

The Good Word

PUBLISHED WITH THE BLESSING OF BISHOP AUXENTIOS OF ETNA AND PORTLAND



FOUR EXTRAORDINARY HIERARCHS OF THE RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH ABROAD, PART II

BY PROTOPRESBYTER DR. JAMES THORNTON

4. SAINT PHILARET, METROPOLITAN OF NEW YORK¹



SAINT PHILARET (VOZNESENSKY), 1903-1985,
METROPOLITAN OF NEW YORK

It has been thirty-eight years since of the repose of one of the great men of the twentieth century—not a great politician, nor a great military captain, nor a great celebrity, but a man great in the things of God: Saint Philaret, Metropolitan of New York. A true Holy Church Father and Champion of Orthodoxy, he was a man whose character was of precisely that unique melding of sanctity, fidelity, sobriety, and courage that we discern in all of the Holy Fathers, from the first-century Apostolic Fathers to those of the modern era.


Saint Philaret was born George Nikolaevich

Voznesensky on March 22, 1903 in Russia, in the city of Kursk. Upon the seizure of power by the Bolsheviks and the onset of civil war, the Voznesensky family escaped the horrors then enveloping Russia and joined the large numbers of emigre Russians living in Harbin, Manchuria. His father, a Priest, took monastic vows after the death of his wife and was elected Archbishop of Hailar, a city in China where large numbers of Russian refugees also settled. The Saint, whose education began in Russia, completed his education in Harbin, graduating from the Russian-Chinese Polytechnic Institute in 1927 with a degree in electrical engineering. He then began classes in theology at the St. Vladimir Institute, completing these in 1931. In December 1931, he was ordained a Priest and tonsured a monk, and took the name Philaret, after St. Philaret the Almsgiver of Constantinople. Six years later he was elevated to Archimandrite and served in various capacities in the Diocese of Harbin.

In 1945, near the end of the Second World War, the Soviets attacked Japan, overrunning and occupying Manchuria (then a province of the Japanese Empire known as Manchukuo). During this period, after the Soviet occupation, Saint Philaret had as little contact with the Soviets as was possible. He flatly and repeatedly refused Soviet citizenship and a Soviet passport and was dauntless in his sermons, censuring the Godless Ones for their outrages. For example, when the *Journal of the Moscow Patriarchate* made reference to the mass-murderer Lenin as a benefactor of the human race, Saint Philaret was so indignant that he devoted a sermon to the subject, a sermon that received wide circulation in the Russian community. Since he had become the focus of anti-Soviet sentiment among Orthodox Russians in Harbin, Soviet agents decided to kill him by setting fire to his residence. The Saint suffered some serious burns in the conflagration, but escaped—thanks be to God—with his life.

In 1962 Saint Philaret was permitted to leave Harbin. He travelled first to the then British Crown Colony of Hong Kong and, after a short time, on to Australia. There, in 1963, he was consecrated Bishop of Brisbane and Vicar Bishop to Archbishop Savva of the Australian Diocese. The following year, 1964, Metropolitan Anastassy, First Hierarchy of the Russian Church Abroad, decided to retire. At the Sobor of

1. This essay first appeared in a slightly different form in my book, *Made Perfect in Faith: Sermons on the Lives and Works of Fifty Holy Church Fathers*, Center for Traditionalist Orthodox Studies, Etna, CA, 2006, pp. 316-322.



Bishops where Metropolitan Anastassy announced his retirement and asked for a new Metropolitan to be chosen, amazingly, Saint Philaret of Brisbane, the hierarch with the least seniority at that time, was unanimously elected the new First Hierarch and Metropolitan. It was a providential step since the years ahead would be difficult ones, requiring exactly a man with the qualities and strengths of the new Metropolitan.

One of the principal issues confronting the Church at that time was that of the growing importance of ecumenism. Ecumenism, as it appeared and developed in the twentieth century, was principally a movement of the Protestant left. Its agenda, its outlook, its ecclesiology, and its theology were thoroughly Protestant in nature. In its view, all Christian bodies were deficient and none represented the criterion of truth. Therefore, only in bringing these bodies together, in a union of churches, could the Church founded by Christ be, so to speak, re-founded. Moreover, its activities were distinctly worldly, emphasizing radical social reforms and multifarious utopian schemes and minimizing spirituality and the reality of the spiritual world and of personal salvation. By the 1960s and '70s, this movement had allied itself with various Marxist "liberation" movements across the globe, even to the extent of financing terrorist activities.

In 1969, on the Sunday commemorating the Sixth Ecumenical Synod, Metropolitan Philaret boldly wrote an open letter, known today as the "First Sorrowful Epistle." It was addressed to "Their Holinesses and Their Beatitudes, the Primate of the Holy Orthodox Churches" and to "the Most Reverend Metropolitans, Archbishops, and Bishops"² of the Orthodox Churches throughout the world. In this First Sorrowful Epistle, the blessed Metropolitan called the attention of the Orthodox Bishops to the dangers of ecumenism, its intrinsic penchant for theological and moral relativism and its basically Protestant presuppositions, and to the uncanonical activities of certain of the Orthodox participants. He writes: "If initially the Orthodox participated in ecumenical meetings only to present the truth, performing, so to speak, a missionary service among confessions foreign to Orthodoxy, now they have combined with them...."³ Therefore, he continued, "We regard it as our duty to protest in the strongest possible terms against this state of affairs. We know that in this protest we have with us all the Holy Fathers of the Church."⁴

2. <http://orthodoxinfo.com/ecumenism/sorrow.aspx>

3. *Ibid.*, p. 221

4. *Ibid.*

Unhappily, the Hierarchs of the various national Churches addressed by the Holy Metropolitan ignored these warnings. Consequently, in 1972, the Metropolitan penned a Second Sorrowful Epistle, in which he cautions:

*In the [First] Sorrowful Epistle, we depicted in vivid colors to what extent the organic membership of the Orthodox Church in that Council [the World Council of Churches], based as it is upon purely Protestant principles, is contrary to the very basis of Orthodoxy. In this Epistle, having been authorized by our Council of Bishops, we would further develop and extend our warning, showing that the participants in the ecumenical movement are involved in a profound heresy against the very foundation of the Church.*⁵

Once again, Saint Philaret's counsel went unacknowledged.

In 1975, the final Sorrowful Epistle was issued, in response to a pro-ecumenist document published by the Constantinopolitan Patriarchate. In this open letter the Metropolitan writes:

*We now warn our flock and call out to our fellow brethren, to their faith in the Church, to their awareness of our common responsibility for our flock before the Heavenly Chief Shepherd. We entreat them not to disdain our announcement, lest a manifest mutilation of Orthodox teaching remain without accusation and condemnation. Its broad distribution has moved us to inform the whole Church of our grief. We would wish to hope that our cry will be heard.*⁶

From those Epistles most especially, the strictly Orthodox stand of the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad was defined and made known to the world. Critics of the Metropolitan abounded, writing off his Epistles as the work of a fanatic. But nothing was more contrary to the truth. The Epistles, far from fanatical, were framed in pastoral and moderate tones.

It is well known that the Saint was especially concerned in the guiding and safeguarding of the souls of young people. One of his parishioners remembers him in these words: "He would take the youth that no one cared about and bring them into the church with nothing but kindness. He was a father to every single one of us."⁷ In connection with his dedication to young people, the Metropolitan produced a small book, *On the Law of God*, which is composed of a series of lectures

5. <http://orthodoxinfo.com/ecumenism/sorrow2.aspx>

6. Metropolitan Philaret, "'The Thyateira Confession': An Appeal to the Primate of the Holy Churches of God, and Their Eminences the Orthodox Hierarchs," *The Orthodox Word*, Vol. XII, No. 1 (66) (January-February 1976), p. 11.

7. <http://www.monasterypress.com/mphilaret.html>

to young people explaining basic Orthodox teaching, the benefit to them of this teaching, and their responsibility as Orthodox Christians. We draw now from that excellent work.

In the chapter entitled “The Christian ‘I,’” the Metropolitan explains:

The first, and the most important obligation which man has concerning himself, is the working out within oneself of a spiritual character, of our true Christian “I.” The spiritual character of a Christian is not something given to him at first. No, it is something sought for, acquired, and worked out by his personal toils and efforts. Neither the body of a Christian with its capabilities, powers, and strivings, nor his soul itself ... are his spiritual personality, the spiritual “I.” This spiritual character in an Orthodox Christian is what sharply differs him from every non-Christian. In the Holy Scripture it is not called a soul, but a spirit. This spirit is precisely the center, the concentration of the spiritual life; it strives toward God and the immortal, blessed, eternal life.

We define the task of the entire life of man as the necessity to use the earthly, transitory life for preparation toward the eternal, spiritual life. In the present instance, this can be said in other words: the task of the earthly life of man consists in that he is able, in the course of this life, to build up, to work out his spiritual character, his true, living, eternal “I.”

One can care about one's “I” in different ways. There are people who are called egoists and who cherish and are concerned very much with their “I.” An egoist, however, thinks only of himself and about no one else. In his egoism, he strives to obtain his personal happiness by any useful means—even though at the cost of suffering and misfortune for neighbors. In his blindness, he does not realize that from the true point of view, in the sense of the Christian understanding of life, he only harms himself, his deathless “I.”

And here is Orthodox Christianity (i.e., the Holy Church), calling upon man to create his spiritual character, directing one in the course of this creativity, to distinguish good and evil and the truly beneficial from the pretended beneficial and harmful. She (the Holy Church) teaches us that we cannot consider the things given us by God (ability, talents, etc.) to be our “I,” rather we must consider them gifts of God. We must use these gifts ... for the building of our spirit. For this, we must use all these “talents” given by God, not for ourselves egoistically, but for others. For, the laws of Heaven's Truth are contradictory to the laws of earthly benefit. According to worldly understandings he who gathers for himself on earth, acquires;

according to the teaching of God's Heavenly Truth, he who, in the earthly life gives away and does good, acquires (for eternity).⁸

Thus, we are taught by Saint Philaret, that one's purpose in this life is to build and to shape one's “I,” that is, one's spiritual, inward self, so that it conforms to the wishes of God. We are taught that our abilities and talents are gifts from God that we must use for the sake of others. And, we are taught that he who gathers for himself on earth gathers treasure for his earthly existence. But he who gives and does good, for the sake of Christ, acquires treasure for all eternity. May we all pay heed to the Sainly Metropolitan's admonitions! ❖ ❖ ❖

A CONFESSOR OF THE CATACOMB CHURCH:⁹




HIEROMONK ALEXANDER (ORLOV)¹⁰ 1878-1977

The priest of the Orthodox Tikhonite Church, Hieromonk Alexander, in the world Athanasius Vasilyevich Orlov, was born in 1878 in Vologda province in the family of Protopriest Basil, who served in one parish for 50 years. His mother, who was called

8. Metropolitan Philaret of New York, First Hierarch of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia, *On the Law of God*, Holy Trinity Monastery, Jordanville NY: 2002, pp. 21-22.

9. Hieroconfessor Alexander (Orlov) of Omsk, <https://trueorthodox.eu/holy-hieroconfessor-alexander-of-omsk-1977/>,

10. Photo courtesy of Hieromonk Paul (Graule) of ROCA-Agafangel, and of the Catacomb Church.



Olga, was a deeply believing Christian. There were six brothers and one sister in the family. All the brothers and the brother-in-law were priests. Father Alexander was the youngest in the family. The Lord placed the mark of his grace on the youngest son of this noble spiritual family from his youngest years - Athanasius refused to eat meat from the age of five.

He went to study in a theological seminary. Now atheism spread widely among schoolchildren and seminarians in those years, and Athanasius fell into its nets. He wanted to go and study at the medical faculty. But this was not hidden from the attentive eye of his believing mother. On her deathbed - she died at the age of 56 - she said to him: "Leave your atheist comrades, change your character and God will not abandon you."

The death of Athanasius' mother had been exactly prophesied by a fool-for-Christ, which made a strong impression on him. The impression was the stronger in that a good provincial doctor who visited the sick woman had said that she would recover. But she did not.

After the death of his mother Athanasius began to become interested in theology, the philosophical approach to religion, the doctrine of the immortality of the soul and life after death. But he was burdened by the fact that he had been so attracted by atheist ideas, and he was constantly pursued by the thought: "You will not be forgiven." This thought also gnawed at his brain: "If you want to receive forgiveness, offer yourself as a sacrifice to God."

And in despair he decided to commit suicide. His nearest relatives did not let him out of their sight and followed him day and night. Many priests tried to convince Athanasius to abandon his plan, but without success. He took a raw thong from a harness, tied the end to a pin in the ceiling, made a noose, got onto a stool, crossed himself and put his head into the noose. And when he stepped off the stool - a fiery streak of lightning flashed before his eyes, and for the rest of his life he remembered the voice which he heard at that moment: "Now you are mine. There is no repentance in the grave." And then he heard the powerful laugh of the devil.

Only after he heard these words did he change his decision and repent. He came to on the floor - the end of the raw thong was swaying on the ceiling, and the noose hung round his neck. On hearing the noise his relatives ran up. His godfather, who was a priest, confessed him and gave him communion. He sincerely repented and the thought of suicide never again entered his head. Another priest, a friend of his father's, said to him: "Athanasius, Satan told you the truth - there is no

repentance in the grave. But you are not yet in the grave, and you can still repent."

Athanasius placed upon himself a strict fast and intensified his prayer. He graduated from the seminary and took up a three-year practical as a psalm-reader in a small parish where there were few services - only every Sunday. Since he was knowledgeable in medicine, he worked to counter epidemics of typhus and dysentery.

In 1915, during the First World War, he went to the front as a volunteer, serving as a regimental priest. With a cross in his hand he would go in front of the soldiers into battle for the Faith, the Tsar and the Fatherland. His fearlessness, untiring service and flaming faith attracted the soldiers.

During battles he would go to the soldiers in the trenches, and at the height of the battle, when shells were exploding all around, to the horror of the soldiers he would rise out of the trench and stand up straight with a cross in his hand. After the battle, many saw that his flak-jacket was literally torn to shreds, especially in the region of the chest. Nevertheless, there was not even a scratch on his body. And this happened more than once. In this way did the Lord preserve and lengthen the life of his servant.


At the defense of the Yakibstadt¹¹ bridgehead, Fr. Alexander did not allow the sappers¹² to blow up the bridge until all the soldiers and the numerous wounded had been transported across from the German side of the river. For the water of the river was cold and swift-flowing. The soldiers then met and decreed that Fr. Alexander should be given the Cross of St. George.

He was three years at the front, and fell into captivity for three months, but managed to escape. He did not go home, but returned to the front. He went into the trenches with his cross and words of encouragement, and he gave sermons. For his faithful service he was awarded with a gramota [a written certificate] and a golden cross by his Majesty Tsar Nicholas II, which he was to receive personally from the Tsar. However, the arrest of the Tsar in 1917 prevented this.

After the revolution Fr. Alexander received no salary. However the older soldiers tried to persuade him not to leave. And he remained until the front was liquidated, saying: "Dear ones, it's a shame to break one's oath."

In 1918 he returned from the front and took up a position in Gribtsovo, Vologda province. His parish consisted of widely scattered villages and a church near a river. There was a bell-tower with one bell weighing

11. Yakibstadt = Jacobstadt, a small town in Latvia, southeast of Riga.
12. Soldier responsible for building roads, laying and clearing mines.



450 pounds, a second - 150, and a third - 80. There were always many parishioners. On the eve of Sundays and feasts, Fr. Alexander introduced all-night vigils, which were followed by choir rehearsals with everyone chanting. He also introduced discussions outside the services: explanations of the Creed, the commandments of the Law of God, Church history, explanations of prayers, and answers to parishioners' questions.

Fr. Alexander reminisced about this period: "I felt myself an irredeemable debtor before the Lord for my previous sins, lack of faith and the sins of my youth, and full of gratitude to the Lord for His mercy towards me in the war and in captivity. I was young, my voice was strong, I did not get tired easily. I often had to speak on the subject of atheism, and to discuss the reality of the personality of Jesus Christ. I considered it my duty to acquaint my parishioners with the great scientists who had believed in God."

At this time the Law of God was forbidden in schools, so Fr. Alexander tried to speak more about the reality of God. This did not please the atheists. And in the provincial newspaper they began to slander him and throw mud at him. It became still more difficult for Fr. Alexander to serve in the parish. The authorities sought the slightest excuse to arrest him. They imposed insupportable taxes on him and forbade him to preach.

Once a group of agitators came to the village soviet [local council] and posted up a notice ordering the villagers to appear at a debate. The old superior refused to speak at the debate, but Fr. Alexander decided to do so. He used what he had himself read and what he had heard in a debate in 1921 between Vvedensky and Lunacharsky against the atheists. The agitators could produce nothing convincing in reply and the senior member of the collective began to shout: "Arrest him...!"

"Everything you have is based on force, not on right," said Fr. Alexander fervently. "And not on facts or logic. A bear has got still greater might - he can beat up whomever he wants." Fr. Alexander went home and the peasants dispersed - they didn't want to listen to one-sided atheism.

Two weeks later they arrested him while he was paying a visit with his wife. He was brought to the village soviet under the guard of a policeman. This was on Cheesefare Saturday, and there were many people in the street. The people gathered at the village soviet and began to demand the release of the priest. The president of the soviet summoned a detachment of red-army men.

"The pope [i.e., a parish priest] has stirred up the whole district in rebellion," he said.

They were sounding the bell for the all-night vigil,

and some of the people went into the church. It became quieter on the street. They said that Fr. Alexander would be taken out the next day. However, during the service they took him out of the village, and then forced him to go the whole way by foot. Snow was falling heavily. The convoy was traveling by wooden-sledges, while he walked behind them for 50 kilometers along the snowy road. The red-army men whipped up the horse, and forced Fr. Alexander to run. Later it turned out that they had been given the order to shoot him while he was supposedly trying to run away.


First, he was put into a common cell in the Kandakovsk prison. The investigators interrogated him, constantly coming back to the same accusation: "He went round the parishes and villages conducting discussions."

But this was not true - he gave sermons only in the church. The investigator demanded that he confess to that, and that would be the end of the matter. But this would have meant that they could drag off any villager who had let him conduct a discussion in his house. These interrogations were often carried out with rifle-butts.

Fr. Alexander exposed their coarseness and then refused to give any evidence before a drunken investigator. They sent him to the GPU¹³ in the provincial capital of Vologda, and from there to a revolutionary tribunal. The interrogations began again, with yet more accusations - there were now 18 points in all. The president of the revolutionary tribunal accused him of mocking the soldiers in the war. In rebuttal of this accusation Fr. Alexander produced his George cross. Then they accused him of conducting anti-semitic propaganda against the Jews. But Fr. Alexander had not a single Jew in his parish. And at the front he had even defended the Jews, for which they had given him a present - a sacred book in Russian and Hebrew with a silver plaque and the inscription: "To the highly respected priest of the 237th Graiboronsky regiment from the Jews of this regiment." They asked to see the book, and it served as a proof of the truthfulness of Fr. Alexander's evidence.

Throughout the Great Fast until Palm Sunday, Fr. Alexander was constantly being brought under armed guard from his solitary cell to interrogations in various parts of the city. He was not allowed parcels from home. However, the day after seeing the procurator he was given back his clothes and documents and allowed to return to his parish. He served the services of Holy Week and met the Day of the Resurrection with joy.

13. The GPU was an early Soviet political police agency, a forerunner of the KGB.



"That Pascha was especially joyful," he said, "for my family, for me and for the parishioners. Their petitions, even as far as the center, had been crowned with success. By the mercy of God I, too, was resurrected!"

The people were very well disposed towards him, they stood up for him through thick and thin in the conflicts with the atheist authorities.

The workers of the MVD¹⁴ watched his every step and in the end their head declared: "We need you" - that is, as a secret agent who would report on people, on how they related to Soviet power. For this cooperation he would be rewarded. This proposal was made to Fr. Alexander several times, but he categorically refused.

In the 1930s he was sent to a concentration camp building the Pinyuga¹⁵ road. He wheeled a wheelbarrow, and in the absence of medical personnel was appointed a medical assistant. And since he was sober he was made head of the pharmacy.

After three years in the camp he returned to his parish. And again the same proposal from the MVD: "We need you." And they began to threaten him with prison and execution by shooting for his fierce sermons against atheism.

Fr. Alexander sought an answer to his dilemma in the Gospel. He found it in Luke 14:26-27: "If any man come to Me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple. And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after Me, cannot be My disciple."

These few words made his decision clear and firm - to leave his family, because he was not allowed to serve honorably as a priest under Soviet power and his conscience did not allow him to become a traitor.

He left his family, his wife and four children - his youngest son Nicholas was only six years old. He went to the river, left a note on the bank saying: "It is impossible to live like this", left his clothes there (so that they should not look for him in the surrounding villages), signed himself with the sign of the cross and left his native land. He took up employment as a shepherd, and in the winter was a sexton in the church of the Holy Spirit.

As a shepherd he wore old peasant clothes and was distinguished from the others by his meekness, humility, eagerness to please and kindness. It was clear from his face that he was not who he said he was. The villagers noticed this, and to test him gave him sour food to eat - but he was satisfied with everything.

In the church he did not go up close to the kliros in case he forgot himself and began to chant. Once, however, in Staraya Russa, he couldn't help it - he began to chant. This gave him away completely. There were rumors that this was not a simple peasant but someone who was hiding from Soviet power.

The time had come when he had to leave this area. And so, thanking God, who had enlightened him through the Holy Gospel and who had made it easier for him to bear the burden of leaving his family, he went to the railway station and got on a train taking him eastwards. This was in 1941.

He came out to Omsk in Siberia. Having neither money nor even a crust of bread, and not knowing anyone, he began to beg for alms, first by the viaduct, and then at the Nikolskaya church. But no one gave him anything. Fr. Alexander prayed to God and thanked Him for sending him this trial for the purification of his former sins.

He came out of the church and saw an elderly woman with a heavy suitcase. He offered to help her. This woman turned out to be a believer, and she gave him something to eat. He told her that he was a priest, but did not recognize the [neo-] renovationist, sergianist church. Gradually a parish was formed around him. At first only a few individuals came, then it was tens of people. Finally such a large catacomb community was formed that it was difficult to find a place where they could all fit in for the festal services and admission had to be limited.


This community included nuns who had been driven out of their destroyed monasteries. The nuns and believing old women collected books and vestments and church utensils. Then people were found who sewed gonfalons [herald flags], and former monastery artists who painted icons. Then there appeared readers and chanters. People learned how to make candles, to bake prosphoras and boil incense, to make photo-icons and stamp crosses.

Fr. Alexander commemorated Schema-Bishop Peter (Ladygin) of Nizhegorod, and later the First Hierarchs of the Russian Church Abroad. At some time during his wanderings he had accepted the monastic tonsure with the name Alexander. According to one source, he became a monk at the end of the 1940s in the city of Ufa. He also adopted a new surname, Orlov, after a nun whom he had tonsured in Omsk.

People invited Fr. Alexander to their homes, and he went from house to house. Children were born and baptized, people repented of their sins and received the Holy Mysteries, burials and pannikhidas for the reposed were carried out. All this was done at great risk both for

14. Intelligence/security police

15. Pinyuga: an area north of Kazan, 400 miles northeast of Moscow



Fr. Alexander and for the parishioners, but God preserved and strengthened them.

On great feasts as many as 100 people gathered. The service was long. It began with an all-night vigil late in the evening and finished early in the morning. The daily services began at about 3 or 4 o'clock and continued until late in the evening. During the proskomedia Fr. Alexander took out a particle for each believer. He spent a long time on confessions and sermons, which caused some of the old women to complain, but he was adamant. In his sermons, which made a great impression on many, batyushka¹⁶ especially concentrated on the refutation of atheist propaganda about the existence of God, and pointed out how many of the great scientists believed in God.

Fr. Alexander had a special veneration for the Mother of God. With what emotion and love he read akathists and molebens to her, and recounted the miraculous healings wrought through her icons in Holy Russia! He also knew the lives of the saints very well, and would often bring up examples from their lives to illustrate a point.

During the 1950s, when atheists were being introduced into the seminaries, Fr. Alexander would warn about these "wolves in sheep's clothing". Twice batyushka was picked up off the streets of Omsk because of the unusual nobility of his bearing and brought to the police station. But with the help of God he was released.

Once, while he was celebrating the Holy Liturgy in Omsk, at the moment of the consecration of the Holy Gifts the police came in. Fr. Alexander took the chalice with the Holy Gifts and stood up against the wall, covering himself with a tablecloth. The police did not notice him.

By the Providence of God and the prayers of the Most Holy Mother of God Fr. Alexander and his flock were often saved from the torture-chambers of the KGB.

The servant of God Anna remembers how she was healed by him. This took place in the 1950s. She went to Fr. Alexander on Sundays and feast days seeking healing from her illness. Most of the time she seemed a normal person, but when they began to chant the Cherubic hymn she suddenly became anxious and began to shout in an inhuman voice, and they had to drag her up to receive communion. In 1952, at the request of her relatives, Fr. Alexander read prayers over the sick woman, and the demon was driven out of her. Since then Anna has become a normal Christian who regularly, in peace and with the fear of God, receives

16. An endearing term for "Father".

the Holy Mysteries and lives a Christian life.

In the middle of the 1960s a chance arrival at one of the services turned out to be a former parishioner of Fr. Alexander's in the church where he served before he left his family. She recognized him, as he did her. After she had told him about his family he decided to visit them.

They were convinced that he had drowned in the river. After telling them what had happened, they told him that his daughter Olga was working for the KGB. His wife just wept. But his daughter said to him: "Father! I give you my room. I will hang it with icons. You pray in it as much as you want, but stay with the family!"

Fr. Alexander replied: "My daughter, I'll do everything you suggest, but only on condition that you leave your work for the KGB."

His daughter replied that she could not do that. Then Fr. Alexander said: "Well then, my daughter, you cannot leave your work in the KGB, and I cannot leave my service to God and the people who have been entrusted to me. My life belongs to the Church of Christ."

At this they parted. Fr. Alexander and his novice left for Omsk, not suspecting that at the order of his daughter a constant watch was placed on him.

By the will of God, however, Fr. Alexander did not fall into the hands of the KGB. His novice went through all the interrogations without giving away batyushka or his address. But the daughter of Maria's landlady answered all the questions at her interrogation.

The church services stopped. Maria was forced to go to her parents at Semipalatinsk, while for Fr. Alexander there began a life full of alarms and persecutions. He went where he was invited only so as not to subject his Omsk parishioners to danger. By the Providence of God faithful Christians offered him refuge in many towns, especially Tavda, Vyatka, Ufa, Ust-Kamennogorsk, Semipalatinsk and Novy Afon.

Once, when he was traveling by boat to Semipalatinsk, he sat down at the piano and began to play "God, save the king". An detective who was traveling on the same boat then told him that on disembarking he would be detained. But it turned out that the detective got drunk, fell asleep and set fire to his mattress in his cabin. Meanwhile, Fr. Alexander had disembarked and escaped.

Once when he arrived in Omsk, he said: "My daughter has betrayed me." People came to visit him more rarely because many, and especially young people, were being summoned for interrogations. There they always demanded answers to the same questions

Dr. Seraphim Steger, Editor, THE GOOD WORD

c/o St. Seraphim of Sarov & St. John of Kronstadt Orthodox Church
6063 Lake Murray Blvd.
La Mesa, CA 91942-2506,
U.S.A.

about Fr. Alexander. And they were asked to work as stooges for the KGB. In 1969, eight years before his death, his sight began to fail. Then he became completely blind and he fell ill. But his hearing was good to the end. He knew the simple services by heart, but he had to be prompted when it came to the festal exclamations. He celebrated the Liturgy only in the presence of his spiritual father, Hieromonk Anthony.

Hieromonk Anthony had spent many years in prison, but after his release he was forbidden to leave. So from the time he lost his sight to his last journey to Omsk in 1973, Fr. Alexander spent most of his time with Fr. Anthony. Fr. Anthony would then come often to Omsk to fulfill the Christian needs of the parishioners of Omsk.

In one of his last letters which have not been destroyed, Fr. Alexander wrote:

"Dear brothers and sisters in Christ!

"I appeal to you with a last humble request before my death: receive as a prayerful memento of the sinful hieromonk Alexander a humble gift which will nevertheless be very useful for all believers: the five prayers of the hierarch Dimitri of Rostov.

"I ask forgiveness of all if I have offended anyone in anything because of my feeble mind, lack of foresight, pettiness, insufficient self-control or, most important, lack of the fear of God - the beginning of spiritual wisdom. I beseech you all who believe in the Lord God to raise your fraternal Christian prayer that the Lord send me a Christian end and count me worthy of a good answer before the Terrible Judgement-seat of Christ. May the Lord reward you with temporary and eternal blessings. Like the Christians of the first centuries, we must brilliantly pass an exam in lofty, burning, fearless patriotism; in lofty, unbribable civil honor; in an ideal family hearth. My path in life is ending with the words

of St. John Chrysostom and the hierarch Nicholas, my favourite hierarchs - Glory to God for all things! ..."

Before his death he said: "I have much to say, but I can't." And before his death he forbade anyone to make any inscription over his grave, saying: "I lived in secret and must lie in secret."

Twenty-four hours before his death he began to breathe with difficulty. In the neighboring room they read the prayers for the departure of the soul from the body. On the morning of his death they had already read the prayers for him although he had not heard them. As he was dying they were reading the akathist to the Holy Great Martyr Barbara.

He died at the age of 99 in the city of Omsk in the family of a pious widow on August 29, 1977 at six o'clock in the evening. He was buried in Omsk in the north-eastern cemetery.

The servant of God Priest Alexander did not recognize the Moscow Patriarchate and did not allow his spiritual children to go there.

The radiant memory of this wonderful man and pastor and fierce denouncer of the atheist Bolshevik power lives on in the hearts of his parishioners who are still alive. The path to his grave is not overgrown. When the parishioners meet, the conversation always turns to Fr. Alexander, and the prayers of those who pray to him at his grave are always answered. ❖ ❖ ❖

