

PRIEST ALEXANDER VALIDOV

Fr. Alexander was born to the family of a priest of the Nizhegorod diocese, Alexis Validov. Wondrous and sure is that world where the saints of God live. For their sakes the Lord endures the world, awaiting its repentance. One of such godly people lived in Nizhny-Novgorod, laboring in the podvig of Foolishness-for-Christ. One day the priest Alexis came with his little son to the city. They walked along the street and were met by the fool-for-Christ. He bowed to the ground before them and said, "Greetings."

"Greetings," answered the father and son.

"You, Alexander," the blessed one pointed at the boy, "you are the first and the last."

"What?" they could not understand.

"You, Alexander, are the first and the last, do you hear?" the blessed one repeated insistently. The father and his son looked at each other in perplexity and Alexander asked, "How did you know that my name is Alexander?"

"I know. You, Alexander, and you, Alexis. Remember, Alexander, you are the first and the last," he repeated. Alexander understood the meaning of these words when they began to come true. In time he became the first priest of the newly built church in the village of Lisi Polyani, where he served until it was closed in 1937. In 1943 the ruined church was struck by lightning and burned down. At the end of the 1940's the remains of the church were used as a club.

After finishing seminary and receiving a blessing for the priesthood, Alexander began to look for a bride. He had heard that not far away lived sisters, nieces of Vladimir Ivanovich Pomeranstsev. Their father had died, and Vladimir Ivanovich had taken them in. Fr. Alexis and his son came to visit them. They sat down and set out the samovar. Alexander liked Alexandra, and he asked her to be his wife. But she did not want to marry him. "It's too early for me," she tried to dissuade him.

Then her mother fell on her knees before him and asked of her, "Sashenka, my blessing is that you go. You will never find a better husband in your orphanhood. He will be a priest, he is a man of circumstance. What more do you need? I ask you to marry him." Alexandra obeyed. They lived well together. They had a large family, four sons and three daughters, the last of whom was born in 1913. When he was ordained,

Fr. Alexander served in the village of Lisi Polyani. From the first day of service he decided never to take any specific pay from anyone. Sometimes he would be asked, "How much should I give you, Father?"

"Whatever you can give."

"Well, I have no money."

"You don't need to give anything; when you come out of your lack, then you can give it to me. And if you don't give it to me, that's all right." Alexandra protested, "You should take something, at least." Fr. Alexander replied, "You have enough to eat, you have shoes on your feet and clothes to wear. But they do not. They are hungry. But my law,

my faith tell me that I should give to the poor and feed them."

During the Apostles' Fast or on Pascha they served Molebens from house to house or brought mountains of bread to parishioners. Fr. Alexander went to serve Molebens, even to the very poorest and to widows, telling them to come for bread in the evening. In the evening, he and his wife would fill a bag for each one and only asked, "Can you carry it? Well, go." Fr. Alexander gave shelter to Matrona Gorbunova. Her husband died very early, and she raised her son Michael. Matushka Alexandra sewed his clothing at her husband's request, so that it would not differ from that of her own children's.

Orphans, widows, the wronged—all came to him for advice and help. In the village lived Annushka. She had an illegitimate child, Vera. She carried a double cross, the crosses of shame and poverty. In the village lived a wealthy man, Basil. He had forty sheep, two cows and a mill. In those days and in this locality, that made him a man of means. His wife, Catherine, was sick all of the time. Annushka got her sustenance from this man. In the winter she took care of his sick wife, and in the summer she worked in the fields. She came on day and said, "Basil Feodorovich, I am sick."

"What do you have?"

"I don't know. I'm sick. I just can't do anything."

His wife was a God-fearing woman and she said, "Basil Feodorovich, I will cut her half a loaf of bread."

"No, don't; I am not going to feed a slacker."

"Basil Feodorovich, I am sick. I'll come tomorrow."

Catherine said, "I'll give her half of a loaf of bread, you see she's asking for it."

"No, don't give it to her." He would not give it to her, and would not let his wife give it to her. Anna went to Fr. Alexander. Matushka gave her cures, and Fr. Alexander gave her four loaves of bread and a bucket of flour and said, "Annushka, when you've eaten it, come to us again." She wanted to bow to his feet, but he did not let her.

"No, no, do not bow to my feet. I am a Christian and I am obligated to feed the hungry and console the wronged." But Fr. Alexander had dealt with Basil Feodorovich more than once. Seeing that Annushka had left the priest with bread, Basil Feodorovich went to him angrily.

"Why did you give it to her? She won't come to me to work for a week."

Fr. Alexander bared his head, bowed to him and said, "Basil Feodorovich, forgive me for Christ's sake, if I have offended you in any way. I fed the hungry, she came to me weeping. I would hope that if I came to you, you would also give something to me."

"No, now I won't, because you provided her with bread and now she won't come at all."

Fr. Alexander bowed to him again and asked his forgiveness. Fr. Alexander was not only merciful, but a peacemaker, as Christ commanded.

Seventy miles from Lisi Polyani lived a wealthy man named Alexis Maximovitch. He so loved to converse with Fr. Alexander that even seventy miles was nothing to him. Sorrow visited his household. His daughter, Antonina, gave birth to an illegitimate child. The enraged father thrashed her roundly and said, "Leave from my house, Tonka, and get out of my sight before I kill you altogether, and I will kill your child without you."

She shrieked and said, "Well, Daddy, Mama, forgive me for Christ's sake. You will never see me again." She took her things and left. Alexis Maximovitch began to change his mind soon after she left, and with increasing anxiety recalled her words, "You will never see me again." Perhaps she is planning to commit suicide? A double anxiety, darker and more oppressive than the shame, lay upon his heart. He set off quickly to

Fr. Alexander and told him everything.

"Go, Alexis Maximovitch, find her today and say to her, 'Toniushka, forgive me, I got angry and could not restrain myself. Let's go home, the baby is crying. Your child is crying for you.' "

"No, I won't do it," the stubborn old man said.

"If you don't go, then you will destroy not only one, but two souls. What if she drowns herself? She sinned, took shame upon herself, and you beat her. Why did you beat her? She is unhappy enough as it is."

"She won't come. Now she is afraid of me. I said, 'I'll kill you if I ever see you again.' "

"Then you fall at her feet and say, 'Forgive me, little daughter, for Christ's sake, forgive me. I am a sinner, I beat you, an unhappy one.' Go and take her home."

He obeyed and took his daughter home. In the morning they went to

Fr. Alexander. Antonina bowed to his feet and said, "Father, you saved my life. I wanted to drown myself. They wouldn't keep me at home, took away my child...."

"And I, Father, wanted to kill her, an awfully beautiful girl, and a child, but I didn't."

"The Lord led you away from that sin. She, Alexis Maximovitch, committed a sin and was shamed, and you even beat her. But her sin is not unforgivable; it is a sin that can be redeemed...."

During the second half of the 1920's the authorities began to oppress

Fr. Alexander with taxes and tributes. The government oppressed the church worse than the Tartars had. The Tartars left something, as if to take the next time, but these took every last thing. They would come to him and say, "Hey Dad, give us a bucket of honey!"

"For whom?"

"For the government."

Having taken everything before, they make an accusation against him: ill-willed refuser

to pay, opponent of the soviet government, will not give any honey.

Fr. Alexander, having read about the honey, said, "You go take it yourselves, if you find even a spoonful of honey. If you find it, then you can take me in as a liar. You can even take all the bees." They did not wish to go, but insisted that he sign the accusation. He thought, "Should I sign such a paper?" But he decided that if he did not sign it, then they would forge his signature themselves and arrest him anyway. So he decided to sign it.

"Vengeance is Mine, I will mete it out," says the Lord. Soon the president of the village soviet, Titov, shot a poor man and was himself arrested. Fr. Alexander remained free. In 1929 atheists arrived in the village to remove the bell. Men gathered with pitchforks and axes, fully determined to drive out the godless ravens who had flown in to peck at what the people held sacred and to destroy their inheritance. Fr. Alexander stopped them, saying, "Every soul is subject to the authorities. They will take you away and blame me for this. As you like, but this is God's matter, and not ours." They took the bells, but the services continued.

How does the good seed grow in a man's soul, and how the evil seed? God sees the growth of the one and of the other. Michael Gorbunov, having found shelter in the priest's family, grew up, joined the communist party, became the chairman of the village council and now he was destroying and pilfering. Knowing the Fr. Alexander would be deprived of his property and shelter, he came that day a little earlier and said, "Can we make some tea?"

The domestics began to make a fuss, heated the samovar, set the table, when eight people came in through the door. Fr. Alexander invited them to share his table, but they refused, saying, "That's enough tea drinking, you've drunk your fill." They brought that same Anna with them to whom Fr. Alexander had been such a benefactor, with the intention of moving her into the priest's house. As if fulfilling some sort of ritual, Nicholas Bankov ordered her, "Anna, take down the icons, chop them up and throw them into the furnace."

"Nicholas Andreevich, I will not chop up the icons. Alexander Alexeevich is my benefactor."

"What sort of benefactor is he? He's a parasite."

"No, he is my benefactor. Without him I could never have raised my daughter."

Nicholas Bankov and Michael Gorbunov with their assistants tore down all of the icons and pictures from the walls, and pulled down the books. Bankov brought an axe from the shed and began to chop up the icons.

Fr. Alexander said, "Nicholas Andreevich, why do you want to stroke the fire with these things? They could have been given to a museum. They could still be useful. There is wood, use it to stroke the furnace."

"You are not in charge here," Bankov answered, placing the broken icons into the stove. On December 9, 1937, Fr. Alexander was arrested. The day before his arrest he was visited by slave of God Anastasia, who was helping the family of Fr. Viacheslav Leontiev. After Fr. Viacheslav's arrest she came to take care of his wife Zoya. Fr. Alexander was sick. Anastasia felt sorry for him and told him that perhaps they would

not arrest a sick man.

"No, they pity no one. Tomorrow they will arrest me." In the morning the militia took him to prison. His daughter gathered a package together and took it to him.

"Is Validov here?" she asked at the window.

"He's here."

"Here is a package for him."

"No packages for him. He's eaten enough."

"Tell me, will they keep him here or send him somewhere?"

"Come the day after tomorrow." The guard slammed the window shut. In one day she came with the wife of Fr. Basil from the village of Andosova, who was arrested at the same time. But the authorities told them that they had been sent off the night before. After Stalin's death, a relative tried to learn of Fr. Alexander's fate, and then received an answer that he had been sentenced to imprisonment in the Far Eastern camps without correspondence (that is, he was shot).

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