

PRIEST MICHAEL SKOMNITSKY

Fr. Michael was born in the 1860's in the village of Blagodatsk, Sechenov district, Nizhegorod Province to the family of the priest Fr. John Skomnitsky. For the last ten years before his martyric death, Fr. Michael served in the village of Ratovo, Sechenov region. He was a meek pastor and a strict fulfiller of the rubrics of the Orthodox Church. Non-acquisitive, he lived in cramped conditions in a rumshackle hut worse than the poorest man's, receiving often from the parishioners no more than his bread for the day. But his humility, meekness and poverty appeared differently in the eyes of God. Elizabeth Kozlova saw Fr. Michael during Liturgy praying elevated in the air. "How did Father Michael please God so?" she asked Fr. Michael's wife.

"He has never served without first reading the rule. And from his childhood he has never transgressed the Wednesday and Friday fasts," she answered.

Three miles from Ratovo in the village of Kozlovka served a priest of another character, Boris Michailovich Voznesensky. During collectivization, a directive was given by which anyone who killed their farm animals could be sentenced to a prison term.

Fr. Boris killed a calf, and the authorities heard of it. He was sentenced to imprisonment. In 1937 he was freed and returned to Kozlovka, but he did not like it there; he wanted to serve in the wealthy Ratovo. Fr. Boris was young, had a beautiful voice, and part of the Ratovo choir agreed to invite him there. The parishioners were against his transferal to Ratovo. But sin is sweet, and man is fallen. Where there is sin, as a rule, there is also faith and conscience. Fr. Boris, through various unrighteous means, took the church. Fr. Michael yielded and went to serve in Kozlovka. But he had only served two or three times before he was arrested on the Feast of the Transfiguration in 1937, together with the parishioners who tried to protect him. Fr. Boris was also soon arrested and sentenced to fifteen years' imprisonment for participation in a murder. He died in the camps, having renounced his faith.

Interrogator Komarov came from Nizhny to investigate the believers. Those arrested were held at first in Sechenov. Many were tortured, others they tried to threaten into working for the authorities. One day Komarov called in one of Fr. Michael's parishioners and began to try to coerce her. "Why do you go to church? You would do better to go to Apollinaria Ivanovna (she was a member of the church council and collaborated with the chekists), and you will have everything you need." His coercion did not work, so he tried flattery. "Yes, you are very religious...."

"What are you saying?" she even waved her arms. "I'm just the same as anyone else." But the unbelievers are hypocrites - he went behind the table to write the protocol. As he wrote,

his face darkened with every minute, and finally he said, "Sign."

"I can't sign what I don't know."

He read that "so and so" is obligated to collaborate with the NKVD. She did not sign it. Komarov took out a pistol and said, "We will wipe you all from the face of the earth. You bother us. We will send you so far away that the crows won't even smell your bones. It's going to be tough, not only for you but for everyone related to you. I'm not letting you go anywhere; you can't hide from us, our eyes see far, and our ears hear far away." He

talked a long time, pacing back and forth, threatening, and finally threatened to shoot her at that very moment.

"I'll put a bullet in you," he said, cocking his gun.

"Go ahead," she said fearlessly.

Komarov again went into the office, then wrote another paper that "so-and-so" is under obligation not to tell anyone what took place between her and the investigator.

In Sechenov, Fr. Michael was given over to tortures, and later taken to the Nizhegorod prison. Once his son, Constantine, came and brought him a package.

"And who are you to him?" they asked.

"His son," he answered. He was immediately arrested. He died in prison.

Fr. Michael was tortured for a long time in prison. After questioning and torture they would lock him in a narrow box, such boxes were called pillars. Fr. Michael died in this box.

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