the latter all that had happened; he promised that the cellarer would build the monastery, and that other builders would be found as well. "And do not be disobedient," said the holy man who had appeared to the Saint, "and do not bring down upon yourself the wrath of God." Upon saying this, he became invisible. That very night the Saint decided to go to Moscow. He told Prochorus about his decision, asked him to remain until his return, and with prayer he set off on the long journey.

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St. Diodorus came to the St. Sergius-Holy Trinity Lavra and prayed before the relics of Sts. Sergius and Nikon, Wonderworkers of Radonezh; but he did not find the cellarer, Alexander Bulstnikov<sup>†</sup>, in the Lavra, since at that time he was in Moscow. The Saint hastened to Moscow, prayed at its holy places, and found the cellarer Alexander. The cellarer told the pious mother of Tsar Michael Theodorovich, the nun Martha, about the hermit who had come from the northern coastal lands. She called the Saint, questioned him about his life in the desert, about the place of his struggles, about the visions of which he had been deemed worthy; and she gave him church vessels, icons, books, vestments, bells, and 200 rubles\* for the building of the churches and the monastery. Promising to donate more at a later time, she ordered the Elder to come to her and inform her about the various needs of his desert monastery. She commanded the Saint to build his monastery with diligence, and she told her son, the Tsar Michael himself, about the hermit. The Tsar gave him a charter. The cellarer Alexander also supplied the Saint with books, vestments, bells, and money. The merchant Nadeya Svetechnikov gave him books and two bells, and other lovers of Christ donated 300 rubles to the Saint. From Moscow St. Diodorus went to Great Novgorod, to Metropolitan Cyprian, the bishop of his diocese, in order to ask his permission to build a monastery. The cellarer Alexander gave the Saint a letter to the Metropolitan, requesting that the hierarch give his patronage to the hermit. Metropolitan Cyprian received the Saint very kindly, gave him an official document of permission, asked him all about his desert, and came to love the holy Elder. The Metropolitan likewise gave the antimension for the sanctification of the church, some money, various supplies for the return journey, a document which freed the monastery from taxes, and a priest who was to perform Divine services in the monastery. Letting the ascetic go, the Metropolitan promised him his protection and help for the future.

St. Diodorus went joyously back to his beloved wilderness, reflecting on all that had happened and being astonished at how it could be that, having nothing before, he had received everything needful for the building of churches and of the whole monastery. And he rejoiced all the more, seeing with his own eyes his dear wilderness, his humble cell, and his co-dweller Prochorus, who was awaiting the return of the Saint.

Then St. Diodorus began to labor on the building of the monastery. First of all, he turned to the Lord in fervent prayer so that He might show him the place where the main church of the monastery should be built, and

\* This sum was quite large, equivalent to 4500 rubles in 1916, and at least several times that amount in present-day dollars — a vivid illustration of the great support given the desert-dwellers by the pious leading nobility.



The village on the river Kena near which St. Diodorus intended to settle, until he was driven away by the local inhabitants.



NUN MARTHA ROMANOV  
Mother of Tsar Michael Feodorovich  
(†1645), first of the Romanov Dynasty.



Nun Martha talks to her son,  
Tsar Michael, about St. Diodorus.  
(from *Russian Pilgrim*, 1913)





A TYPICAL MONASTIC ORATORY OF ONEGA REGION, still miraculously preserved today from the 17th century, constructed out of logs, appearing just as St. Diodorus would have seen it.

he was vouchsafed a vision. He saw coming down from the heavens a great Cross, which came to rest on the mountain. Around the Cross many ravens were flying, which then came down to the mountain and perched on trees, and he heard a voice saying, "May a church of the Most Holy Trinity be erected on this place, and as many birds as you see here, so many will be the monks who will come to you here and will glorify the name of God in this place."



THE TOWN OF KARGOPOL

just as it must have looked in the time of St. Diodorus when he crossed the wide Onega river for the last time before his repose.



Kargopol's Main Cathedral, towering over the quiet Onega River in a landscape totally unchanged since the days of St. Diodorus.



The snowbound old Kargopol churches on the banks of the frozen river: a forlorn scene of Russia today.

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The Saint informed Prochorus of his vision, and they glorified God. Then they hired carpenters and workers to fell trees for the church building. When the trees were ready, they undertook the building of a wooden church dedicated to the Life-giving Trinity. Previously on George-hill there had been a pagan cemetery. There sacrifices had been offered to the pagan gods, and thus the place was unclean. When they began to build the church, the mountain shook and cries could be heard from within it. The carpenters were frightened and wished to leave their work. Then the Saint performed a service of prayer on the mountain and sprinkled the place with holy water, and the demons fled into George Lake with noise and cries, and then disappeared into the forest. Having built a church dedicated to the Life-giving Trinity, the workmen undertook the building of the church of the Entry of the Mother of God, with a wing dedicated to the Wonderworkers of Solovki. They built cells and surrounded the monastery with a fence. The priest who had been brought by St. Diodorus from Novgorod performed Divine service in the main church. All this happened about the year 1626.

At first there were only three brethren in the newly-built monastery: St. Diodorus, his co-dweller Prochorus, and the priest who had come from Novgorod. But then, one by one, some laymen began to come, and they were tonsured into the monastic rank and labored in the desert monastery with humility and obedience. The Saint himself labored diligently and with love for the brethren, both in the bakery and in the kitchen. He washed the clothing of the brethren and took care of the brethren as a father does his children. He comforted the novices and taught them how to labor, to struggle, and to flee idle talking, by which the enemy often deceives monks.

Once, while standing at prayer, the Saint saw, as it were, a pillar of metal reaching from earth to heaven. From this pillar hooks were hanging, and upon them many monks were being raised up. They were raised up to the heavens, some by the hooks and some by the pillar; the heavens were opened, a great light shone upon those who had been raised, and then the heavens again were closed. Others were raised only half-way up the pillar and then fell to the earth, and so again began their ascent. The vision signified the difficulty and the height of monastic labor.

When many brethren had gathered in the monastery of the Life-giving Trinity, the lack of bread and other food was felt, and there was no place where the monastery could obtain them. The place was far away from the villages of the world, and in the summertime, by reason of the swamps surrounding them, there was not even a road. Only with great labor and out of extreme need did someone get through to the monastery. Famine began, and the brethren began to complain against St. Diodorus, saying: "He has senselessly wasted all his money on building; at one time he built three



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churches, made cells, and surrounded the monastery with a fence, and now we have nothing to eat. It would have been better at first to build one church, and the second one afterwards. We cannot bear hunger, and tomorrow morning we will all separate, each one going where he wishes."

The Elder consoled them and said, "Endure, O brethren: God will not abandon us, for He can feed us."

But the brethren did not cease to murmur. The Saint stood at prayer and entreated the Lord not to abandon those who hoped in Him. Then a radiant man appeared before him and said, "Do not be faint-hearted, but strengthen the brethren and remember how many souls the Lord fed in the desert. Do you really think He cannot feed you few? Labor and give thanks to God, and catch fish in the lake."

This vision was repeated twice, but the Saint did not believe his visions and considered them a demonic attack. Having seen the radiant elder for the third time, he tested him, forcing him to read a prayer. The one who had appeared read "Meet It Is," and his face shone with an unearthly light. The Saint fell to the feet of this wondrous elder and asked him, "Who are you, my lord, and why do you have such concern over this place and the brethren, over us sinners? A sweet light illuminates my heart in your presence."

"I was tonsured in the monastery of St. Cyril and am abbot of the monastery of Oshevensk. My name is Alexander. Do not grieve, Diodorus; strengthen the brethren, place your hope in God, labor for Him with fear, and He will feed you."

Then the wonderworker\* reminded St. Diodorus of his own words which he had spoken in the previous vision, when he had prophesied the increase of the brethren in the monastery, and became invisible. St. Diodorus glorified God and His Saint, Alexander, and entreated the brethren to go to the lake and fish. The brethren went fishing and caught many fish, which they sold for sixty rubles and thus bought bread and everything necessary.

Another time, the Saint's fellow struggler, Prochorus, heard a voice from the icon of the Most Holy Mother of God, before which he was praying, which said, "Do not grieve, but have love among yourselves and labor; God will not abandon you, but He will feed you in this place. Go to the lake and fish." And again the brethren caught many fish.

It happened a third time that the brethren of George-hill were hungry. The monks murmured against the Saint, but he, being meek in soul, consoled the brethren and called upon them to hope only in God, Who will not

\* St. Alexander of Oshevensk and Kargopol (†1479, April 20), founder of Oshevensk Monastery and Orthodox enlightener of the Kargopol region.

## SAINT DIODORUS OF GEORGE-HILL

force them to endure beyond their strength, but will be merciful. The brethren were calmed; and going out beyond the monastery on obedience, at their work they saw a black fox lying on the ground, and they took it and sold it for eight rubles, with which they bought food.

Up to this time the monastery did not have its own land for tilling, nor its own grain, and therefore the brethren were often hungry. But now that the monastery had increased in size and the brethren had multiplied, the Saint and his fellow strugglers decided to make their own tilling land. They felled trees and ploughed the land.

But new and severe trials were being made ready for the Saint. At that time there was sent to the George-hill Monastery, by order of Patriarch Philaret of All Russia, a disgraced elder, a certain Theodosius. After living for a short time in the monastery, he devised evil against St. Diodorus and decided to kill him. Finding the most suitable time, the evil-doer called the ascetic into the forest and there strove to fulfill his intention. He knocked the Saint to the ground, beat him without mercy, and choked him. Then he dragged the unconscious ascetic under a fallen tree and covered him, thinking that he was dead. But the grace of God helped the Saint; he recovered consciousness and with great labor he came to his own cell. Seeing him, Theodosius became petrified from fear, and coming into the cell of the ascetic, he fell down at his feet and with tears begged his forgiveness, entreating him not to tell about what had happened. The meek ascetic forgave the criminal, not even becoming angry at him, and only remarked, "May God forgive you, my child, for this is not your doing, but the devil's." He promised Theodosius that he would hide his crime from everyone, and he began to love him more than before. But the evil-doer was not at all touched by the Saint's meekness and was not corrected at all.

A little time passed, and Theodosius began to arouse the novices against St. Diodorus, persuading them to leave the monastery. Once the brethren were felling trees, and Theodosius was with them. He carved with an axe in a tree the likeness of St. Diodorus' face, signed his name, and began to beat the image with a whip. Everyone laughed at this. Theodosius continued to arouse the novices, and deceived and persuaded seventeen of them to flee the monastery. Having taken counsel together, they robbed the monastery treasury, took as much of the monastery property as they could carry with them, and having grieved the Saint, they left. The holy Elder was not made bitter by the deprivation of the monastery possessions; he even rejoiced at the departure of the unworthy brethren who were scandalizing other monks by their disobedience. Having hope in God alone, he gave thanks to Him for all sorrows. St. Diodorus received many offences also from

## THE NORTHERN THEBAID

other senseless men, and always he endured without murmuring, praying for those who offended him, instructing them on the way to salvation, and bringing them into love by secret accusations and exhortations. Often he went off by himself, away from the brethren, and lived in silence, praying to the Lord day and night.

Once the Saint was travelling to Great Novgorod to collect alms for the monastery, and on the return journey he stopped in the village of Andoma, near Lake Onega, with a certain Christ-lover, John, who had a young daughter who, before this, had been promised in marriage. Conversing with the Saint, John said, "Holy Father, I wish to give my daughter in marriage."

Having been silent a little, the Saint remarked, "Slave of God, wait a little, and then act in the way that is pleasing to God." The next day the Saint left for his monastery, and forty days after this the daughter of John died a virgin.

**T**HEN THE BLESSED REPOSE of the Saint of God drew near. The Saint had to travel on monastery business to the city of Kargopol. Before his departure he called the Hieromonk Joasaph and the Elder Prochorus, who first lived with him, and entrusted to them the governance of the monastery, exhorting them to keep the monastery with great care and without weakening. To Prochorus he revealed his impending death. "We will no longer see each other," said the Saint to his fellow desert-dweller. "If it is pleasing to the Lord, we will meet in the future life."

Soon after coming to Kargopol, St. Diodorus became ill, and after receiving Communion of the Holy Mysteries, he departed in peace to the Lord on the 27th day of November, 1633. His body was buried at the parish church of the priest who had given him the Holy Mysteries before his death.

Not for long, however, was the labor-loving body of the ascetic to lie far from his monastery. Two months after the Saint's repose, Prochorus came to Kargopol and took with him the incorrupt body of his Elder. Having brought it to the George-hill Monastery, Prochorus buried it near the church of the Life-giving Trinity, on the southern side.

St. Diodorus left his monastery a written testament through the same priest of Kargopol mentioned above. The Saint commanded the brethren and strongly exhorted them: "Let there be not even a rumor of the keeping of intoxicating beverages in the monastery among the brethren; but be joyful and sober in the spiritual life. And if anyone, being possessed by fearlessness and disdaining this commandment and written testament, shall begin to bring wine to the monastery and to give himself over to drunkenness, I will bring judgment against him before the terrible and unhyprocritical Judge, our Lord Jesus Christ."

## SAINT DIODORUS OF GEORGE-HILL

The Lord glorified St. Diodorus by gifts of His grace, by clairvoyance and miracles. The following miracle occurred after the repose of St. Diodorus, in the year 1656. The youth Andrew, who lived in the George-hill Monastery, was incontinent in food and drink and was committing a sexual sin. Not desiring the death of a sinner, the Lord punished Andrew with blindness. He sought help from men, but he found none. Then he came to the grave of St. Diodorus, fervently prayed for healing, wiped his blind eyes with the cover from the grave and with the Saint's cowl, and immediately he recovered his sight. But soon Andrew forgot the mercy of God's Saint and gave himself over in thought to his previous sin. Then the Saint appeared to him in sleep, forbidding him and saying, "Do not sin, do not sin, lest your previous affliction return to you." Andrew remembered the warning of the Saint for only a short time; and then again he gave himself over to his sin. There came upon him then an illness, and he suffered from it until he repented before the Superior and corrected his manner of life.

Once there arose in Andrew the desire to leave the monastery. But St. Diodorus again appeared to him in sleep and said, "Endure in this place and it will be well with you." Andrew remembered the mercy which had been shown to him by the Saint of God, and he feared to leave the monastery, but with joy he promised to endure in it as long as would be pleasing to the Lord; and indeed, later he received the monastic tonsure there.

**T**HE RELICS of St. Diodorus remained in the ground with a reliquary over them in the church of the Life-giving Trinity, which had two side altars, one dedicated to the Entry of the Most Holy Theotokos, and the other to his beloved Sts. Sabbatius and Zosimas, founders of Solovki Monastery. There is no record of the Saint's ever having been officially canonized, and it is most likely that his name was entered into the Orthodox Calendar on the basis of his local veneration, as has indeed been the case with most other Orthodox Saints. During the period of monastic persecution, in 1764, the monastery was closed and turned into a parish church, and during the new flowering of Russian monasticism in the 19th century it seems not to have been revived as a monastic settlement. There is no mention at all of its present existence under the soulless Communist rule.

The memory of St. Diodorus is as fragrant today as ever for those who still thirst for true Orthodox spiritual life. Out of love for God's Saints who dwell in the desert, he himself became one of them and bequeathed to us as his testament the fiery freedom of the monastic spirit—achieved through self-renunciation—and the unquenchable thirst for communion with God, which is given to those who hate the world, take up their Cross, and follow Christ our Saviour. Amen.



THE LIFE OF

## Saint Dorothy of Kashin

AND THE RIGHTEOUS WOMEN OF HOLY RUSSIA\*

LET WOMEN KEEP SILENCE IN THE CHURCHES.

I Cor. 14:34

**A**WAY FROM THE TUMULT and noise of the world, in quiet monastic refuges, in deserted landscapes which evoke thoughts of eternity, women of Holy Russia worked out their salvation for a thousand years, striving to acquire first of all humility of wisdom. One of them was the forgotten St. Dorothy of 17th-century Kashin.

The spiritual fragrance of this key virtue in Patristic Orthodoxy, that of HUMILITY OF WISDOM, which is the joining together of humility and wisdom, has always been very close to true Orthodox women, and especially to the women Saints. Behind them there always shines forth the humble image of Her Who is the first Abbess of all monastics, the Most Holy Theotokos.

Particularly is this true of the women Saints of Holy Russia, who were so penetrated by this quiet, refined, and pure virtue that only very meager information has even come down to us about them. They strove to be unseen, unnoticed, concealed in quiet monastic cells behind monastery walls, located beyond distant lakes and rivers, in forgotten sketes hidden in green thickets, in the shadow of weeping willows and birch groves, which alone heard their quiet prayer and soft chanting and saw them beholding the bridal chamber of their Divine Bridegroom, Christ.

\*Abbreviated from the weekly periodical, *Russian Pilgrim*, 1893, nos. 41, 42, 43, & 50; with additional information from *Russian Ascetics of the 18th & 19th Centuries*, by Bishop Nikodim of Belgorod, vols. 1, 2, & 13, Moscow, 1912. Other sources: *Lives of Russian Saints*, 2 Vols., Synodal edition of 1908 and 1916; *History of the Russian Church* by Metropolitan Macarius of Moscow, 1891; *Vologda Patericon*, Vologda, 1880; *Pilgrims' Guide in Imperial Russia* by Pavlovksy, 1907; *Orthodox Monasteries in the Russian Empire* by L. I. Denisov, Moscow, 1908; *Lives of Saints* by Archbishop Philaret of Chernigov, St. Petersburg, 1892-1900; *Holy Russia* by Archimandrite Leonid Kavelin, St. Petersburg, 1891; *The Mother of God* by E. Poseyanin, St. Petersburg, 1905 (all in Russian).



ST. DOROTHY OF KASHIN

Commemorated September 24 and February 6

TROPARION, TONE 8

**I**N THEE, O MOTHER, was truly preserved what is according to the image of God;\* for, having taken up thy cross, thou didst follow after Christ,\* and thou didst teach in act to despise the flesh, for it passeth away,\* but to be diligent over the soul, as a thing immortal.\* Wherefore thy spirit, O St. Dorothy, doth rejoice together with the Angels.



SAINT ANNA OF KASHIN



Convent of the Meeting of the Lord  
Across the River from Kashin, 1913



ABBESS ANTONIA



Above: St. Anna's Grave  
Left: The Dormition Church

## THE NORTHERN THEBAID

number of communities increased. The astonishing impulse for the foundation of new monasteries, which now moved northward, was as it were an answer to the question of how to retain the Orthodox philosophy of life. In addition to providing a harmonious and economically independent communal life, these monasteries, which formed an Orthodox mentality in the full spirit of the Church, opened up a mystical realm of spiritual perfection which transfigured earthly men, women and children into Angel-like beings. This inspired the newly-enlightened Russian people, and a whole network of monastic citadels sprang up around Novgorod, Pskov, Suzdal and, of course, Moscow, which, after the fall of the Second Rome—Constantinople—became the Third Rome. Great Saints founded monasteries in this period: *St. Anna of Novgorod* (†1050, Oct. 4); three Pskov Abbesses: *Enpraxia* (†1243, May 8), *Martha* (†1300, Nov. 8) and *Bassa* (†1473, March 19); *St. Charitina, Abbess of Novgorod* (†1281, Oct. 5); *St. Eudocia of Moscow* (†1407, July 7), foundress of two convents; and many others in Moscow, both canonized and uncanonized.

Monastic communities of virgins in Holy Russia were greatly esteemed and honored—and not only as places where princes would put their wives away when they wished to get rid of them. The women's monasteries were always thought of as holy places, havens for ascetic labor, with a life centered about the cycle of beautiful and all-encompassing church services, for which refined liturgical arts were developed. The use of convents as hospitals, orphanages, schools, and workshops was always secondary, when it appeared at all. The ancient Byzantine models of asceticism, which were constantly present through the reading of the Synaxaria, the Prologue, and the Lives of Saints, were the main source of monastic inspiration and it was here that the heart of the women of Holy Russia lay.

It is wrong to say,\* simply because no striking Lives of such women Saints have come down to us, that women in ancient Russia did not follow the severe anchoritic, hesychast practices of the desert-dwellers of old. There is sufficient indication in the sources that remain that there were indeed such heroines, who waged no less fierce battles with the prince of this world than the great holy men whose Lives are well known to us. The Lives of women anchorites in later centuries—such as *Abbess Enpraxia of Old Ladoga* (†1823, Sept. 23) and *Blessed Mary the Cave-digger of the White Mountains* (†1822, June 22)—show clearly what was in the hearts of women Saints in that

\* As does Fedotov, and also T. Manukhina in *St. Anna of Kashin*, YMCA Press, Paris, 1954 (in Russian).



### ST. DOROTHY OF KASHIN

The number of women Saints known by the Church on earth falls far short of the number of men Saints, and there has come down to us a surprisingly small number of their Lives, many of which are brief and rather general. This does not, however, mean that their numbers were really so few or that they did not attain the spiritual heights of men—but only emphasizes the surpassing beauty of their other-worldly humility and silence (*hesychia*).

The Orthodox women Saints, unlike Martha, sit at the feet of the Lord and pay heed to the words of Christ: *Mary hath chosen the best part, which shall not be taken away from her* (Luke 10:42)—and they keep silence in the churches (I Cor. 14:34).



THE VERY BEGINNING of Christianity in Russia occurred through a holy woman, *St. Olga, Equal to the Apostles* (†969, July 11), whose grandson, *St. Vladimir* (†1015, July 15) baptized his Kievan principedom in 988 and gave the whole of Russia the Orthodox Christian Faith at the very time when Byzantium had reached its highest point in all phases of spiritual culture. By this time all the basic heresies had been identified and uprooted by the Seven Ecumenical Councils, and monasticism was in full bloom. Thus, Russia from the very beginning was entrusted with the fullness of the *pure Faith, Orthodoxy*, and she treasured it throughout the ages as the supreme heritage in her hierarchy of values, herself thereby becoming, in the activities and hopes of her best sons and daughters, *Holy Russia*, the guardian of Orthodoxy. Such she has remained until this very day, even while in bonds and in the catacombs under the Communist Yoke.

Monasticism immediately captured the Russian soul and was practiced in Kievan Russia in monasteries and convents built by princes and noblemen. It flourished predominantly in the Kiev Caves, which began with a spark brought to Russia from Mt. Athos by St. Anthony. Monasteries both for men and women began to spring up in various places, being founded chiefly by princes, who saw them as treasuries of sanctity for their principality, but also by hierarchs, by monks, and by righteous women—some even being founded by women for men, as in the case of *St. Euphrosyne of Polotsk*, that great pilgrim-lover of Byzantium and the Holy Land, where she reposed in the Lavra of her beloved St. Theodosius the Cernobiarch, her relics being later translated to the Kiev Caves.

The coming of the Tatar barbarians, who demolished Kiev, burning and destroying on their way all the monasteries and killing their inhabitants, did not cut off the growth of monastic communities. On the contrary, the



SYNAXIS OF THE WOMEN SAINTS OF HOLY RUSSIA



ST. EUPHROSYNE  
of Polotsk



ST. SOLOMONIA  
of Suzdal  
16th century icons



ST. FEBRONIA  
of Murom



The Holy Child, ST. ARTEMIOUS OF VERKOLA,  
folk-icon depicting his life and miracles according to his monastery tradition.

## ST. DOROTHY OF KASHIN

earlier time when the whole of Russian society marvelled at the anchoritic fervor of the dwellers of the unknown northern wilds.

The monastic movement of the holy women of Russia, to be sure, took forms that were somewhat different from those of the holy men of the North. It was the men who—in the steps of St. Sergius of Radonezh—were fearless "pioneers" of the northern forests, braving the untrodden territories of Russia with their constant dangers from wild animals, roaming Tatars and robbers, and the sheer physical hardships of establishing a monastic settlement in an uninhabited forest. The great desert-dwellers, after founding a monastic community, would usually move northward to find a new solitary desert, followed by their disciples, and often their disciples themselves would leave the original monastery to found their own communities. Women desert-lovers would then settle near the village which had grown up around the monastery, or in the monastery buildings themselves, if they had been deserted by the monks; thus they would have the protection of an established place already carved out of the wilderness and surrounded by a fence or wall. Here the women desert-dwellers would continue the founder's rule and tradition. Often it would be little-known women ascetics who would hand down the only information we have about some Saint. Thus, when the relics of St. Cyril of Velik (†15th century, June 9) were discovered incorrupt, it was a certain *Righteous Nun Aquilina Nakapa* (†1517) who gave information about the unknown Saint, having herself received a miraculous healing from him, as had the *Righteous Eulampia*; and so the story of St. Cyril was handed down to us—but nothing more is known of the Blessed Aquilina and her monastic tradition.

Another kind of desert-loving holy woman is to be found in ancient Russia in a place which might easily be overlooked today when Orthodox society has become so worldly and the fundamentals of Orthodox upbringing have been largely forgotten. The primary duty which the Church lays upon woman is not merely the rearing of children, but, more importantly, the *breathing into them* of the sacred fragrance of *humility and meekness of heart*, which seals the spiritual bond between Christ and the child from infancy onward. This is no easy task, and never was. It is to this task that the spiritual energy of desert-loving women went in ancient Russia. Thus it is that many great Saints of the Northern Thebaid had great Saints for their mothers. The love for the life of paradise in the wilderness, and the spiritual strength that comes from a humble heart capable of enduring the hardships of the desert, were first given to the ascetics of the North during the guilelessness of childhood by their angel-like mothers, who, being unable to go to the northern desert themselves by reason of their worldly obligations, raised up sons fit to be desert-dwellers.



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The mother of St. Sergius of Radonezh was *St. Maria, nun of Khotkov* (†1337); of St. Alexander of Svir, *St. Barbara, nun of Oyat* (†1500); of St. Macarius of Kolyazin, *St. Irene of Kozbin* (†15th century, June 1); of St. Philip, Metropolitan of Moscow and monk of Solovki, *St. Barianuphia, schemanun of Moscow*; the mothers of the fools for Christ of the North, Sts. Nicholas Kochanov and John of Ustiug, were the *Righteous Juliana* (†1384, Dec. 21) and *Abbess Natalia*; and there were others. The sister of St. Artemius of Verkola was the blessed *Parascheva of Pirimin*, venerated locally as a Saint. The widely-venerated *St. Juliana of Marom* (†1604, Jan. 2), who raised many children and grandchildren, was a desert-dweller at heart.

THE MONASTIC EXODUS into the Northern Thebaid, although unintentionally it resulted in the colonization of the forest wilds, was first of all an enormous movement of individuals who sought solely to acquire Christian perfection and other-worldliness. It was the fruit of a deeply-rooted Orthodox world view, according to which fallen human nature was to be governed by the love of Truth, by means of a definite Patristic standard: non-acquisitiveness, the mental activity of the Jesus Prayer, Hesychasm. This produced such a flowering of genuine Orthodox sanctity in men and women that even children, caught up in the ascetic fervor, reached the spiritual states of men of mature years and worked miracles after their death. The child-Saints of the North include *St. Artemius of Verkola* (†1345, June 23), *Sts. James* and his brother *John of Munerab* (†1570, June 24), *St. Glyceria* the young girl of *Novgorod* (†1522, May 15), and *St. John of Ustiug* (†1494, May 29), the fool for Christ who died at 18, having already achieved a height of Christian perfection.

Of all the hundreds of new monasteries which were founded each century in the vastness of the Northern Thebaid, at least a fourth were convents, some of them remaining small sketes with just a few virgins, others becoming much larger. Considering all the dangers of the uninhabited, almost impenetrable marshland of intertwining lakes and rivers, and also the sparseness of Orthodox habitation in these vast areas during the 14th to 17th centuries, it is indeed amazing what great fervor and zeal the women of Holy Russia manifested in following the anchoritic path of the ancient Saints of the Thebaid. Who can tell the full story of their spiritual heights? Who can enumerate their struggles, especially today when the very principles of True Orthodoxy are rapidly disappearing from the face of the earth?

The great Saints of the Thebaid, *Anthony* and *Pachomius*, and the great Orthodox Father of the West, *St. Benedict of Nursia*, founded monastic communities for women and placed their sisters in charge of them. So, in Russia,



ST. DIONYSIUS OF GLUSHITSA  
and a Typical Convent of the Russian North

the great *St. Enthyimius of Suzdal*, being in close contact with St. Sergius of Radonezh and St. Alexis of Moscow, even being called "the second Sergius," founded in 1364 a coenobitic convent, just like St. Pachomius', across the river from his monastery, entrusting its care to his niece. He directed his convent according to a special monastic rule which he had from his elder the cave-dweller of Nizhni-Novgorod, *St. Dionysius* (later Archbishop) of *Suzdal* (†1385, Oct. 15), who was in the full tradition of Byzantine spirituality and twice travelled to Greece.

This same holy monk, St. Dionysius, blessed his spiritual daughter *St. Theuora of Nizhni-Novgorod* (†1375, April 16) to found a coenobitic convent in the latter city, and later tonsured her in it. In her we see the first clear example of a severe female ascetic Saint of the pure Byzantine tradition in the North.

ONE OF THE GREATEST FATHERS of the Northern Thebaid was *St. Dionysius of Glushitsa* (†1437, June 1). Through him the spirit of Mt. Athos—that is to say, of traditional Byzantine spirituality—went deep into the North and entered the women's convents. Earlier direct contacts with Mt. Athos had been maintained throughout the centuries, beginning with the Kievan St. Anthony, but St. Dionysius is the first one known to us to establish a convent with an Athonite typicon. A native of Vologda, St. Dionysius was tonsured

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in the Spasso-Kameni Island Monastery by its Abbot, *Blessed Dionysius* (†1425, Oct. 18), who out of special love gave his disciple his own name. Having received hesychast training for many years in this monastery, which had an Athonite typicon, and feeling the need for silence, St. Dionysius went deep into the forest wilds of Vologda and there, near the wild river Glushitsa, began his anachoretic life. Soon he was followed not only by monks, but also by God-thirsting women, for whom he established a convent on a nearby hill and dedicated the community to St. Leontius of Rostov, since he had just returned from Rostov, where he received the blessing and instruction of his elder Dionysius, now Bishop of Rostov. This convent with its Athonite spirit flourished and spread the desert-dwelling ideal for women far and wide.

St. Dionysius was also an outstanding icon-painter, and it is known that he adorned the convent with his icons. One of them, a wonder-working icon of the Dormition of the Most Holy Mother of God, was given to the Monastery of the Seven Hills located on the same river, which had been founded by the Saint's disciples. When this monastery became deserted after a plague, the Most Holy Mother of God appeared in a dream to a righteous nun in a Moscow convent, *Juliana of the Belozersk family*, who had lain paralyzed for three years, promising her healing if she would go to the Seven Hills Monastery and rebuild the church there. This the Blessed Juliana promised, was miraculously healed, and went north and found the deserted monastery and the wondrous icon painted by St. Dionysius. In the midst of the total desolation, she built herself a tiny cell next to the church and thus refounded the convent, which existed for many centuries and became a seedbed of the spiritual tradition received through St. Dionysius. Later another Saint shone forth here: the *Blessed Nun Mariamna* (†1643).

Other convents became renowned in the Northern Thebaid. In the vicinity of the *St. Cyril of White Lake Monastery*, following the tradition of this Saint, a convent was founded at Goritsy on a river bank by the noblewoman *Eudocia* in 1544; it became a Lavra for women in the North where many holy and renowned women worked out their salvation right up to Soviet times.

In *Vologda*, the *Holy Nun Domnina* founded in 1560 the famous Dormition Convent, where a stone church was dedicated to St. Sergius of Radonezh, the Abba of the North.

In the *Kargopol territory*, a Dormition Convent was founded in 1592 by *St. John the Hairy*, who was "a laborer of the monastery of virgins," as the ancient chronicles describe him; he later received the schema with the name of Jonah and was buried in the convent.

In *Solychegodsk*, the *Holy Virgin Juliana*, refusing to accede to the unclean desire of a pagan, was drowned in the river, where the Ulianovsky convent was soon built, with her as its patron.

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In the Arctic territory of *Archangel'sk*, a Holy Trinity Convent was founded in 1604. In 1664 the *Righteous Abbess Martha*, who was known personally by Tsar Alexis Michailovich Romanov, turned it into a blossoming monastic citadel for women in the utmost North.

In *Old Ladoga* near Valaam, the renowned Dormition Convent existed from the 13th century. After being destroyed by the Swedes, it was rebuilt in 1617 and became one of northern Russia's most important contemplative centers, where later there shone forth the great *Abbess Eupraxia*, spiritual converser with Sts. Sergius and Herman of Valaam and St. Alexander of Svir.

**SPIRITUALLY ORIENTED WOMEN** would never plunge into the wilds absolutely alone, but would always approach the monastic calling with the sole purpose of saving their soul with caution, self-distrust, and meekness. They would settle by twos and threes in humble abodes, often abandoned cabins, in forlorn areas, near churches on the outskirts of town, or near cemeteries. They would provide themselves with God-pleasing deeds: reading the Psalter over the dead, baking prosphora, painting icons, making candles, or mending; they would remain in silence while one sister would read soul-profitting texts from the Lives of Saints or the Holy Fathers, or they would chant canons, akathists, or "psalms" (religious songs), shedding tears of contrition and repentance. Their common sharing of the basic necessities of life would give them spiritual growth and strength, providing an active experience in sobriety of life, something especially essential for those who might be called by God for a life of seclusion after years of trials and sufferings.

Their cells would consist of a one-room cabin with anterooms. It would have an iconostasis or icon-corner, before which vigil lamps would be burning at all times, and an analogion with all the books necessary for the indispensable reading of the daily cycle of services. There would be the smell of incense and home-made bread, a hooked runner rug, flowerpots on the wide window sills, neatness, and a reigning quietness — all this would add to the warmth of a typical cell of the "God-workers." Here the all-night vigils would frequently be conducted, and a devout, God-fearing eldress would console suffering hearts with words of contrition, softer than oil.

The whole touching atmosphere of these "workers for God" spoke of deep warmth, simplicity, and inward tranquility and peace with God and His transfigured world. This was the most popular and beloved way in which living Orthodox piety was disseminated among the people throughout Russia. This way of life has withstood all historical temptations. The "babushkas" of today, who have saved Orthodox piety from the Communists, still get their leaven from this heart of Holy Russia.



## ST. DOROTHY OF KASHIN

ST. DOROTHY was born in 1549, in the prosperous early part of the reign of John IV (the Terrible), and died in 1629 during the peaceful reign of the first Romanov Tsar, Michael Theodorovich; but her whole life, beginning when she was twelve years old, passed in the midst of the most frightful conditions of rebellion, anarchy, famine, plague, and foreign invasion.

This holy nun of the latter times was of noble blood, and some say that she was of the family of the Princes Korkodinov, but neither her place of birth nor her name before receiving the monastic tonsure are known to us. She was given in marriage to Theodore Ladygin and by him had a son, Michael; they lived in the region north of Moscow, where the city of Kashin is located. In the first decade of the 17th century, Kashin was laid waste by invading Poles and Lithuanians, and St. Dorothy's husband fell on the field of battle in defence of the city.

Thus it was that, having lost her husband and her earthly happiness in the midst of the terrible misfortunes of the Russian land, St. Dorothy, already a woman of mature years, resolved to abandon the world and seek, in prayers and struggles, not a temporary happiness which is so often darkened by various evils, but rather a heavenly and eternal blessedness. By Divine inspiration she chose for herself a peaceful and soul-saving refuge in the Convent of the Meeting of the Lord in Kashin. This monastery, renowned for treasuring the holy relics of *St. Anna of Kashin*, the Princess Schema-nun and miracle-worker (†1368, Oct. 2 and June 12), had just been laid waste together with the city, and how many labors and deprivations and struggles stood before her when she entered it! With great effort she made for herself a humble, confining cell in the midst of the ruins, and here she devoted herself to prayer, fasting, obedience, and other holy struggles known to God alone. Here amidst the ashes she found a large Icon of the Korsun Mother of God, which she kept in her cell, and which later became celebrated for working many miracles.

The whole territory where this peaceful hamlet once lay presented itself as a virtual wilderness of dark forests, endless birch-groves and desolate lakes and ponds abundant with birds and freely-roaming wild animals. This was also the native country of highly-esteemed desert-dwelling saints whom St. Dorothy could not but hold very dear to her heart; for she did not retreat, to console her old age, to one of the well-established convents which abounded at that time in Moscow, but chose the silence of the Kashin wilds, for which she had



A Schema-nun of the Northern Thebaid — painting by S. Zhivotovsky

ILLUSTRATIONS OF ORTHODOX CONVENT LIFE



A Typical Nun's Cell with Iconostasis in a Well-to-do Monastery



Nun and Novices Singing Antiphonally on the Right Cliros



BLESSED FR. PETER OF UGLICH  
†1866 (see p. 229)



A typical convent priest with his matushka drinking tea at home



The Kashin Convent, seen from the town, as it appeared 150 years ago



Kashin Convent: The Dormition church and the new cathedral in 1912





SPRINGTIME IN THE NORTHERN BIRCH-GROVE SKETE

A nun stoops in Jesus Prayer on the steps of a typical skete chapel, beholding the rushing torrent of the awakening spring, a prefiguration of our future resurrection.

A painting by E. E. Volkov from RUSSIAN PILGRIM, 1913.

#### ST. DOROTHY OF KASHIN

been preparing her whole life long. Just eight miles from Kashin had lived *St. Macarius of Kolyazin* (†1483), who had the custom to roam the woods like a new Adam amidst wild beasts who walked with him like sheep. His nephew, *St. Paisius of Uglich* (1504), joined him as a boy and reached such heights that the Most Holy Mother of God visited him when he was at prayer with his disciple *St. Adrian* and *St. Cassian* (1504), the friend of *St. Nilus of Sora*. Not far away also was Soliger Lake with *St. Nilus* (1554) living in it on *Stolbenski* islet. Another native of Kashin, *St. Sabbas of Vyshera* (1460), having returned from Mt. Athos, became a stylite. All these angel-like men founded monasteries, and the fragrance of their life spread far and wide and inspired ascetic exploits. All this constituted *St. Dorothy's* spiritual inheritance in her melancholy abode and raised her mind to higher visions and thoughts divine.

At the same time she strove to help all the many inhabitants of the city and the surrounding area, who lived in great affliction and misfortune. By her word of consolation, by her heartfelt kindness, and by gifts of money, she strove to help everyone and encourage and raise up all those who suffered in this most oppressive time. All the possessions remaining to her after the death of her husband she either spent for the restoration of the convent or distributed to the poor. For herself she kept nothing except prayer, tears, and struggles. Having been accustomed to live amidst wealth and abundance, now she did not even know where to find her daily bread, and she had to endure every kind of deprivation and need. But with God's help she endured everything with greatness of soul and with firm faith in Divine Providence. In her small, one-windowed cell she had a place hidden from the eyes of men, where she wept, prayed, and sighed before the Lord God day and night over her own salvation and that of her fellow men. Especially did she pray for her husband, for the suffering city, and the holy convent. She sought one thing: the most difficult and sorrowful struggles, in order to cleanse her soul of sins and prepare herself for blessed eternity.

The Lord heard the fervent prayer of *St. Dorothy* for the restoration of the Convent of the Meeting of the Lord. Soon after she had settled in the ruins, they began to resound with the spiritual rejoicing of the sisters, who little by little returned to the convent when the danger had passed. The rumor of the exalted spiritual life of *St. Dorothy* and her deeds of mercy attracted to the convent also many other virgins and women who were seeking the salvation of their souls. Thus the monastery was re-established, and when enough sisters had gathered together, an abbess was needed for them. But *St. Dorothy*, who by her numberless labors and struggles and gifts had been responsible for the restoration of the monastery, hated all glory and outward

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honors, and in her great humility she decisively refused the high position of abbess, preferring to continue her ascetic life in the calling of a simple nun. Thus, for the rest of her life the Saint served for all as an example of love of labor, patience, self-sacrifice, and flaming love for and trust in God. Her whole life exhaled the fragrance of the great women-strugglers of Christian antiquity, and likewise of those who preceded her in her native land: *St. Anna of Kashin*, *St. Euphrosyne*, the great foundress of convents and monasteries in *Polotsk* (†1173, May 23), *St. Febronia of Murom* (†1228, June 25), *St. Euphrosyne* (†1250, Sept. 25), the great virgin-ascetic of *Suzdal*, daughter of *St. Michael of Chernigov*, and others.

Such a life did this holy woman live almost in our own days. For it is not the times that are at fault if we do not see now the abundance of holy men and women who flourished in earlier centuries; it is rather our evil will, and lack of determination, and want of faith. But *Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, and today, and forever* (Heb. 13:8).

In the year 1615 *St. Dorothy* received the Great Angelic Schema and redoubled her labors of asceticism and piety. Finally, after twenty years of struggles in the Convent of the Meeting of the Lord, the holy *Dorothy* came to the end of her much-suffering life, in the eightieth year of her age. On the eve of the feast of the great and holy inspirer of monastic struggles in the Russian North, *St. Sergius of Radonezh*, on September 24, 1629, *St. Dorothy* peacefully reposed in the Lord. From that day she has stood before the Lord with the burning lamp of flaming love for God, and with the oil of good deeds done for her neighbor and of the grace of the All-Holy Spirit which she acquired by her holy life. She passed over from death unto the life prepared for all who love God, from an earthly into a heavenly habitation, where she has yet greater boldness of intercession before the Almighty.

The holy remains of *St. Dorothy* were buried near the main convent church of the Meeting of the Lord, on the north side. Over the grave a memorial of white stone was erected with pillars carved out of it, and the inscription on this memorial survived in almost perfect condition until the 20th century.

*St. Dorothy* remained in spirit with her monastery even after her repose. Her memory was kept sacredly by the sisters down to our own times. Many have been the miracles of healing and supernatural help worked at her grave for those who have come with faith in her intercession before God. A list of these miracles was kept in the monastery. But her memory became especially revered over two centuries after her repose because of her appearances to *Abbess Antonia* of the Saint's convent.

## ST. DOROTHY OF KASHIN



**ABBESS ANTONIA MEZENTSOVA** (†1875, Jan. 26) was truly a saint. A spiritual daughter of the great 19th-century saint, *Priest Peter of Uglich*, she was so penetrated with true Orthodox monastic spirit that *St. Anna of Kashin* would appear to her and tell who of the sisters ought to be tonsured into the great schema and even where the ancient schemas were to be found.

*Abbess Antonia* had been a sister at a convent in *Suzdal* and had agreed, at the persuasion of her godmother, to transfer to the *Kashin Convent* of the Meeting. But the 20-year-old novice grieved greatly at leaving her first monastery, where the relics of the pious Princess *Sofia* (wife of *John IV*) reposed, supposing that she would be deprived of the grace which she had known there, for *St. Sofia-Solomonina of Suzdal* (†1542, Dec. 16) worked many great miracles in her Protection Convent, which was founded and spiritually directed by the great *St. Euthymius of Suzdal*, friend of *St. Sergius of Radonezh*.

But then, after tearful prayer at night, she saw in a dream that she was entering the Convent of the Meeting in *Kashin*, which she had not seen before; but by reason of the great crowds of people she could not enter the monastery. After many efforts she finally entered, and being astonished at the great numbers of pilgrims, she asked the reason for this; she was told that the relics of *St. Dorothy* (of whom she had never heard) were being opened for her canonization. This vision cut short the grief of the future *Abbess Antonia* and gave her the assurance that there was a righteous one reposing in the Convent of the Meeting also, and that her transferal there in 1839 was not without the will of God.

After some years in the Convent, the novice *Alexandra* (as she was then called) entered a particularly difficult period of spiritual trials. One day in this period, when she had not slept for several nights out of sorrow, she went to the monastery church for Matins, and after sitting down for the reading of the kathismata, she fell into a light sleep. Suddenly an unknown Schema-nun stood before her after coming out of the northern door of the Altar. She held in her right hand a wooden cross and a lighted wax candle, and in her left hand a smoking censer. Her mantle was gathered up and hung over her left arm. She stood right in front of novice *Alexandra* and directed a penetrating glance at her, as if seeing through her inward grief. Immediately the novice arose, but the vision had already vanished, and no one around her had seen it; and in her heart she felt an indescribably joyful feeling, as



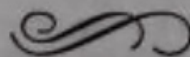
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if she had never been in a sorrowful state. When she returned to her cell after Matins, she hastened to sketch with a pencil on paper the Schema-nun she had seen, whom she recognized as St. Dorothy, whom she deeply revered and often called upon in prayer. Several years after this she painted the Icon of St. Dorothy in full stature, exactly as she had sketched it that morning under the impression of that wonderful vision, only adding the Kashin Convent churches and other buildings behind the figure of St. Dorothy (the little chapel on the left of St. Dorothy is the stone chapel built over her grave; see page 211).

Later Mother Antonia became Abbess in the Convent of St. Dorothy, and out of her reverence for the Saint she desired to show some special veneration for her memory. Many times, when visiting her holy Elder, Father Peter the fool for Christ's sake of Uglich, she would hear from him these words of reproach: "Dorothy is not honored among you!" This greatly grieved Mother Antonia, and finally she asked the Elder what she should do to venerate the holy one. He replied sharply and decisively: "Build a chapel!" In obedience to her holy Elder, she had a small chapel erected out of sheets of metal in a single morning in the summer of 1857, fearing that someone might tell the local bishop and he might forbid the construction if it were long underway. The bishop, however, when he found out about it, approved this veneration of St. Dorothy, and in 1870 Abbess Antonia was able to build a larger, stone chapel over the Saint's relics.

During these years St. Dorothy appeared many times and worked many miracles in her convent. A certain nun, Mother Seraphima, loved to spend the midnight hours with her cell attendant in the convent church. One night they came to the church at midnight and to their amazement saw a strange nun praying by a window, even though the church had been locked and no one could have entered. Another time at midnight they saw in the church an extraordinary light, all the candles were burning, and a nun was praying before the Altar. Many other sisters also were vouchsafed such visions of St. Dorothy.

We do not know the fate of the Convent or of the veneration of St. Dorothy after the Communist Revolution. But among those who love God's Saints she will not be forgotten, and in heaven she continues to pray for the newly-devastated Russian land and for all who venerate her with faith and love.



## ANASTASIA OF PADAN

In order to obtain a more detailed glimpse of the inward spiritual world of a female representative of the Northern Thebaid, we may look at the life of the 19th-century Blessed Anastasia. Although two centuries separate her from the time of St. Dorothy of Kashin, nevertheless, in all essential respects their lives are quite revealingly similar.



IN THE FOGGY REGION of Olonets with its innumerable lakes and dense forests, from ancient times many monasteries for men and women have taken refuge, small in numbers and little known. The Padan Hermitage of the Entry of the Most Holy Mother of God into the Temple, which ceased to function as a monastery in the 18th century, retained up to this century an appearance very similar to that of the ancient skete. At the exit from the forest, in the meadow, there were only three small cells at various distances one from the other; the church was not immediately visible, being very small and standing in a splendid birch forest, such as abound in this region. The charming birches and the splendid meadows, the quiet river Padan, the joyful playing of the fish in it, and the most pleasant, fragrant aroma from the birches, involuntarily forced one to think of the beautiful things of the future life, and inspired one to quiet and fervent prayer to the merciful Creator.

Founded by St. Cornelius of Padan, one of the disciples of St. Alexander of Svir, this monastery existed for 221 years, before being closed in 1764 and turned into parish property which was rarely frequented due to its isolation. The restored church of the Entry represented the remnant of a venerable antiquity, a memorial testifying of the holy ascetics who performed their God-pleasing struggles in simplicity of soul and purity of thought. This church has one wooden dome. Its roof, like a peasant hut, has two slopes and resembles more a chapel or a peasant farm than a church. The entrance to it is from the north, the altar is lower than the church itself, and the log cabin which has been placed next to the church is on the side. The small windows are placed one above the other. There are a few icons in this church: the icon of the Entry into the Temple of the Most Holy Mother of God, which is venerated in the neighboring villages, and the icons of Sts. Cornelius, Dionysius, and Misail, the founder of the monastery and his disciples. The small bells are hung on pillars near the church.

Around the church and the river, there were four small hut-cells. Before Anastasia settled there with her sisters, a watchman lived in one of them, and in

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another one a blind man, while the remaining two huts were empty. The watchman used to tell pilgrims that an Elder-schema-monk had been seen there many times; sometimes he sat in thought on the slope and sometimes elsewhere. It was the founder of the Hermitage, St. Cornelius, who appeared and grieved over the desolation of the monastery which he had founded.

The nun desert-dweller Anastasia was born in the year 1819 in the Province of Kharkov and was named Anna. Her relatives were simple, pious people from Kiev. Anna was a year old when her mother died and grew up under the guidance of her grandmother Euphrosyne, who lived 114 years, 84 years in chaste widowhood. She was a strict faster. On Fridays she would eat nothing at all, except a little bread and water after the setting of the sun. Every year she twice went on a pilgrimage to Kiev. Only for the three years previous to her death did she cease to go on her pilgrimage, when she was 111 years old. Anna obeyed her grandmother in everything and accompanied her from her earliest years on her pilgrimages to Kiev and the surrounding region. Being taught early to read, Anna from her childhood became accustomed to soul-profitable reading and began to be zealous for a holy, ascetic life. She liked especially the Life of St. Mary of Egypt.

At 17 both her grandmother and father died and this was the last impulse causing her to break with the world. She gave away all the meager property of her parents to the poor, bought some bread for five pennies, and went to save her soul in the desolate region of the Golosevsky Hermitage near Kiev, where in complete seclusion and in prayer she could endure only sixteen days. She thought naively that she could quickly acquire holiness and dispassion, but soon she came to understand the falseness of this feeling. Therefore, she entered one of the women's monasteries in the region of Kiev and lived there for quite some time, acquiring well the basic monastic training, learning to cut off her own will and understanding.

But Anna was drawn by the solitude of the desert. Fearing to act according to her own false understanding, she hastened with fervent prayer to the Mother of God, begging Her help, asking for an indication from Her as to whether the path for which her soul was striving was pleasing to the Lord. As a reply to the girl's flaming prayer, she had the following remarkable dream. She saw that she was holding an icon of the Mother of God in her hands. From the icon was coming forth a gentle voice which enveloped the girl in a pleasant warmth. This warmth entered within her, and although it was pleasant at first, later it became heavy and bitter. Understanding from this dream that her labor was pleasing to God, but from having been pleasant at first it would then become difficult and bitter, she went on a pilgrimage to Pochaev Lavra to venerate its holy Icon.



ELDER IGNATIUS (ISALAH)  
†1852, April 20

BLESSED ANASTASIA



A Typical Northern Skete: Leushino Convent





A Church of the Olonets Territory, Blessed by St. Alexander of Svir in 1522, in a Skete near the Village of Shemensk.



The building of a half-earthen birch hut, typical of the one Anastasia lived in.

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And from now on the Most Holy Mother of God began to help her. At this time she met three holy persons who shaped her life. First, she met a great ascetic, FATHER THEODOSIUS LEVITSKY, a lay priest who, like the later St. John of Kronstadt, led a monk's life in the world, was a highly experienced spiritual director, and had a hospice for the poor, the lame and pilgrims; she worked for him for a while, and he prepared her for her desert life. Second, upon his death she met a girl of like mind, MARIA, later DESERT-DWELLER OF OLONETS. The two girls went north into the Olonets region and lived a secluded anchoritic life in mutual obedience near the village of Maria's family. Finally, she came into contact with the great ELDER IGNATIUS of ST. NICEPHORUS OF VAZHA LAKE HERMITAGE, who was Maria's uncle. This holy Father of latter times, a monk of Mt. Athos and a close friend of BISHOP IGNATIUS BRIANCHANINOV, at first did not encourage the two girls to live alone in the forest, upon their request to guide them. But after their pilgrimage to Solovki their desire became more realistic. Fr. Ignatius, finally convinced of their determination and firmness, himself helped them with a cell in the vicinity of his monastery. After his death, when they had to leave this cell and to do everything themselves, they came to taste much bitterness, being persecuted and terrorized. Then with great labor they dug the frozen ground to build an earthen cell. This work was difficult for these weak girls, inexperienced in physical labor. All they had to eat was mushrooms, and they had "worms instead of salt." The whole summer they went barefoot, out of necessity, and there were many poisonous snakes. They had one axe which was dull and would constantly fall off the handle. With great difficulty the two of them cut down several dozens of spruce trees. Their half-chopped spruce trees would bend over but for a long time would not fall; and weeping and praying, the girls would again undertake the work. Somehow they built a cell out of these trees. They had to bail the water out of the leaking hut, and in place of a door they hung up their dresses. They made a poor stove: the top of the chimney was resting on sticks which were covered with clay, and they burned with the first fire in the stove. After a time there came a peasant who brought them an axe, saw, and some flour, and made them a door. The smoke and cold filled this poor hut where the girls lived a whole winter, praying to God and enduring all these difficulties. Later, in place of the grass roof they made a better one, using their observation of a typical peasant board roof. It became warm, but now there was a new inconvenience: the trees, on becoming damp, began to grow, sending out long shoots. With the spring, when the earth thawed, their cell totally collapsed. But these lovers of struggle bore all these sorrows without murmuring, both then and for

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many years afterwards. The solitude of the desert was dear to their spirit, and for its sake they were ready to endure everything.

Once Anastasia went for mushrooms and, becoming lost in the forest, was forced to sleep under the spruces in the rain and wind. In another place of their settlement there were very many poisonous snakes, there being a snake pit near their cell in the hollow of an old tree. Once, when returning from gathering mushrooms, Anastasia entered her hut and found a large snake lying on the mat where she slept. Another time she went to the wooden barrel for bread, and in the barrel she discovered an immense hissing snake. When going after mushrooms another time, Anastasia, seeing a number of fallen trees, thought of making a turnip garden. Thus, she brought some dried twigs and began to burn them so as to clear the area; but the day was dry, and a veritable forest fire began. She fell to the earth and was entreating the Lord for help, when suddenly a cloud appeared and drenched everything, putting out the fire.

The Church authorities did not approve of Anastasia's desert-dwelling, and she had to flee farther north. She was living with a disciple when two masked thieves fell upon them, looking for money. They bound the desert-dwellers with ropes so tightly that their arms turned dark and remained so long afterward. Only when the thieves got into the storage shelf and found there only a few mushrooms and one measure of flour were they convinced that the desert-dwellers were non-acquirers. They untied them, bowed down to the ground asking their forgiveness, and left. Thus Anastasia endured great trials on her narrow path.

But with these misfortunes her voluntary suffering by no means came to an end. When the difficulties of life did not chase her away from the desert, the enemy of the human race began to disturb her with despondency, boredom, inexplainable fear, voices, threats, visions. But the Lord did not leave her, for the sake of her profound humility and her firm faith. He consoled her with visions during sleep.

Once she saw a black servant of the prince of the air. He was sitting and writing in a book and spoke of the necessity of destroying all the monasteries. With hatred, he threw himself on the desert-dweller Anastasia when she began to defend the monasteries and speak about their prayer for the world. "And they would even pray for you," she said. But this only evoked a new and frightful explosion of anger; however, an invisible power saved her from the fierceness of the enemy. Then Anastasia saw choirs of monastic virgins and women walking and mightily singing a sacred song and bearing lamps in their hands. Anastasia with her thin voice began to sing with them and to follow after them. And with this she woke up.

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Another time when Anastasia in exhaustion from a difficult infirmity was lying down and reading the *Philokalia*, she fell asleep and saw coming towards her a legion of demons from which she was preserved by the Saviour, Who has commanded us to cleanse the heart and strengthen it by imperturbable prayer, something which is not given to a man immediately and without difficulty. Another time she saw in unutterable beauty the Mother of God as She is depicted on the icon "Joy of All Who Sorrow," after which vision she immediately felt herself healed from her severe disease.

The enemy strove, in his attempts to upset the desert-dweller, to strike also in visions during sleep, assuming the appearance of an angel of light. But Anastasia felt always at the beginning of such dreams an oppression of spirit, and she would wake up and begin fervently to pray, and the temptation would pass without harm to her.

To the degree to which the desert-dweller matured spiritually in her sorrowful conditions, the power of her moral influence increased more and more, and gradually disciples began to gather around her — girls who like her were zealots of the Kingdom on High. The greatness of her self-renunciation and patience can be judged by the fact that Bishop Ignatius (Brianchaninov) when seeing her dwelling was so touched that he burst into tears, and allowed her to live in the place of the former monastery of Padan, where Anastasia secretly received the monastic tonsure. Her cell was cold and humble. On the floor moss was placed in the corner. Upon it there were boards, and on these boards she slept. Towards morning, the moss would freeze from the cold. From her desert labors her body began to swell and ache very severely, but she did not utter a single groan and bore everything in silence, being joyful in countenance, meek, and attentive.

Once Mother Anastasia was very sick, as is related by a certain nun who lived alone half a mile from her and would go to her and serve her. She was grieved that it was so far to go, but Anastasia saw this and strengthened her by her prayers and with the assertion that this labor was pleasing to God. Once this nun saw in a dream that someone had given her shoes all made out of wonderful, unearthly flowers. She looked inside them and there were wondrous flowers, and they were fragrant. "These shoes are for you, for your labor and serving of Mother Anastasia," a voice said to her. She awoke with joy and continued to serve her Eldress without grief until the end of her life. The Eldress herself, a constant doer of the Prayer of Jesus, taught her fellow-strugglers also this spiritual art. The nun Eudocia could not grow used to this and was not convinced in the power of this prayer. And then she saw a dream: there was an



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immense number of people, and among them the demons were walking and attracting them to evil things. The unarmed people immediately went and fulfilled the orders of the enemy. The demons came up also to her. She began to do the Jesus Prayer, and saw a sword next to her, which was formed entirely out of the Name of Jesus, long and flaming. Wherever she turned the sword, the demons fled. She woke up and became a fervent doer of the prayer.

Anastasia's food was poor. They cooked only cabbage soup, or soup made of potato greens. When the nuns were working at handiwork in the cells one would read while the others would listen while working. The daily reading was the Lives of Saints. All the places which were not understandable, the Eldress herself would explain, and spoke so from the heart, that almost all the sisters would weep.

When a sufficiently large sisterhood had been formed around Mother Anastasia, she finally built a monastery. But the Eldress to the end remained faithful to her love of the desert. The renewal of the ancient monastery of Padan as a women's monastery was the work of another person, whom Mother Anastasia blessed to act in her name and under her personal supervision.

After some period of sickness, Blessed Anastasia quietly passed away on July 11, 1901. Her grave, after the reliquary of St. Cornelius itself, was the dearest treasure of the convent.



**DO NOT OPEN** your heart to another without need; out of a thousand you may find only one who would keep your secret. Strive by every means to keep the treasure of your spiritual gifts. Otherwise you will lose it and not find it again." Such was the counsel of St. Seraphim of Sarov to his "orphans," based on the patristic teaching to gather spiritual treasure in silence. And precisely such was the spiritual fervor of holy women in Russia: concealed humility, the hiding from the human eye. This is so evident from the great Lives which have come down to us: for example, the above-mentioned co-struggler of Anastasia, *Maria of Olonets*; the virgins of St. Seraphim: ANASTASIA LOGACHEV (†1815); *Neonilla* (1875); *Pelagia* (1884); "*Pascha*" of Sarov (1915); and, especially inspiring, as revealed in her own autobiography, *Abbess Thair of Lenshi* (1915), who with the help of St. John of Kronstadt revived the great monastery of St. Therapontes of Belozersk, whose Abbess, Seraphima, met a martyr's death at the hands of Communists.

One of such silent ones, literally hidden from the world, a contemporary of St. Dorothy, who blossomed in the uttermost North of the Russian Thebaid, was the Righteous PARASCEVA OF PINEGA.



Interior of the refectory, with Russian stove at left



A typical scene in a women's skete of Northern Russia.  
A genuine duplicate in our days: Protection Skete at Bluffton, Alta., Canada.



In the Far Northern Skete, a novice in summer habit.  
A 19th century Painting.

## PARASCEVA OF PINEGA

THE PINEGA is a dreamy river, not broad like the Dvina, of which it is a tributary, but like a placid pond, and its many reeds and lilies are still and unmoved upon the surface of the stream. The river is so narrow, one could often throw a stone across it, and on each bank is forest, forest, and again forest, forest without end. This is the land of tundra, the most dangerous region in Europe," as it was described by Stephen Graham at the turn of this century in his travel journal of the Russian North, *Undiscovered Russia*.

In this land, in the village of Verkola near Kevrola, a boy Artemius was born in 1532 to pious parents Cosmas and Apollinaria. He was God-fearing and unusually meek and holy. At the age of twelve, when ploughing with his father in the field, he was struck dead by thunder, which the simple villagers took as a sign that God was angry with him, and they left him unburied in the forest. One can well imagine how the village opinion affected his already God-fearing and extremely pious family. In this atmosphere of awe and silent trembling before God grew up St. Artemius' sister, Parasceva, who matured into sanctity without knowing it. Shunned by the world, but surrounded by God's beauty of the flowering northern spring and preserved by the snow-swept winter, she herself became a saint and a wonderworker, for, like her brother, she was a chosen vessel of God. When after 32 years the body of her holy brother was discovered incorrupt, and he worked many miracles and was esteemed by all, so that even a whole monastery was established over his relics, Parasceva was already formed spiritually, and to avoid the pitfalls of pride, she withdrew to silence and oblivion. Thus we do not even know whether she entered a convent or when she died. We only know that she died a righteous virgin.\*

In 1610 the relics of St. Artemius were examined by Metropolitan Macarius of Novgorod, his Life was written and a Service was composed to him. The same year a coffin with the fragrant relics of a virgin was discovered in the Pirimin church of St. George, and a certain man was granted a vision; a fair virgin appeared to him, informing that her name was Parasceva, that sick people should come to this church and pray to St. George and the newly-revealed Wonderworker Parasceva, and that help would be granted, which indeed began to happen abundantly. Later a special chapel was built to treasure her relics, an old icon of her was placed there, and her memory was celebrated on October 28. Such is the power of sanctity hidden in God.

\* On her (in Russian) see the monthly *Strannik*, 1878, no. 12; for the Life of St. Artemius see *The Orthodox Word*, March-April, 1974.





ST. NICODEMUS OF KOZHA LAKE

TROPARION, TONE 1

**T**HOU DIDST COME from the reigning city of Moscow and the great monasteries which are there,\* and being guided by the Providence of the Divine Mind thou didst strive towards the lands by the sea.\* Thou didst settle in the wilderness,\* avoiding worldly tumult and being armed with the power of the Holy Spirit,\* banishing thine enemies by the weapon of the Cross,\* perfecting thy life by fasting and unceasing prayer,\* zealously imitating the great Fathers Anthony and Onuphrius\* and Paul of Thebes.\* Pray with them to the Lord, O Father Nicodemus,\* that our souls may be saved.



THE LIFE OF

## St. Nicodemus of Kozha Lake

ANCHORITE OF THE ARCTIC TUNDRA\*

Commemorated July 3.

**S**AINT NICODEMUS was born in the village of Ivankova, near the city of Rostov, in the middle of the 16th century. In holy Baptism he was called Nicetas. His parents were wealthy and pious peasants. Nicetas was brought up in the spirit of Christian piety, and when he grew old enough he began to help his father with farm labors, and often shepherded a flock in the field. Once while he was in the field he heard a voice saying, "Nicodemus! Nicodemus!" The boy looked around, but seeing nothing he understood that this was a Divine voice addressed to him, and he became frightened. Returning home, he told everything to his parents, and they understood that the voice signified the Divine calling of their son to monasticism; and thus they explained it to him. But Nicetas at this time was only twelve years old, and so he did not immediately leave his parents to fulfill his calling, but rather, placing all his trust in God's will, he remained with them and lived in obedience to them until their death, which occurred soon thereafter.

Having buried his parents, Nicetas set out for the city of Yaroslavl, where he lived for a long time. Here he learned to forge nails and thus earn his living. This occupation gave him more income than he needed for the satisfaction of his limited needs, and thus, rejoicing, he gave all beyond what he needed as alms to the poor. He passed his life in untiring love of labor, and fervently attended God's temple, praying warmly, remembering the voice in the field and entreating that its meaning might be made known to him, which soon, indeed, came to pass.

\* Translated from *Russian Pilgrim*, 1894, nos. 23, 25, 27, with additions from *Pravoslavny Sobesednik*, published by the Kazan Theological Academy, 1858, and the *Lives of Saints* by Archbishop Philaret of Chernigov, St. Petersburg, 1892-1900, volumes for May, June, July and December.

## THE NORTHERN THEBAID

From Yaroslavl Nicetas moved to Moscow, where he began to work with a certain man named Tveryanin, whose wife was an evil and adulterous woman. The pious life of the two friends, their frequent conversations which were foreign to all immodesty, and their almost constant spending of time at labor, did not please this evil woman. So as to be delivered from all this, she resolved to kill her husband. With this in mind, she made a pudding and, after putting poison in it, offered it at dinner to her husband and Nicetas, who was with them at that time. The two suspected nothing and ate. After dinner Tveryanin immediately died, and Nicetas, even while remaining alive, began to suffer pains in the stomach. This affliction so exhausted Nicetas that he could no longer work alone, and he decided to sell his handiwork and go to another place.

When he went out with this purpose in mind, there came up to him someone in rags, asking: "Nicetas, why are you sick and what has happened to you? Tell me everything without hesitation." Nicetas related everything to him, just as it had happened. To this the unknown one replied: "Come, child Nicetas, at the sixth hour of the day, to the slope of the Protection Cathedral; there you will see me, and I will give you something to drink. The prayers of the Most Holy Mother of God will help you, and you will be healed." When Nicetas, at the assigned hour, came to the Protection Cathedral, the unknown one came out to meet him with a small vessel; giving him this vessel, he commanded Nicetas to make the sign of the Cross and drink of it. When Nicetas had drunk, the unknown one — who was in reality St. Basil, the fool for Christ's sake of Moscow\* — vanished from his sight, and Nicetas felt himself completely well.

**A**FTER THIS MIRACULOUS healing, Nicetas began to ask himself whether it were not the time at last to dedicate his life, which God had so long preserved, entirely to His service, and thus to fulfill the calling of his childhood. To answer this question, Nicetas went to Kulishki, where the clairvoyant Elder Elias lived and gave soul-saving counsel. He had scarcely reached the cell of the Elder when the latter, who was surrounded by a great crowd of people, cried out prophetically to him: "From where has the desert-dweller of Khozyug come here?" Thus he answered the secret thought of the future ascetic. All doubt and wavering now vanished from his soul. Nicetas immediately sold all that he had, gave the money to the poor, and coming to the Chudov monastery in Moscow, entreated the Archimandrite

\*†1552, Commemorated on August 2.



STS. ADRIAN AND THERAPONTES OF MONZA  
and STS. SERAPION AND NIKODEMOS OF KOZHA LAKE

Paphnutius to receive him into the brotherhood and give him the monastic vows. Paphnutius received the meek laborer with love, placing upon him a forty-day fast and other obediences. When Nicetas had fulfilled everything carefully, with meekness and obedience, studying at the same time the Divine Scripture, Paphnutius clothed him in the Angelic habit and called him Nicodemus, in honor of St. Nicodemus the prosphora-baker of the Kiev Caves, on whose feast day the tonsure was performed, on October 31, 1595. And so the prophecy of the voice in the field, which had called Nicetas by the name of Nicodemus, was fulfilled.

St. Nicodemus spent eleven years in the Chudov monastery under the guidance of the intelligent and loving instructor, Archimandrite Paphnutius. This Paphnutius was a very spiritual man who had been a monk in the desert monastery of St. Paul of Obnora, where he had had a striking spiritual experience that changed the whole course of his life, as well as that of his close friend and fellow ascetic, *St. Adrian of Monza*.\*\* Paphnutius knew that the blessed Adrian had had a mysterious dream in his youth, in which he was shown a certain holy place, a hermitage with a church between two rivers, which was fore-ordained to be the place of his ascetic labors. The two friends prayed fervently to God to be worthy to find this place, the secret of which

\*\*†1619, May 5.



### THE NORTHERN THEBAID

was known to no one but them. One night Paphnutius beheld an unusual light in the east, as if it were dawn, and he saw a church and crosses in this dazzling light; this was not in a dream, but in reality. The next night he had scarcely prayed and lain down to sleep when there appeared to him an unknown man who said: "Send your friend Adrian to search for a new monastery on the very place which you have seen in the light of the dawn to the east. A holy man will appear there." And he added: "But that place is not designated for you." When Paphnutius informed St. Adrian of this, the latter set out to look for it; and he did indeed find and recognize the holy place on the Monza River.

The one who had appeared to Paphnutius as an Angel-like announcer of heavenly decrees was the great *St. Therapontes of Monza*,\* a secret disciple of St. Basil, the fool for Christ of Moscow, a desert-dweller and wonder-worker himself. Having reached spiritual purity, he saw in the light of God's grace the humble wish of the two holy friends, had compassion on them, and mystically came to their aid, first by indicating to them the place chosen by God for His laborers, and then moving to the Monza River hermitage himself, as an unknown wandering pilgrim, to help St. Adrian to establish his community.

Hardly had St. Adrian moved to the Monza River when, by a royal decree, Paphnutius was made Archimandrite of the Chudov monastery and was separated from his beloved desert, in order to be like a leaven in the world, increasing the love for the desert in other seekers of God. St. Nicodemus was one of those he inspired.

In the Chudov monastery St. Nicodemus went through various obediences, one after the other. Battling with the passions, at the same time he labored honestly and fervently for the brethren, was meek, chaste, pious, courageous, and filled with love for all. The brethren were astonished at his labors and loved him; but the Saint fled from honor and was burning with the desire for greater spiritual perfection. Having renounced his own will, he entirely gave himself over to the service of God, cleansing his soul for Him by ascetic struggles. In the last years of his stay in the Chudov monastery he held the position of lamp-lighter.

In 1606 Archimandrite Paphnutius was ordained bishop and made Metropolitan of Krutitsa. St. Nicodemus went with him to Krutitsa, but soon began to entreat him to let him go into the wilderness; life in a Metropolitan's household, with its tumult, could not satisfy the soul of the ascetic.

\*†1599. Dec. 12.



Blessed Basil and St. Artemius of Verkola. 17th century Stroganov icon.



The native city of St. Nicodemus, Rostov the Great (16th century Kremlin).

Folk icon  
and pictures  
of the  
Kozha-Lake  
Monastery  
100 years ago



The Most Holy Theotokos and St. Nicodemus protecting



A typical chapel of the tundra similar to St. Nicodemus' abode at Khozyug



the Monastery, built over dried and cultivated tundra land



The Kozha-Lake Abbots: Sts. Abramius and Serapion St. Nicodemus with his icon of the Vladimir Theotokos





St. Nicodemus goes for water by the stream in his Khozyug hermitage  
A watercolor from *Russian Pilgrim*, 1917

## ST. NICODEMUS OF KOZHA LAKE

Metropolitan Paphnutius for a long time tried to persuade St. Nicodemus to stay with him, not wishing to be separated from his beloved disciple; but seeing his unbending resolve, and himself loving the desert, he blessed him to depart, and gave him in blessing an Icon of the Vladimir Mother of God. And thus St. Nicodemus, after living in Krutitsa for just one year, set out for a desert hermitage in the Far North.

The desert-dwellers of the North were well known in Moscow at this period, and the pious Muscovites loved them dearly. Many of them would come to the capital for one need or another, and the noblemen and even the Tsars received them warmly and heaped gifts upon them, even entreating them to be godfathers for their children. One desert-dweller who was beloved in Moscow was *St. Serapion of Kozha Lake*,\*\* at whose hermitage in the Arctic tundra swamps St. Nicodemus now decided to settle.

**SAINT SERAPION** was a Tatar Prince, captured at Kazan, who was then baptized and so came to love the Orthodox Faith that he resolved to leave the world and struggle in the northern wilderness. On a desert peninsula in Kozha Lake he met the anchorite Niphon, who became his elder. The two of them lived on grass and berries. After a period of trial, Niphon tonsured his disciple in the Angelic habit, and soon other brothers began to join them. After the death of Niphon, St. Serapion went to Moscow in 1584, receiving land from the Tsar for the new monastery. In 1608 the Saint's disciple Abraham was made abbot, and St. Serapion himself withdrew to end his days in solitude.

When St. Nicodemus came to Kozha Lake he was received with love by St. Serapion and Abbot Abraham and joined to the brotherhood, which at that time numbered some forty monks. But here also St. Nicodemus did not stay long, only a year and a half, laboring in the prosphora-bakery, thus imitating his patron-Saint. Then, fleeing glory and honor, with the blessing of the superior, he went into the nearby wilderness of the river Khozyug, in the summer of 1609; and now another prophecy, that of the blessed Elias, was fulfilled: for he had called the Saint the "desert-dweller of Khozyug."

In the wilderness of Khozyug St. Nicodemus built a small cell by himself, dug the earth and planted vegetables, gathered roots, fished in the river, and thus fed himself by the work of his hands. However, he would eat the fish only when it had begun to spoil, so that his flesh might not take too sweet delight of earthly things. At first the monks would bring him milk from the monastery, but soon the Saint refused to accept it any longer. His time

\*\*†1611, June 27.

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was occupied with strict fasting and continence, almost ceaseless vigilance (for he took only a little sleep, and that standing up), constant prayer, frequently with tears, and hard labor. In this desert St. Nicodemus found what his heart had desired for so long. "Oh, humble Nicodemus," he would say to himself, "you have found for yourself a silent place for salvation. And thus, arise in spirit in this short time, even if at the eleventh hour, for the evening has already drawn nigh, and the Righteous Judge is coming with glory to give to each according to his deeds." And he untiringly struggled in the mental activity. The Saint had not only to battle with himself, but also, like every true ascetic, to wage a stubborn spiritual warfare with the devil. The enemy began his warfare by trying to arouse in the ascetic the desires of the flesh and thereby to destroy him. For this reason, he would appear to the Saint, when the latter was going for water, in the form of a beautiful woman lying by the stream. But this attempt did not succeed. Having mortified the flesh and love for the world while in the monasteries, St. Nicodemus did not give in to the temptation. He understood the snares of the devil and prayed against them, and the phantom would disappear.

It was from experience of such trials as these that the Saint composed the following prayer against temptation, which has come down to our days:

"O Master, Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, Word of the Father! Do not put to shame me a sinner who hope in Thee and come to Thee for refuge. O Lover of mankind, God of every consolation, bountiful and merciful, O Lord Who art before the ages and now and forever! Remove from me, Thy slave, the devil who riseth up against me and battleth with me, for like a lion he goeth about seeking whom he may devour. Likewise doth he arm himself against me Thy slave and wisheth to devour me; but give me not over, O Lord, to those who wrong me; for blessed art Thou unto the ages of ages. Amen."

Often the desert-dwellers of the Far North had to face the full might of nature, a power fierce and untamed by man. But these frightful, destructive outbursts, which broke in on the quiet of their otherwise undisturbed life, were conquered by the power of faith and prayer. "One day," writes the author of the original life of St. Nicodemus, "on the river Khozyug the waters rose up and became so high that they overflowed all the banks and inundated the whole region. They swept round the cell of the Saint, for it stood near the river, and so inundated it that it became scarcely visible; only the roof remained in sight. Then St. Nicodemus took the Vladimir Icon of the Most Holy Mother of God, with which his spiritual father and teacher, Metropolitan Paphnutius of Krutitsa, had blessed him, and went to the very

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peak of his cell and stood as on a pillar and prayed with tears, singing the Psalms. Thus he prayed with tears until the water subsided, returned to its bounds, and continued its natural course." Another time, during the heat of summer, the Saint's cell caught on fire; but again, his tearful prayer with the wonderworking Icon in his hands saved him and his cell from destruction, and he continued unwaveringly on the path of salvation.

Many times the devil appeared before the mental gaze of the Saint and tried to chase him away from his solitude. "Go away from here, evil monk," the demons would cry out, "or we will destroy you." But these threats had no success. The Saint banished the demons with prayer and continued his struggles.

Seeing his complete failure and the unbendingness of St. Nicodemus, the father of lies and pride made use of the following ruse. After appearing in a numberless multitude, the demons began to depart from the Saint, promising not to return again to him because of his holiness. They thought that the Saint would believe them and consider himself perfect, weaken his prayer, grow proud, and thus fall. But when, after some time, they returned and saw the same vigilance, they were compelled, in powerlessness and with shame, to leave St. Nicodemus for good.

Then did the power of God descend upon the Saint. Having purified and strengthened his soul in the good, St. Nicodemus offered it as a sacrifice to God. And God accepted this pure sacrifice and granted the Saint to become an implement of His mercy to sinful men. God vouchsafed to him, while he was still in the body on this earth, the gifts of clairvoyance, healing of infirmities, and the power to appear in spirit to those who called upon him with faith. When the Saint's future disciple and biographer, Hieromonk James, came to him for the first time, as a layman, he was greeted by the Saint as someone long known to him. On this first visit the Saint healed him of an affliction of the eyes; another time he healed him of an ailment of the teeth, and restored him from asphyxiation; and in 1638 he appeared to him in sleep and healed him of pains in the stomach.

Again, to Cyriacus Kozlov and Maximus Peshkov, who called upon the Saint with faith in a moment of danger while sailing on the White Sea, he appeared and saved them from death. Many other miracles also did St. Nicodemus perform for the salvation of men; even his old monastic mantle gushed forth miracles for those who touched it with faith to the afflicted member. In this way the same James, on another occasion, was healed of toothache.

St. Nicodemus, an Angel in the body, having acquired Christian perfection, lived among the wild beasts of his desert as did Adam in the midst



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of Paradise. Once — it is related in his Life — Abbot Abraham of the Kozha Lake monastery, who often visited the Saint and held spiritual converse with him, "entered a boat with one monk and sailed up the river Khozyug in order to examine the newly-cleared hay fields. When we were on the way back and were sailing down the river, we saw the Saint walking near the river, and around him wild beasts, those that are called reindeer, were walking, and had no fear of him. But when they heard our voices they fled into the wilderness. The Abbot asked the Saint about the reindeer, whether these beasts frequently came there. And the Saint said that it was so. The Abbot was greatly astonished at this, how the reindeer walked near the Saint and did not fear him."

Crowds of people now began to come to the Saint, and each received from him that for which he came. The fame of the desert-dweller of Khozyug spread round about and reached even to Moscow. The chief hierarch of the Russian Church, Patriarch Ioasaph I, heard of the Saint's struggles, and as a sign of reverence he sent him his fox-fur coat, asking his prayers. This was in the year 1639. St. Nicodemus accepted this honored gift, kissed it, offered up prayer for the donor, but did not keep the coat for himself but rather sent it to the Kozha Lake monastery, saying: "A single shirt is enough for my poor self." This fur coat was preserved in the Kozha Lake monastery until 1885, when it burned in the fire which destroyed the Theophany church, at which time the mantle and walking staff of St. Nicodemus were also destroyed. St. Nicodemus already felt that he had travelled the path of his life without wavering, and now he desired only one thing: to be with Christ, for Whom he had labored his whole life long.

**T**HUS THE SAINT began to pray: "O Master, Lord Jesus Christ! Vouchsafe me to be a communicant with Thy Saints and to be a participant of Thy Kingdom together with them, and number me with them in Thy light which Thou hast prepared for Thy righteous ones." The Saint had scarcely finished this prayer than there appeared before him two men: a hierarch and a monk. Thinking that these were ghosts, he became frightened, but the hierarch said: "Fear not, slave of Christ, desert-dweller and holy zealot. The Lord has sent us to inform you of your approaching demise, for soon you shall receive the good things of Jerusalem which the Lord has prepared for those who love Him." Falling at their feet, St. Nicodemus asked them who they were. To this the hierarch replied: "I am Alexis, Metropolitan of Moscow, and with me is Dionysius, Archimandrite of St. Sergius' monastery of the Holy Trinity. O holy one! That for which you entreated the Lord will be done to you according to your petition; you shall be numbered with the Saints and will be settled in the Heavenly Kingdom." With these words both

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Saints became invisible. St. Nicodemus, in spiritual joy, glorifying God and feeling the exhaustion of his body, called Abbot Jonah of the monastery and, having related to him concerning the apparition, asked for Communion of the Holy Mysteries of Christ. This was seven months before the repose of the Saint, in December, 1639.

Abbot Jonah entreated St. Nicodemus to leave his cell, which had been built shortly before this in place of the Saint's old cell by peasants who served the monastery, and to leave the desert in order to finish his days in the monastery. With tears the Saint parted with the beloved site of his ascetic struggles and went to the monastery, where he was met triumphantly by all the brethren, on May 20, 1640. The Saint lived only 44 more days after this.

Coming to the monastery, the God-pleaser settled in a certain empty cell, declining all invitations to live with the brethren, and here he prepared for his end, which occurred on July 3, 1640. On this day his disciple James, who then was still the layman John Dyatlev, a peasant of Priluki, went out after dinner on an obedience. Passing by the cell of St. Nicodemus, he heard his voice. Entering the ante-room, the disciple saw his Elder sitting in exhaustion on the threshold, and helped him to enter the cell, "Go, child John, in peace," said the Saint; "may the Lord be with you all the days of your life." John went out to his obedience. It was at this time that St. Nicodemus reposed.

Then the Abbot and the brethren, coming out of the refectory, smelled an extraordinary fragrance; discovering that it was coming from the cell of the Saint, they rejoiced and went there, but the cell was closed. After saying the usual prayer and receiving no reply, they entered the cell and found the Saint already reposed. His face was bright and joyful, and the cell was filled with fragrance.

After preparing the holy relics, the Abbot Jonah and the brethren buried them solemnly and honorably near the church of the Lord's Theophany, on the south side. The Russian Church numbered him among the Saints in the year 1662, doubtless due to the influence of Nikon, Patriarch of Moscow, who had been a monk in the monastery of Kozha Lake during the lifetime of St. Nicodemus, and succeeded Jonah as Abbot in 1642. The service to the Saint was composed at that time by Metropolitan Macarius Grevensky and the Serbian Abba Theodosius, who had come to Russia in connection with the case of Patriarch Nikon.

Ever afterward, all those who hasten to the Saint for help with faith and love receive what they entreat of St. Nicodemus, wonderworker of Kozha Lake.



THE ORIGINAL THEOPHANY CHURCH OF KOZHA LAKE MONASTERY  
as it appeared before the fire of 1885



Typical interior of a church of the Northern Thebaid, this one built by  
St. Tryphon of Pechenga and preserved exactly as the Saint knew it



A typical chapel of the tundra similar to St. Nicodemus' abode at Khozyug



A Northern Church in the Same Style as the Original  
Kozha Lake Monastery Church





ST. DALMATUS OF SIBERIA

KONTAKION, TONE 8

Having been a valiant warrior for an earthly king,\* thou didst abandon everything for the service of the King of Heaven.\* Leading an army of warriors against enemies visible and invisible,\* with the sword of the Spirit and the aid of the Queen of Heaven thou didst repel their assaults.\* Now in the heavens, do not cease to entreat Christ, O holy Father Dalmatus,\* that we who venerate thy memory may obtain great mercy and cry out in gratitude to God: Alleluia.



THE LIFE OF  
*Saint Dalmatus of Siberia*  
AND THE MONASTIC EXODUS INTO THE SIBERIAN TAIGA\*

Commemorated February 15

**S**AINTE DALMATUS was born in the first quarter of the 17th century in a cossack family. His father was Ivan Makrinsky and his mother was a descendent of newly baptized Siberian Tatars, evidently of noble lineage. Thus, the Saint was a native Siberian, probably from the town of Tobolsk, which at that time was the cultural and strategic center for the whole of vast Siberia. In holy Baptism the young Makrinsky was given the name Demetrius in honor of the Vologda ascetic, St. Demetrius of Priluki, the disciple of St. Sergius of Radonezh and an outstanding representative of the Northern Thebaid.† This already left a certain mystical stamp on the boy's spiritual formation, for later he was to be in so many ways similar to his heavenly patron. Later, when living alone as a hermit in a cave in the taiga, often he would bring to mind the image of St. Demetrius and draw from it strength in the severe trials and temptations which inevitably come upon desert dwellers. And St. Demetrius, seeing his struggles and hearing his tearful prayer and lamentation, interceded before the Throne of God on behalf of the young bearer of his name and follower of his spiritual path.

\* Sources: The weekly periodical *Russian Pilgrim*, 1894 and 1896; *The Earthly Life of the Most Holy Mother of God and Her Miraculous Icons*, by E. Pose-lyanin, 1902; the biweekly periodical of Pochaev Monastery, *Russian Monk*, 1911, no. 12, p. 73; *Orthodox Way* for 1968, Jordanville, N.Y., p. 118; the monthly periodical *Strannik*, 1866, IV; *Historical Description of Kirensk Mon-astery*, Moscow, 1841; *Russian Ascetics of the 18th and 19th Centuries*, by Bp. Nikodim of Belgorod, vol., 13, Moscow, 1912 (all in Russian).

† Commemorated Feb. 11, †1392.



One of the original churches built by St. Tryphon of Vyatka

BY THE MIDDLE of the 17th century the movement of ascetics to the isolated places of the Northern Thebaid had largely spent itself. Hundreds of monasteries had been established, and the desert had become populated with many thousands of monks. But the new historical conditions were not so favorable for the monastic spirit, and the Time of Troubles had brought desolation to many monasteries. Yet the thirst for the desert life of solitude not only could not be quenched, but was even increasing. And so, lovers of the desert life found a new place for their solitary labors in the sparsely settled area beyond the Ural Mountains, where wild pagan and Moslem tribes still roamed. This boundless area, like a new world opening before the lovers of silence and wilderness — was Siberia. It provided new wide spaces of freedom for monastic endeavor, especially in its dense, impenetrable northern jungle: the taiga.

The taiga is the dense virgin forest which then covered most of the North. It indeed offered opportunities to extend the frontier of the Northern Thebaid, and many holy men adorned it with their sanctity. Thus the monastic exodus, the perennial Christian flight to the desert, occurred eastward across the Urals by way of Great Ustiug, Vyatka, Perm, along the great Kama River — and soon the whole of this region north to the Arctic Sea was caught up in the fervor of bringing the Orthodox Faith and monasticism to the wild peoples of this new land. This may be clearly seen in the life and labors of *St. Tryphon of Vyatka*, who travelled through this vast territory disseminating the monastic

#### ST. DALMATUS OF SIBERIA

ideal through his personal sanctity, building churches and monastic communities on his way.\* As early as 1593 monks of Kozha Lake Monastery, *Cornelius, Longinus, Herman and Bogolep*, founded a New Kozha monastery on the Enisei River in Mangazea, where in 1664 *Abbot Stephanida* founded a convent.

#### ST. TIKHON OF ENISEY

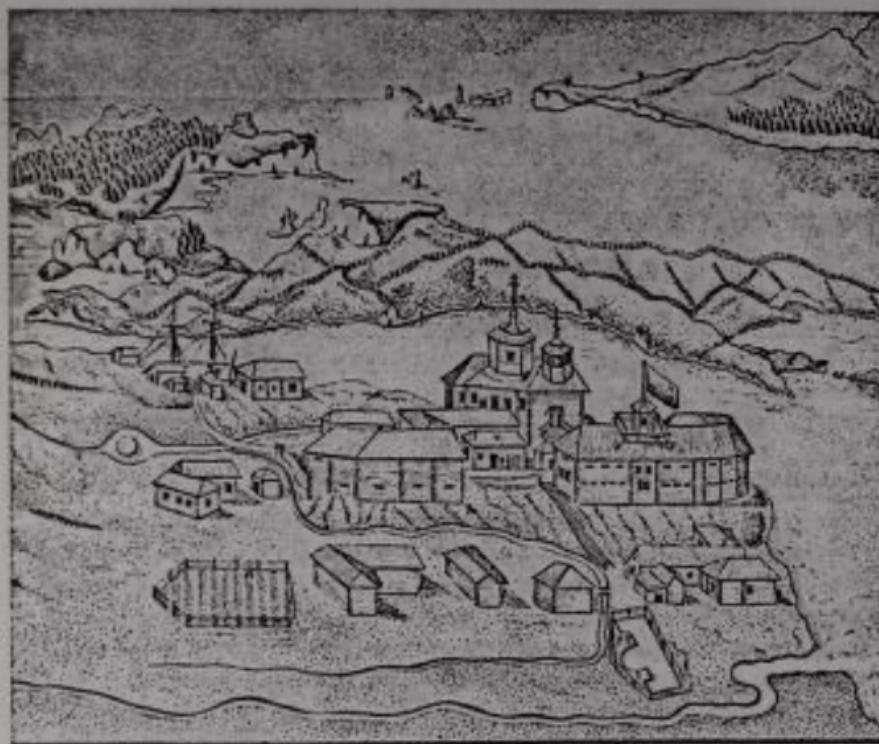
St. Tikhon was born in Ustiug in a priestly family and migrated to a frontier town on the Enisei River in his adult years. There he entered the New Kozha Monastery and led an ascetic life, with the hope of going away entirely into the wilderness. With the Abbot's blessing, he set out in a small boat with the monk Dionysius, up the river Enisei. At Turukhan they spent the winter, and the next spring (1657) they went 20 miles further up the Enisei, where they found a beautiful uninhabited place in the midst of an impenetrable forest. There they erected a cross and then built cells and began to live a God-pleasing life. With their hands they labored, and with their lips they ceaselessly glorified God in prayer. Soon others began to join them, notable elders among them being Mercurius, Gerasim, Paul and Nikon. With God's help and the blessing of Archbishop Simeon of Tobolsk, they erected a wooden church dedicated to the Holy Trinity, and the brothers compelled St. Tikhon to accept the priestly rank. As abbot, he gave the chief example of ascetic life and meekness. Before celebrating Liturgy he would spend the night in prayer, and during Great Lent he would eat only bread and water on Saturdays and Sundays. He wore iron chains, and heavy iron crosses on his chest and back. The hesychast nature of his sanctity made him worthy to be God's vehicle in revealing the relics of the Blessed Child Basil of Mangazea, which he transferred to his monastery on skis, pulling a sled. On July 24, 1682, he reposed, later appearing gloriously from Paradise and giving healings at his grave.

#### ST. HERMOGENES OF LENA

St. Hermogenes also was a newcomer to Siberia, bringing the light of Christianity to the natives along the Lena River. He began also in search of a desolate place on the shores of this great, silent river. Having lived as a recluse he gathered around himself some brethren, who appealed to the church and secular authorities for permission to build a church and have it consecrated. Already in 1665 a second church adorned this Kirensk Monastery, surrounded by the monks' cells. As a result of local strife, however, the Saint did not even see this church built before a band of "pioneers" took him as a hostage, fleeing with him to the shores of the Amur River, where in 1671 they established the Fort of Albazin. There the Saint erected two monasteries up the Kutar River

\* †1612, October 8.





*Видъ строения «Троицкой Пустыни», съ северной стороны. 1798*

THE FARTHERMOST OUTPOST OF THE SIBERIAN  
MISSION AND FIRST ORTHODOX MISSION IN AMERICA

RESURRECTION CHURCH AT ST. PAUL HARBOR  
ON KODIAK ISLAND IN ALASKA

*A topographical drawing made in 1798, showing the original  
buildings of the harbor as seen from the north side*



St. Hermogenes' Kirensk Monastery (18th century engraving)

and for twenty years he labored with apostolic zeal. In 1685 the Chinese destroyed Fort Albazin and its inhabitants were released, which gave the Saint the opportunity to return to his beloved Kirensk Monastery. Having returned, the Saint died on December 19, 1690, and was buried there. A reliquary was soon built over his grave, where many miracles took place.

The Tobolsk Archbishop Gerasim (†1650) was the hierarch during whose rule many monasteries were officially founded in Siberia; he was a wise and very active archpastor. In connection with him there is an interesting mention of a group of enterprising Novgorodians who reached the Aleutian Islands at about this time and settled in America, keeping alive and spreading their Orthodox faith and customs. Later St. Herman of Alaska (†1836) mentioned them in a letter to Abbot Nazarius of Valaam. The farthest outpost of this Siberian missionary fervor, the Mission to America of 1794, was composed exclusively of monks, who thus brought to the American continent, most strikingly in the person of St. Herman, the spirit of the Northern Thebaid, together with the great text of the monastic spiritual struggle—the *Philokalia*.

It is impossible even to mention all the great monastic figures of 17th- and 18th-century Siberia; but one cannot omit from this brief list at least the monastic founders beyond Lake Baikal: Elder Gerasim the Wonderworker, who founded the Ascension Monastery in Irkutsk, Hieromonk Macarius, who founded Holy Transfiguration Monastery in 1681, and Abbot Theodosius, founder of Holy Trinity Monastery in 1682.

## THE NORTHERN THEBAID

### ST. DALMATUS, OR DALMAT

**I**T WAS to such a company that St. Dalmat was to join himself.

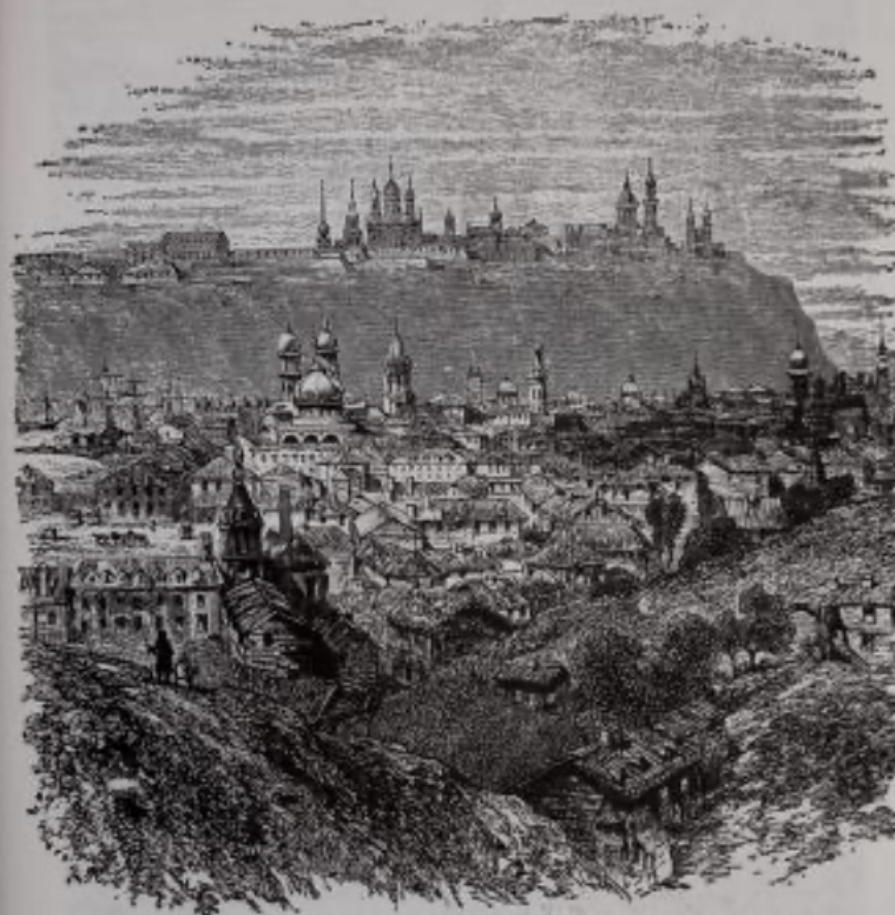
And so Demetrius Ivanovich Makrinsky, fortified by the Holy Mysteries of the Orthodox Church, grew strong in body and spirit, and in his virtuous life as a valiant cossack and fearless defender of the Orthodox Sovereign, became distinguished by some heroic deed, and for his faithful service to the Russian State he was rewarded with the rank of nobility. He was tall, handsome, and strong, rich and honored. He was happily married and had children, one of whom, his son, later joined his father as an ascetic and became his successor as abbot of his monastery.

And then suddenly, as his Life tells us, "he left his wife and children, and becoming inflamed with love for God and ascetic struggle, entered Nerjansk Monastery in the nearby Ural Mountains."

What the cause was for this abrupt change in his hitherto full and happy life, we do not know: God calls to His service in unfathomable ways. But one event took place about the same time in the city of Tobolsk which indeed could have caused many to stop in deep perplexity in order to reflect on the value of all our earthly endeavors in the face of the eternity which awaits us after death.

On the 14th of August, 1643, on the eve of the Feast of the Dormition of the Most Holy Mother of God, a great fire broke out in Tobolsk, and almost the whole city burned to the ground. The fire destroyed the city fort, all the government buildings, the cathedral and parish churches, the archbishop's residence, storehouses, the business district and countless other buildings and private homes. The fire lasted for several days and made people penniless overnight. Whether Demetrius himself lost everything in the fire, as thousands of others did, or whether, seeing the all-consuming fire, he made a thorough re-evaluation of his spiritual life, or even made a vow to dedicate his life to God — we do not know. What we do know is that the worldly hero decided at about this time to become a struggler for God. With deep devotion he took an icon precisely of the Dormition of the Most Holy Mother of God, abandoning everything else and went into the uninhabited Ural Mountains — in order to die to the world.

In the monastery the young struggler was tonsured with the name of Dalmat and given over to monastic obediences for the testing and refining of his ascetic fervor. The monastic ideal of the Northern Thebaids was taking root



TOBOLSK

THE HEART OF ORTHODOX SIBERIA

The upper and lower towns of Tobolsk after the fire of 1643





The upper and lower towns of Tobolsk



View of the city of Tobolsk from the Irtysh River



METROPOLITAN PHILOTHEUS OF TOBOLSK  
Theodore in Schema  
1650-1727

in Siberia at this time; books and tales of monasticism were spreading, aided by such powerful church figures as the Tobolsk hierarch Gerasim. And so the ascetic fervor could not but ignite the heart of the young monk Dalmat also. He rapidly progressed in the spiritual life and thirsted for the mental inward activity which was so characteristic of his patron, St. Demetrius of Priluki.

So outstanding was the monk Dalmat, both in his strict ascetic struggles and his virtuous life, that the brothers of the monastery elected him to be their abbot, even though he was still quite young. But the humble Dalmat, fleeing worldly glory and the responsibility for so many souls, fled the monastery, taking with him his cell-icon of the Dormition of the Most Holy Mother of God, seeking a solitary place where he might please God by a life of silence and ascetic struggles.

Our holy Father found a place according to his desire on the bank of the river Isset, where the river Techa flows into it. Here, on a hill which from of old had borne the name of "White Town," he dug a cave for himself and began to live an anchoritic life. This was on land which belonged to the Tatar Prince Ilgei.

But this lamp of Orthodox monastic life, St. Dalmat, was not meant to be hid under a bushel, but to be placed upon a lampstand and shine for the salvation of others. And so it was that the rumor of the great ascetic soon spread among the inhabitants of this area, not only among the Christians, but also among those who had not yet been enlightened by Holy Baptism. Many of the Christians began to join him and share his life of monastic struggle, and from as far away as Nizhni-Novgorod on the Volga River in the west,

### THE NORTHERN THEBAID

a certain Elder, John, a disciple of the Elder Dorotheus, was granted a miraculous revelation concerning the labors of St. Dalmat, and he hastened into Siberia to join his community.

Many laymen also, both Christian and non-Christian, would come to visit the Saint and take delight in his sweet converse which was for their spiritual profit; those who were not yet Christians would leave him with an awareness of how far the Orthodox Faith surpassed their own pagan beliefs.

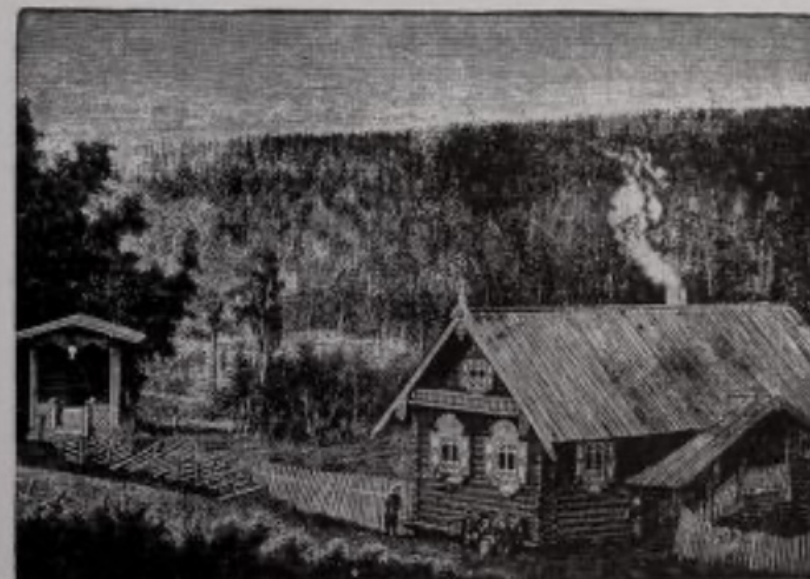
Thus was the beginning made, in the year 1644, for the monastery which later came to be called the "Dalmatian" monastery, after its holy founder. Soon the cave of St. Dalmat could no longer contain all the ascetics who desired to share his life, and the Saint asked the blessing of Archbishop of Tobolsk, Gerasimus Kremnev, to build a chapel with wooden walls. This was the first building of the new monastery, and in it was placed the wonder-working Icon of the Dormition which the Saint had brought with him when he first settled there.

**N**OT LONG, HOWEVER, was the young community to enjoy repose. The first enemies to appear were the Russian lease-holders Korolev and Shipitsyni, to whom Iligei had just leased the whole "White Town" with its surrounding area. Here they made a great income from fish, otters, and beavers, and for some reason they formed the idea that the ascetics who had settled there were dangerous rivals in this undertaking. Resorting to slander in order to remove their "rivals," they told the Prince that the Elder Dalmat had built a monastery there and intended to take away his whole estate. The Prince, enraged at the "brazenness" of the desert-dwellers, hastened to the cave of the Saint with bared sword. The Elder met the Prince with meekness and true Christian calmness and courage, and informed that they were related to each other, since the Saint's mother was descended from newly-baptized Siberian Tatars. The majestic appearance of the Saint, his extraordinary meekness calm, and the news of his kinship, immediately disposed Iligei favorably towards the Saint. He placed his sword at the Saint's feet and departed in silence.

But the malice of the Saint's enemies did not cease and they continued to spread slanders about him to the Prince, extending even to the Saint's supposed secret desire to kill the Prince himself. Again the Prince believed the false accusations, and this time he resolved to punish the monks most cruelly. Therefore, with his army, composed chiefly of his fellow Moslems, he set out for "White Town." Nightfall found him on the opposite bank of the river



A river in the Ural Mountains



Typical structures of a well-to-do monastery in Siberia





ST. DALMATUS' DORMITION MONASTERY  
as it looked at its flourishing peak at the end of Imperial Russia  
*From a painting preserved at the monastery*



Siberian natives: a Tunguse family in their birch-bark tent

## ST. DALMATUS OF SIBERIA

from the monastery, and he decided to wait to cross the river in the morning. The destruction of the barely-established monastery seemed certain.

Soon the night bonfires were lit and, being reflected in the dark waters of the wide river, gave the scene an ominous character. The monks on the opposite shore could not but see the fires and hear the echoed shouting and singing and the vicious laughter of their enemies, who seemed to celebrate their victory in advance.

Having almost no means of self-defence, the monks turned for help in prayer to the Mother of God, their sure Protectress. And quick help was indeed rendered. That very night the Queen of Heaven appeared to Iligei in a dream. It was a majestic apparition: clad in royal purple, with a glittering crown above Her head, the Mother of God held a flaming sword, and in Her right hand a whip. Sternly She forbade the pagan prince to do any harm to St. Dalmat and his fellow-strugglers, commanding him to give this land to the Saint in perpetuity, together with all its rights.

Greatly shocked by this vision, Prince Iligei completely changed his intention, and in the morning he crossed the river with a few of his followers and told the Elder of the miraculous appearance to him of a Woman, Whom he called the Mother of God. From that time on Prince Iligei had a special respect for St. Dalmat, protecting him from enemies and giving him abundant gifts.

The following spring, when the lease on the land had expired, the Prince came with his whole family to the Saint's monastery, conducted the Saint over the whole extent of the property, and solemnly presented the land to the monastery, giving the Saint, in addition, as a sign of his respect, his own iron helmet and coat of mail, which was preserved up to this century in the monastery sepulchre. This occurred in the year 1646, which is considered the year of the monastery's foundation.

THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN is acquired by many struggles and much suffering. And so, even after the Saint's deliverance from Iligei he did not enjoy repose for long. In the beginning of 1651 a wild horde of pagan Kalmyks attacked the monastery, burned the buildings, and killed with the sword or took into captivity all the monks. St. Dalmat alone was miraculously preserved from fire and death. The monastery was completely destroyed, except for the wonder-working Icon of the Dormition, which miraculously remained through the looting and the fire, only one corner of it being slightly scorched where the brazen hand of one of the pagans had touched it.

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Resolved to work out his salvation in patience and long-suffering, St. Dalmat returned to the site of his monastery and began to restore it from its foundations. Thanks to his fervor and his labors, within a few years a wooden church and several wooden cells had been built, and again monks and pilgrims flocked to the holy Elder from near and far, begging his counsel and aiding the monastery with their gifts.

Later the monastery was again subjected to the attacks of wild Siberian tribes, and several times was laid waste, until the pious Tsar Theodore Alexeevich caused it to be surrounded with a wall and fortified, in 1682. Here the Saint finished the course of his much-suffering life in peace in the year 1697, being buried within the monastery walls.

After the Saint's repose, his own son, Archimandrite Isaac, was abbot in his monastery. It was he who, in 1717, built the stone church which remained until this century, dedicated to the Dormition of the Most Holy Mother of God, with wings dedicated to St. John the Theologian and — a sign of the kinship of St. Dalmat with the main monastic current further west in Russia — St. Demetrius of Priluki, the contemporary and fellow-converser with St. Sergius of Radonezh. Later in the monastery there was a small home-church dedicated to Sts. Sergius and Nikon of Radonezh. Until the Revolution the "Dalmatian" monastery, beautifully situated on the hill of "White Town," although it was never large (with 60 monks in 1908), was a leading place of pilgrimage for the pious Orthodox faithful, who were drawn both by the holy memory of St. Dalmat, and by the wonder-working Icon treasured in the main stone church, whose feast days on February 15 and August 15 attracted a great multitude of pilgrims.

A chapel was built over the grave of St. Dalmat, and in it were kept his monastic cowl and mantle and his portrait (which is presented here in the beginning of this Life). Up to the present century services were held there almost daily, and a book was kept which recorded the many miracles which occurred by his prayers.

And thus even the last frontier of open space in the vast Russian land came to know the monastic tradition of St. Sergius, in the person of the holy Elder Dalmatus, who even under the attack of barbarian tribes kept alive the flame of true monasticism and sanctity in a final blossoming of the Northern Thebaid in the wild Siberian land.



## EPILOGUE

THE GREAT monastic movement which began with St. Sergius, the great Abba of the Northern Thebaid, came to an end with the conclusion of the 17th century. New historical conditions — chiefly the Old Believer schism and the Westernizing reforms of Peter I — made no longer possible that harmony between the ascetic fervor of the best sons and daughters of Russia, and the profound piety of the believing Russian people, which led to the creation of innumerable new monasteries and convents under the inspiration of the Byzantine monastic ideal. We have seen, indeed, that the end of the period of the Northern Thebaid is one of decline — but it is a decline only by comparison with the astonishing monastic blossoming of the 14th to 16th centuries; by comparison with almost any other Orthodox land or period, the 17th century Russian monastic movement would have to be called a flourishing one that produced at least 45 canonized Saints† (and many were never canonized owing to 18th-century conditions) and a large number of new monasteries.

At the end of the 18th century, a new great epoch of monasticism began with the great Elder Paisius Velichkovsky, the Abba of a new monastic movement whose current has not entirely died out even in our own times. That must be the subject of another book.

† *The Golden Chain of Sanctity in Russia*, by Rev. Nicholas Smirnov, Buenos Aires, 1958, gives the complete list of just the officially canonized Saints, together with dates.



## THE NORTHERN THEBAID

What, then, of the 18th century itself? Was the true monastic tradition dead in Russia? Did Peter and Catherine actually destroy monasticism, as has sometimes been said? The answers to these questions will do much to illuminate not only the continuity of the monastic tradition in Russia, but also the condition of Orthodox monasticism in the 19th century, and even today.

Some of the decrees of Peter I regarding monasticism,\* to be sure, were directed against abuses in an institution which at that time had become very large and, in places where the monastic rule and spirit were not carefully preserved, there were unquestionably disorders which needed regulation. But several of the decrees were directed against the free existence of monasteries, and they smothered the very spirit of monasticism. Thus, in 1703 Peter forbade the building of new monasteries; a decree of 1724 turned monasteries into refuges for sick soldiers; and in 1734 it was forbidden to tonsure anyone except widowed priests and retired soldiers. Finally, under Catherine, in 1764, the Government appropriated monastic property altogether and assigned a monetary salary to the monastic clergy; of the 953 monasteries then existing, 568 were closed entirely and 160 more were left totally without income; and "quotas" were established of the number of monks allowed in each monastery. It can be imagined what a blow these reforms gave to Russian monasticism: what room was there for desert-loving fervor in State-supported and supervised institutions whose abbots were often transferred and too often had the function of administrators rather than spiritual fathers?

But the aims of the Westernizing rules were not achieved: the monastic spirit, still very much alive in all classes of Russian society, was not snuffed out. Desert-loving monks and nuns simply went again to the desert, whether in Russia or outside her borders, avoiding the "established" monasteries; new communities were established, despite the laws; and there rose up a number of powerful monastic leaders, new Abbots of Holy Russia, who were not afraid to defy the authorities in order to preserve the free monastic spirit, and who sometimes endured a trial hitherto unknown in the history of Russian monasticism, revealing the extent of the disharmony between the monastic ideal and the corrupted leading society: they were placed in prison.

Here it will be possible to mention only very briefly some representatives of the genuine Orthodox monastic tradition in 18th-century Russia — enough to show that the monastic "revival" of Blessed Paisius Velichkovsky was not at all

\* Information in this paragraph is taken from Hieromonk Clement Sederholm, "On Desert-dwelling in the Forests of Roslavl," an appendix to the Biography of Elder Moses of Optina, Moscow, 1882, pp. 233-250.



ABBOT EPHRAIM  
OF SAROV



BLESSED PAISIUS  
VELICHKOVSKY



FATHER PACHOMIUS  
OF SAROV

something imported from abroad, but something which had deep roots in Russia itself and only awaited more favorable conditions to burst forth into the glorious flowering of 19th-century Orthodox monasticism.

BLESSED JOB (Joshua in Schema) OF SOLOVKI (†1720, March 9), the first monastic victim of the reforms of Peter I, humbled himself to such a degree that he was vouchsafed to converse with the Most Holy Mother of God. She blessed him to found the Golgotha Skete and prophesied concerning the millions who would find martyrdom on his Golgotha hill in Soviet times.

BLESSED JOHN OF SAROV (†1737, July 4), founder of the great 18th-century monastic center of Sarov, lived at first in caves, fought the schism of the Old Believers, and was finally placed in prison, where he had a righteous death, leaving behind a whole host of disciples and successors: the Blessed DEMETRIUS, EPHRAIM, PACHOMIUS, JOACHIM, JOSEPH, MARK, and the great ST. SERAPHIM.

ABBESS ALEXANDRA OF DIVEYEVO (†1789, June 13) founded her convent under the close spiritual direction of the Sarov Elders, especially St. Seraphim, and nurtured a real Lavra of 3000 righteous nuns and fools for Christ; the Convent continued to exist until the Soviets closed it in 1927.

BLESSED NAZARIUS OF VALAAM (†1809, Feb. 23 and Oct. 14) was the refounder of the great Lavra on Lake Ladoga, using the Typicon in which he had been trained in his native Sarov, leaving behind him a great tradition and holy disciples: BLESSED PATERMUTHIUS, INNOCENT, BARLAAM, ABEL THE PROPHET, CYRIACUS, EUTHYMIUS, and ST. HERMAN OF ALASKA.

## THE NORTHERN THEBAID

**BLESSED THEODORE OF SANAXAR** (†1791, Feb. 19), the great aristocrat-cornobishop of the 18th century, the outspoken protege of Empress Catherine II, was a desert-dweller of the renowned Roslavl Forests and Sarov who finally suffered persecution and banishment. He left many disciples: **BLESSED MACARIUS OF PESNOSHA**, **THEOPHANES OF NEW LAKE**, **IGNATIUS**, and others.

**BLESSED BASIL OF MERLOPOLYANI** (†1767), the Elder of Blessed Paisius Velichkovsky, living outside of Russia, in Moldavia, wrote important introductions to Patristic works on the Prayer of Jesus.

**SCHEMA-ABBESS MARYTHA (Protasieva) OF ARZAMAS** (†1813, April 30) was the disciple of Blessed Theodore of Sanaxar and later of Paisius Velichkovsky, who wrote to her his famous instruction for women monastics.

**BLESSED PAISIUS VELICHKOVSKY** (†1794, Nov. 15) was the inspirer of the great monastic-patristic movement of 19th-century Russia. His innumerable disciples in Russia begin with **ELDER CLEOPHAS** (†1778, March 9), the two **ELDERS ATHANASIUS, PAUL, THEOPHANES OF SOLOVKI** and many others.

**BLESSED NICETAS** of the Roslavl Forests (†1793, March 29) was worthy to behold the appearance of the Most Holy Theotokos and even to sing with Her. Together with him there was a whole multitude of desert-dwellers in the Brjansk Forests throughout the 18th century: **BLESSED SERAPHION** (†1721), **IOASAPH** (†1730), **BARNABAS** (†1775), the great **ALEXIS OF KONEVITS** (1812), and innumerable others.

**BLESSED THEODOSIUS** of the Sophroniev Monastery (†1802, Jan. 12) was a fellow struggler of Blessed Paisius and Elder of the great **PHILARET**, founder of the Glinsk Hermitage.

**BLESSED DOSITHEUS OF THE KIEV-CAVES** (†1776, Sept. 25) was a recluse who transmitted the Paisian tradition in the south of Russia and blessed St. Seraphim to go to Sarov; in reality she was a woman, and was known to the Empress Elizabeth. **BLESSED DOSITHEA OF MOSCOW** (†1810) was a royal recluse who spread the Paisian tradition in the north.

**ST. TIKHON OF ZADONSK** (†1783, Aug. 13) was the great 18th-century enlightener raised up by God against the masonic pseudo-enlightenment of that time. His writings are for laymen as well as monastics, but he was first of all a great monastic force who inspired a host of followers: the **BLESSED METROPHANES, AGAPITUS, NICANDER, COSMAS, MELANIA, MATRONA, THAIS**, and many others, his influence extending as far as the Kozha Lake Monastery in the Arctic tundra.

**METROPOLITAN PHILOTHEUS OF SIBERIA** (†1727, May 31) was a great monastic Father in Siberia, where a whole monastic movement was begun by him



SAROV MONASTERY IN THE 18TH CENTURY

and other 18th-century Siberian hierarchs: **STS. JOHN** (†1765, June 10) and **PAUL** (†1768, Nov. 4) of **TOBOLSK**, **STS. INNOCENT** (†1731, Nov. 27) and **SOPHRONIUS** (†1771, June 3) of **IRKUTSK**, the righteous **GERASIMUS** and **SYN-ESIUS OF IRKUTSK**, and many others.

The new monastic movement which sprouted from the fertile Orthodox soil of 18th-century Russia under the favorable conditions given by the truly Orthodox Tsars of the 19th century, was to rival the epoch of the Northern Thebaid itself. But now there was to be a subtle difference in tone, one not affecting the essence of Orthodox spirituality or monastic life, but one that reflected the changed historical circumstances of the whole Orthodox world: the new monastic revival is no longer dependent on Byzantium. There are no more pilgrimages to the East in search of the Orthodox monastic tradition; or, to be more precise: the few pilgrimages thus undertaken, such as that of Blessed Paisius Velichkovsky to Mount Athos, meet with failure. The Orthodox monastic tradition is more alive in Russia than in Greece, and it is the Russians themselves who, in the 19th century, are responsible for a great monastic flowering on Mt. Athos, led by great Elders such as Jerome and Arsenius, who had their spiritual roots firmly in Russian soil. Even the great Greek Fathers of the Patristic revival of this time, **Sts. Macarius of Corinth** and **Nicodemus the Hagiorite**, are not monastic founders as were Blessed Paisius and his disciples, but only transmitters of the Patristic doctrine and its texts.



## THE NORTHERN THEBAID

What all this means is one thing: Orthodox monastic Russia, in the epoch of the Northern Thebaid, had come of age. Just as once Byzantium itself had humbly absorbed the spirituality and tradition of Palestine and Egypt and had transmitted it to other peoples, so now Russia had thoroughly absorbed the Orthodox tradition of Byzantium and made it her own. There is no longer any need to travel outside of Russia to find it. Whether one says "Byzantium" (the earlier phase) or "Holy Russia" (the later phase), the same thing is meant: the tradition of unadulterated Orthodoxy.

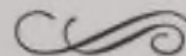
The monastic movement of Blessed Paisius completed the monastic foundation which the monks of the Northern Thebaid had begun, by providing Slavonic and then Russian translations of almost all the monastic works of the Holy Fathers which had been written in or translated into Greek. The Northern Thebaid itself richly provided new sources of monastic literature in the numerous Lives of its Saints and in the spiritual writings of its great Holy Father, St. Nilus of Sora; then, in the 18th century, the golden age of Slavonic and Russian Patristic literature begins with the writings of Blessed Basil of Merlopolyani, St. Tikhon of Zadonsk, Blessed Paisius himself, and many others. The great Greek and Near-Eastern Patristic epoch had already produced the basic texts of Orthodox spirituality and monasticism, but the final Patristic flowering in Russia — where the purity of Orthodox tradition was sealed by the sanctity of the wonderworking Elders — was to provide the connecting link between the Patristic tradition and the Orthodox faithful of today, some of whom have seen the last great Orthodox Elders of the golden chain of Orthodox spirituality which has come down unbroken from the Egyptian desert to us. The spiritual strength of Orthodoxy today, whether Russian or non-Russian, rests directly upon the Saints of the Northern Thebaid, who have bequeathed to the Orthodox faithful their experience of communion with God and the example of their God-pleasing lives.

How can we make use of this holy inheritance in our own lives today? We must not deceive ourselves: the life of the desert-dwellers of the Northern Thebaid is far beyond us in our time of unparalleled spiritual emptiness. In any epoch the monastic life is limited by the kind of life which is being led in the world. At a time when daily Orthodox life in Russia was both extremely difficult and very sober, monasticism could flourish; but in our time when ordinary life has become abnormally "comfortable" and the world-view of even the best religious and intellectual leaders is shockingly frivolous, what more is to be expected than that luke-warm "spirituality with comfort" with which bold voices from inside Soviet Russia even now are reproaching the free West? The situation within enslaved Russia is spiritually much more favorable, because on



MUROM MONASTERY ORATORY IN WINTER MOONLIGHT  
FOUNDED BY ST. LAZARUS (†1391, March 8)

A Greek coming to Russia in 1331 with a bishop to Novgorod, he liked Onega Lake so much that he chose to live there on an island. With the help of a wonderworking Icon of the Theotokos, he founded a monastery, building with his own hands this church, which survives to this day.

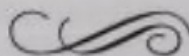




KLIMENTY MONASTERY ON KIZHI ISLAND  
FOUNDED BY ST. JONAH (†1554, June 6)

\*\*\*

A young Novgorod merchant was drowning in the stormy waters of Onega with all his merchandise. Upon giving a vow to become a monk, he was miraculously saved, and when inspecting the island at this spot he heard a voice directing him to build a monastery here. Approaching the place whence the voice came, he saw an Icon of the Holy Trinity surrounded by dazzling light. He went to a Novgorod monastery and became a monk, later returning to Kizhi Island to found a monastery.



KIZHI MONASTERY, WITH STS. JONAH AND NICHOLAS  
19th Century Engraving (1894)

the foundation of the suffering and hardship which are the daily lot of most people there, something spiritual *can* come out. From many signs it is evident that a religious awakening is beginning now in Russia, whose result cannot yet be foreseen, but which may well result in the re-establishment of some of the monastic centers mentioned in this book.

And yet, the situation of enslaved Russia and the free West is not as different as it might seem. Everywhere today the disease of disbelief has entered deeply into the minds, and most of all the hearts, of men. Our Orthodoxy, even when it is outwardly still correct, is the poorest, the feeblest Christianity there has ever been. The God-bearing Elders who, comparatively speaking, abounded even in the periods of spiritual decline in earlier centuries, are now conspicuous by their total absence, and the conditions of contemporary life are scarcely likely to give birth to anything but counterfeits.

And still the voice of the Northern Thibaid calls us — not, it may be, to go to the desert (although some fortunate few may be able to do even that,



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for the forests are still on God's earth) — but at least to keep alive the fragrance of the desert in our hearts; to dwell in mind and heart with these angel-like men and women and have them as our truest friends, conversing with them in prayer; to be always aloof from the attachments and passions of this life, even when they center about some institution or leader of the church organization; to be first of all a citizen of the Heavenly Jerusalem, the City on high towards which all our Christian labors are directed, and only secondarily a member of this world below which perishes. He who has once sensed this fragrance of the desert, with its exhilarating freedom in Christ and its sober constancy in struggle, will never be satisfied with anything in this world, but can only cry out with the Apostle and Theologian: *Come, Lord Jesus*. Even so, *Surely I come quickly* (Apocalypse 22:20). Amen.

—Monk Seraphim Rose



HOLY TRANSFIGURATION CATHEDRAL  
OF ST. ALEXANDER'S SVIR MONASTERY  
Where the Saint's relics were treasured



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# *The* NORTHERN THEBAID

## *Monastic Saints of the Russian North*

Compiled and translated  
by Fathers Seraphim and  
Herman of Platina



FROM the fourth century A.D., the desert Thebaid of Egypt was the home of thousands of monks and nuns who made the desert a city peopled with Christians striving towards the heavens in the Angelic way of life. A thousand years later, no fewer thousands of monks and nuns, likewise seeking communion with God, went to live in the forests of Northern Russia, creating what has become known as the "Northern Thebaid."

Just as the sultry African nature with its clear blue sky, lush colors, its burning sun, and its incomparable moonlit nights, is distinct from the aquarelle soft tones of Russia's northern nature with the blue surface of its lakes and the soft shades of its leafy forests—in the same way the sanctity of the Saints of the Egyptian desert, elemental and mighty, is distinct from the sanctity of Russia, which is quiet, lofty, and as crystal-clear as the radiant and quiet evening of the Russian spring. But both in Russia and in Egypt there is the same divine prayer, the same interior silence, leading to direct contact with God.

Illustrated with rare pictures from old Russian books and magazines, *The Northern Thebaid* chronicles the lives of a number of holy men and women of the Russian forests, presenting the Orthodox monastic tradition which inspired them and which is still alive today for those who would follow in their footsteps. This edition is a facsimile of the original edition, which was hand-printed by Fr. Seraphim Rose and his monastic brothers in the mountain forests of Northern California.

FR. SERAPHIM ROSE FOUNDATION

RELIGION

ISBN 0-938635-37-9

\$17