

## Nun Ephemaia: On "Reminiscences of St. John in Shanghai"



*Photo: Bishop John in Shanghai (1896-1966)*

*Source: [http://www.orthodox.cn/localchurch/shanghai/cathedral\\_en.htm](http://www.orthodox.cn/localchurch/shanghai/cathedral_en.htm)*

# St. John in Shanghai

## REMINISCENCES OF NUN EUPHEMIA, AS TOLD TO THE NUNS OF HOLY CROSS SKETE

### I. THE ORPHANAGE

There were always wars in China. The Chinese had large families with many children, and there was very little to eat. To save on

food, they would get rid of newborns, placing them out on the street to freeze to death. Vladika John would pick them up and bring them to the orphanage. On these outings, the deacon of the cathedral would follow him in order to help and protect him. Once Vladika said to this deacon about a child, "Pick him up." The deacon objected, "But he's Chinese." "But he is made in the image of God," said Vladika.

Thus the orphanage grew. Vladika John asked my mother Lydia to help in the orphanage. She was not able to, since she already had six children of her own, but she said, "I will help in other ways." She went to the orphanage asking what she could do, and was told, "We need to feed them." She said, "I will take Wednesdays and Fridays." So she would go on her bicycle to the market with me beside her on another bicycle, and we would load her bicycle with food to take it to the orphanage. On the assigned days, our family was entirely focused on helping the orphanage. That was how the orphanage was supported: by various families in the parish helping out.

The orphanage was always very busy. New orphans were coming all the time. All of them would come to the Saturday-night Vigil and would stand together.

## **2. Boys**

My father, a seminary graduate, read and sang in church, and my brothers served in the altar. All of them were close to Vladika John. Vladika would say after the service, "Come, let us see if there is something," and he would treat them to some food. If someone misbehaved before leaving church, he had to make prostrations. Vladika would be there and would count the

prostrations, which were done before the feast-day icon. Since my whole family walked to church together, we would have to wait while my brothers made their prostrations. Vladika would explain to them what they had done, how they had offended God. Then, after the prostrations, he would smile and stroke their heads--and what a smile! Then we would go. Whenever my father would ask what they had done, Vladika would say, "It's all forgiven."

He had so much on his mind. At night he received phone calls all the time. He always remembered the age, character and personality of the boys. Once he had a discussion with my brothers and others. "We are strong, we can take care of that," they said about something or other. "I can take on two or three of you!" Vladika said, challenging them. They didn't believe him. In his kellia, Vladika took off his cross and podrasnik (cassock) and said, "Let's go!" and he wrestled all over the kellia.

### **3. CLAIRVOYANCE**

Once on my name day, I came to church, received Holy Communion, and after the service went to kiss the cross. Vladika said to me, "Do you know the meaning of your name?" (At that time, my name was Ludmila.) "'Ludi' means 'people,' and 'mile' means 'kind and gentle.'" So be kind and gentle to all people." This stayed with me all my life.

I always had the feeling that Vladika knew exactly what was going on. Once I had a burden on my heart: maybe it had something to do with school. That evening, all through the service I secretly prayed to the Mother of God about my problem. When I came to kiss the cross after the service, Vladika said, "Your prayers will be answered." It had been revealed to him.

In church, my father was coming to receive the blessing at the end of the service, when a gentleman came up just before him. He handed Vladika an envelope and said something, and Vladika blessed him and thanked him. The man departed, then my father came up, and then another family; and Vladika gave the envelope unopened to this family. The man who had given it saw what had happened and was concerned, because he had not told Vladika how much money was in the envelope, and it was a huge sum. He immediately went up to Vladika, thinking that Vladika had unknowingly given away such a large amount. But Vladika paid no heed. "I know," he said. "That family needs it."

#### 4. MIRACLES



*Shanghai Cathedral, ca. 1930s*

1) Vladika John's cathedral in Shanghai was dedicated to the Icon of the Theotokos, Surety of Sinners. There Vladika held an Akathist service once a week, on a weekday. One Sunday, after my mother kissed the cross at the end of the service, Vladika said to her, "I'll see you at the Akathist." Mother said, "Father and the children will come, but not me, I have nosebleeds." These nosebleeds would come at certain times and were extreme. Mother suffered greatly from them. Vladika blessed her and said,

"Lydia, that was the last time you'll have a nosebleed." She came to the Akathist; but, doubting what he said, she brought with her a big towel, just in case. But she didn't need it and never had another nosebleed.

Shanghai was humid and hot. Sometimes Mother and Father would take us children to Tientsin in the mountains for a short vacation. There was a Russian church there, and my family never missed a service. In fact, we would not vacation in a town where there was not a Russian church. Sometimes Father would have to stay at home and miss the vacation, but this year he went. Mother fell ill in Tientsin she had typhoid. We felt maybe we would lose her. Father called Vladika John and told him that Mother was very ill, thinking he might have to bury her there in Tientsin. Vladika consoled him, saying "You will all be back, and the children will soon return to school." He even mentioned the date. "She will be well," he said. I remember that that night, Mother had a fever of 42 degrees C and was delirious, and we tried to keep her comfortable. Father came home later after talking to Vladika, and after that she began coming to. She had a bad night but pulled through.

## **5. A HOLY MAN'S PRAYERS**

There was another incident in which our family suffered in China. Since our family lived in the French sector of the city, we attended the French school along with many other Russians. French came easily to us. Some of the Russian students excelled, higher than some of the French students, and the French teachers praised the Russian children for this and tried to encourage the French to do better. This created friction. Sometimes there were fights. Nothing drastic: a little cheating while playing marbles, for

instance. Instead of the children saying, "I'm sorry," there were insults.

My older brother, Eugene, was very good at soccer. Somehow, the French boys wanted to belittle him, so they said, "The Russians think they can do anything." Eugene said, "Yes!" They wanted to find something he couldn't do, so as to put him in his place. "Eugene," they said, "we have something you cannot do. Swallow a razor blade!" "Yes, I can," he said, "but you have to give me time." "When?" "Tomorrow." Eugene went home, took his father's razor blade and started practicing. He learned to chew the fine steel into sand. "So, I can do it," he said. The next day, they gathered on the recreation field. "Here is the razor blade." He chewed it up in the way he had practiced, swallowed it, and washed it down with water. The kids got very scared, and ran and told everyone. The school wrote a note to tell my parents, and sent Eugene home with it; and I followed. The most difficult thing for him was to face our parents. He said to Mother, "I've done it before." Mother called the doctor, who at first did not believe he had done it. Then the doctor became concerned. "If even a little piece sticks into the intestine, death will occur." For three days they waited. Mother turned completely gray during those few days. The doctor said, "I will send opium, to help with death." That petrified my mother. "What will we do?" she asked my father. "You follow the doctor's directions," he said. Then he called Vladika John, and Vladika prayed, and assured him that Eugene would be alright. The pieces in Eugene came out without harming him.

At another time, Vladika saved me by his prayers. Once father bought a piece of leather and made shoes with it. He pounded the nails, and I was right next to him. While he pounded, he held the nails in his mouth. I copied him, but somehow swallowed one.

Vladika John prayed, and I was all right. This time the doctor also felt it was a miracle.

## **THE CONVENT**

I was still young when Matushka Rufina, the Abbess of the Convent of the Vladimir Mother of God in Shanghai, passed away. She was dressed as a nun in the coffin. The little orphan girls were in blue, with white headcoverings. Vladika served, and Matushka Ariadna, the successor of Abbess Rufina, took care of everything. Vladika loved that convent so much. He would serve there on the feast days, and we would also go since my brothers would serve as acolytes with Vladika. Matushka Ariadna would bring the novices and little girls to the cathedral.

## **LEAVING SHANGHAI**

Vladika wore sandals; I never saw him barefoot. But he wore sandals in all weather. In the fall there were typhoons, and the water would gather in the streets where there was no sewage system. Vladika would walk with the water and sewage up to his knees. He refused to use the rickshaws which were all over Shanghai, because he said it was not right to make human beings, made in the image of God, serve as beasts of burden. Interestingly, these rickshaws disappeared after that.



*Tent Church at  
Tubabao Refuge Camp,  
Philippines*

It was very difficult when the time came to leave Shanghai. But we had Vladika John. When the communists came, everyone had to leave; all the consulates were closing. Russian immigrants had no country to go to; they were stateless, so they would have to endure whatever happened in Shanghai. When the Synod said that Vladika had to leave, that he was being transferred, he said, "What about my flock? I will not leave without my flock." They went to the Philippines, where they lived in tents; the largest tent was the church. He went straight to the White House to obtain special permission for them to come to the United States. He pleaded there, speaking in Congress, and was granted his request.

Many years later, when my younger brother Nikita went to Moscow for a year as an exchange teacher, taking with him his wife and family, Vladika blessed him, embraced him and said, "I will not see you again." And it was so.



## IN THE STEPS OF THE SAINTS

Vladika John would point out that you cannot teach something if you do not have it yourself. He fulfilled the commandments that he taught. Always he read and reread the Lives of Saints. They are living examples, he would say, of people who were like us. Perhaps some were even greater sinners than us and had even more weaknesses than we do, but they still made it. Therefore he had the right to demand of us what he did.

He was attacked and persecuted because he was a saint, but he returned good for evil. We saw him do it.

It is hard for me to imagine that this great saint is the same man who used to stroke my head.

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