

# St. George Newsletter

March 2012

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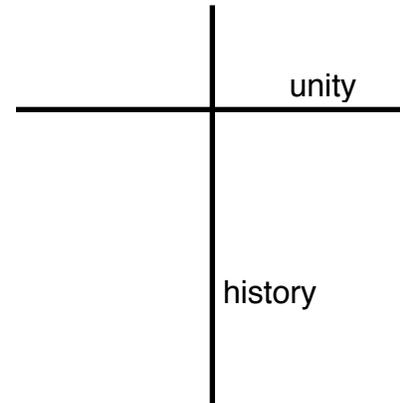
## What is Orthodoxy?

The first Sunday of Great Lent is dedicated to the triumph of our Orthodox faith. This is an opportunity not to pat ourselves on the back for finding the true faith. It can be an opportunity for us to contemplate our faith and how it is lived out in our lives.

The Orthodox faith is the faith handed down by our Lord Jesus Christ to the apostles. As its doctrines were challenged over the ages, they were made more precise by the fathers of the Ecumenical councils. The councils did not introduce new teachings. When the priest Arius began to question whether Christ was one with the Father, the First Ecumenical Council was called. At this council, the relationship of the Son (and the Holy Spirit) with the Father was first called "homoousios" -- one in Essence. It was not a new belief, but now it had found a name. The dogmatic content of our faith is found in the Symbol of Faith, which every Orthodox Christian should know by heart. We read it every day as part of our morning prayers, and sing it together at every Liturgy.

The Church is a union of history and unity. The history of the Church connects us to the apostles. Every ordained Orthodox clergyman has roots in the apostles. This forms a vertical connection that goes into the past and into the future. At the same time, the Orthodox Church unites people of all nations. The Church is a unity of fourteen independent, self-governing Churches with a common belief and common practices. This forms a horizontal connection. Without either of these connections, we lose our Orthodoxy. If we make a break from this historical church, we lose the purity of the apostolic doctrine. If we break from our brothers in Christ, through fanaticism, we lose our unity, and even if our practice is firmly rooted in the

history, it is done out of pride and phariseeism. When this history and unity are combined in a diagram, these are the results:



As you see, we get a cross -- the foundation of our faith.

One may form other such crosses, from our faith and works, for example. In any case, Orthodoxy is a package that consists of many aspects. It is not a name only. On one hand, our baptism gives us the right to call ourselves Orthodox -- we have been cleansed of our sins, given the gift of the Holy Spirit, and confessed our Orthodox faith. On the other hand, our baptism is only the beginning. Many people who have been baptized have ceased to believe. Since they do not confess the faith, they are not properly called Orthodox. The mass murderer Joseph Stalin had been baptized as an Orthodox Christian, but made it his work to exterminate the clergy of the Church. Surely the Church does not count him among its members.

Orthodoxy is yet more that keeping the faith expressed in baptism. It is not only a creed, but a way of life. If one may make the distinction between "baptized" and "Orthodox", here we have the distinction between "Orthodox" and "churched". A "churched" person is generally thought of as one who reads the appointed

prayers at home, keeps the fast, attends the church services, and so on. These things are all true, but must not be observed purely mechanically, and must not be confused with the substance of the faith. The purpose of prayer rules, fasting, and sacraments (especially those of confession and communion) is to bring a person closer to God. This nearness to God and hope in eternal life with Him imparts a true happiness that is not founded on perishable material things, and that is not threatened by external forces.

The Orthodox ideal is to keep the fast out of hope that it will be a sacrifice acceptable to God and lighten our souls to ascend to Him. Our prayer should be not a race to finish an appointed rule, but precious time spent laying out our needs before God. As the Church fathers were experts in prayer, it is good to strive to learning and using the prayers from the prayerbook. But at the same time we must not forget that prayer is a connection with God, and is often well-expressed in our own words. Similarly, our study of the scriptures and writings of the Church fathers is not measured by the number of psalms, chapters of the Gospel, or pages read each day. The measure of reading of the Gospel is how it inspires us to bring our own life in line with the life of Christ described in it.

We may test the meaning of our Orthodoxy in our own life using the following quote of C.S. Lewis: "One must keep on pointing out that Christianity is a statement which, if false, is of no importance, and, if true, of infinite importance. The one thing it cannot be is moderately important." What importance does our Orthodox Christianity have for us?

*On February 4, 2012 at the Vigil service for the holiday of the new-martyrs and confessors of Russia, a new saint's name was enrolled in the list of those interceding for us in heaven. The Church did not "make" this new-martyr a saint, as our ruling hierarch archbishop Kyrill explains in his homily on this great occasion.*

## **Sermon of the Occasion of the Canonization of the New Martyr Alexander of Munich**

*Archbishop KYRILL of San Francisco & Western America*

In the Name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit: Amen.

Today the Church rejoices, and today is a day on which we all should rejoice; for to the assembly of the Saints has been added a new name, in the person of the New Martyr Alexander (Schmorell) of Munich, whom our Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia has canonised during today's Divine Services. Though St. Alexander's holiness is not new, and he has not been 'made' a saint today but was a saint in his life and has interceded for the world since his martyric death, today we recognise him in the diptychs, and future generations shall hold him up as an example of true faith and piety.

But why has the Church done this? What has been witnessed and perceived in the life of this man who lived only 26 years on this earth, that has compelled the Church no longer to remain silent about his life and witness but to glorify his memory in this manner?

In a word: faith. In the life of St. Alexander, we find a unique example of what it means for a man to be inspired by the Orthodox faith -- not merely adhering to it as a fragment of cultural identity or subscribing to it in intellectual terms, but being so firmly established and supported by an unbending faith in God that no challenge, however great, however seemingly insurmountable, could not be risen up to and overcome by God's power.

The New Martyr Alexander lived in tumultuous times. His life began in persecution: born in 1917, his family fled to Germany only a few years later. And as his life began, so would it continue. Having escaped the Bolsheviks, they soon found themselves under the sway of a new oppression in the form of National Socialism, better known as the Nazi movement.

But as Alexander grew, he knew he had to resist. The young Alexander, having become a student, became one of the founders of a group that took the name 'White Rose' and went on -- over the course of only a few short years -- to become one of the most important resistance movements in Germany (and Alexander himself wrote the only public protest against the Holocaust that would ever be printed in Germany during the war). His group's activities in producing pamphlets earned them great fame, these pamphlets ultimately being reprinted and dropped by the Allies over German cities; but it also earned attention from the State, which in due course arrested Alexander and after a brief mockery of a trial, beheaded him on July 13, 1943.

But our holy Mother Church does not glorify men because they were politically active; and to die unjustly does not make one a martyr. So how is it that today we proclaim Alexander a Saint and a father among the New Martyrs of the Church?

From his youth, St. Alexander lived a life of piety -- attending the Divine Services, even taking religion classes in Munich. And then, when the innocence of youth was stripped from him by the horrors taking place in the world around him, it was his faith in God above all that inspired his political activities. St. Alexander explicitly, expressly saw the affairs of the world in spiritual terms: the political situation overtaking Germany and Europe was not simply a matter of governments and ideologies, but a conflict between the Will of God and the powers of the devil. As he wrote in one of his pamphlets:

"We must struggle against the Nazi terrorist state with rational means, but whosoever today still doubts the reality and existence of demonic powers, has failed by a wide margin to understand ... the background of this war."

It was not men against which Alexander resisted; it was the devil. While some in his day, and perhaps some in our own, might look at his life and see principally political activity, St. Alexander saw his every action as an attempt to

bring man into a communion with God's Will, rejecting and turning away from those worldly forces that had become captive to Satan and the demons.

Listen to these words, written by the Saint and published by him in one of his 'political' pamphlets:

"Everywhere and at all times, demons have been lurking in the dark, waiting for the moment when man is weak, when of his own volition he leaves his place in the order of Creation as founded for him by God in freedom, when he yields to the force of evil and separates himself from the powers of a higher order; and after voluntarily taking the first step, he is driven on to the next and the next at a furiously accelerating rate. [...] But everywhere and at all times of greatest trial men have appeared -- prophets and saints -- who cherished their freedom, who preached the One God and who with His help brought the people to a reversal of their downward course. Man is free, to be sure; but without the true God he is defenseless against the power of evil. He is like a rudderless ship, at the mercy of the storm; an infant without his mother; a cloud dissolving into the air.'

These are the words of a man driven not by political zeal or a humanist sense of social action, but by an unwavering faith in the power of God to overcome evil, and a strong awareness that it is spiritual darkness and the activity of the devil that generates terror among human society.

Such was St. Alexander's expression of the Truth in the context of his resistance during the War; but when we look more closely at his life we see that this 'public' faith was but the fruit of a heart that at all times rested in the love of God -- a love born of struggle. Unjustly imprisoned in 1943 by the Nazi government, St. Alexander wrote a series of letters to his family. In one of those letters he writes:

"The many misfortunes I have suffered were necessary [...] in order for my eyes to be opened. I am grateful for everything, and I thank God that I have been given the opportunity to

understand what He has been leading me to. [...] What did I know of true belief until now? of true and deep belief? of the first, last and only truth -- about God?"

In his last letter, written to his family on the morning of his martyrdom, St. Alexander wrote:

"One thought above all I would put into your hearts: Do not forget God!"

Brothers and sisters, these are the words, and this is the life, of a Saint precious in the eyes of God; one of those, in the words of the Holy Apostle St. Paul, "of whom the world was not worthy."

When we look to the process of glorification of a Saint in the Church, one of the main criteria is the piety of the man -- his zeal for the complete fulfilment of Christ's commandments; that he is a Christian above all else. In the case of some Saints we look also to the testimony of miracles (though there have been saints who were not miracle-workers); in the case of others we behold the testimony of incorrupt relics (though there have been many saints, such as St. Seraphim, whose relics were not incorrupt); but in the case of a martyr we look to that podvig of his life that leads him to bear ultimate witness for the Truth of Christ, and the manner in which he meets his end.

In St. Alexander, we see a man who, despite his youth, saw the whole world in terms of God's truth -- proclaimed in holy men, trounced in men of evil who fell under the devil's sway. We see a man whose every act was intentionally, deliberately an act of faith and an act of his Christian confession. And we see a man who, persecuted and hunted down for his unyielding confession of the truth and resistance to evil, met his death with a peaceful heart, certain that in this manner he would be drawn more fully into God's embrace, and with his final breath urging others to remember the One God who has the power to save.

What a precious thing -- and one so little known to the world at large -- that one of the principal voices against the horrors of the inhuman war in

Europe, was a voice driven by the holiness of the Orthodox confession!

Let us today, then, rejoice. God rejoices in His Saints, and so too must we; and this morning we have a true cause of rejoicing.

Holy Father Alexander of Munich, newly Glorified among the choir of the Saints, do not cease to intercede with a loving God on behalf of our souls. Amen!

† Archbishop Kyrill

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