

ST. MAXIMUS SANDOVICH

Saint Maximus Sandovich was born in 1886 in the village of Zhdenia on the present frontier of Poland with Slovakia, in territory which was part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire at the time. His piety was evident from his early years. As a schoolboy, he would get up early to read the services and sing the canticles of the church in his room. He wanted to become a priest or monk and so, at the end of his secondary education, he entered a Uniate monastery of the region as a novice. But the life of this establishment soon disappointed him, and he left after three months for the Monastery of Pochaev in Ukraine (see 28 Oct.), as much renowned for the strictness of its typikon and for the spiritual life of the fathers, as for its witness to the Orthodox tradition. When Maximus was still a novice, Metropolitan Antony Khrapovitsky (1863-1936), visited the monastery and asked the Abbot to let him take a novice with him who could be put to study in his Seminary, with a view to ordination to serve the Ukrainian communities in the Carpathian region, that had returned to Orthodoxy from the Unia. Maximus was chosen so he had to give up his heart's desire for the monastic life and follow the Bishop. When he had finished his studies at the Seminary in Zhitomir, he married a Byelorussian wife and was ordained by the Metropolitan in 1911.

His pastoral ministry began in the town of Grab, not far from his native village, where he served the first Orthodox Liturgy since the Carpatho-Russians yielded to Uniatism in the eighteenth century. He was arrested on a visit to his family home, sentenced to eight days imprisonment and heavily fined. Father Maximus was unshaken by this and continued to serve the divine Liturgy in the surrounding villages, despite the penalties imposed by the courts upon himself and those who assisted him. In March 1912, he was remanded in custody at Lvov, charged with being Orthodox, using Church books written in Russia and of collaboration with the enemy, for so Russia was regarded by the Austro-Hungarian authorities. Despite the lying accusations heaped up against him, and the ill-treatment and harassment of all kinds that he endured, when he and his companions came to trial in June 1914, they were acquitted. In poor health, he was able to return to Zhdenia. But, on the outbreak of the First World War in August, he was again arrested, together with his pregnant wife, his father and the Orthodox of his village. They were imprisoned at Gorlice, the country town. On September 6, 1914, Father Maximus was brought out of his cell before a judge who summarily informed him that he was condemned to death. He was shot in the prison yard before the eyes of the assembled Orthodox prisoners. As he fell, Christ's valiant Martyr cried out, "Long live holy Orthodoxy!" whereupon, of one of the executioners, seized with anger, rushed forward and stabbed him. It was not until 1922 that his body could be taken to Zhdenia, where it was laid to rest near the church. From then on, pilgrims flocked to his tomb. Veneration of Saint Maximus, as the very image of their ethnic and religious identity, grew among the Carpatho-Russian Orthodox, especially during the years of their deportation.

Through the prayers of Thy Saints, Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on us. Amen

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