

THE *VITA PRIMA*
OF
ST JOHN THE WONDERWORKER

by

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Preface

The text below is a reprint of the *Vita Prima*, or First Life, of St John (Maximovitch) the Wonderworker written shortly after his repose in 1966 by one of his most faithful followers in the path of ancient Christianity, Eugene (or as he would later become, Hieromonk Seraphim) Rose. When Fr Seraphim wrote this life, St John had been laid to rest in a magnificent tomb beneath the Cathedral of the *Joy of All Who Sorrow* in San Francisco. For the next two decades the St Herman Brotherhood, that St John had blessed, kept an accurate record of the hundreds upon hundreds of people who testified to miracles that they had received through the prayers of the Holy Archbishop.

To the great joy of Orthodox Christians throughout the world, on the 14th December 1993 the tomb was opened to find St John's body whole, in tact and incorrupt, even though his vestments and sandals had long since turned to dust. On the 28th anniversary of his repose, 2nd July 1994, in a triumphant and paschal service, Archbishop John was declared a Saint of the Church, making official a veneration that had been going on for many years. His incorrupt body, redressed in beautiful vestments was then laid in a new shrine in the south-west corner of the cathedral where beneath his ikon (reproduced on the front cover of this booklet) a lampada burns, and prayer requests from around the world are read.

This *Vita Prima* is reprinted with the kind permission of the St Herman of Alaska Brotherhood of Platina, California and is the first publication in the Mettingham College Series. At the end of this booklet, a list of further resources about St John the Wonderworker has been compiled all of which can be purchased through the church bookstall.

HOLY HIERARCH JOHN PRAY TO GOD FOR US!

Introduction

Barely six months ago there reposed in the Lord a hierarch of the Church of Christ whose life so extraordinarily radiated the Christian virtues and the grace of the Holy Spirit as to make of him a pillar of true Orthodoxy and an example of Christian life that is of universal significance. In Archbishop John there were united three kinds of the highest Christian activity that are rarely found together: that of a bold and esteemed Prince of the Church; an ascetic in the tradition of the pillar saints, taking upon himself the severest self mortification; and a fool for Christ's sake, instructing men by a 'foolishness' that was beyond the wisdom of this world.

The following account cannot begin to be called a complete life of Archbishop John; it is only a selection of the material that is already available, presented in the form of a preliminary sketch of the life of this holy man. It was compiled by the St. Herman Brotherhood, which was organized with the blessing of Archbishop John (who wished to see Father Herman canonized after Father John of Kronstadt) for the mission of the printed word. Now, in fulfillment of this mission, it is our duty to speak the truth about this man who was, in our dark times when genuine Christianity has almost vanished, an embodiment of the life in Christ.

The account is based primarily upon personal acquaintance and upon the testimony of witnesses known to the compilers. Archbishop John throughout is referred to by the term Russians use to speak of and address bishops: Vladika. In English this is rendered 'Master,' but the Russian word, when used by itself, implies a familiarity and endearment that are wanting in the nearest English equivalent. For those who knew him, Archbishop John will always be simply Vladika.

I

Youth

Archbishop John was born on the 4th June, 1896, in the village of Adamovka in the province of Kharkov in southern Russia. He was a member the Maximovitch family, to which St. John of Tobolsk also had belonged. His father, Boris, was a marshal of nobility in one part of Kharkov province; and his uncle was rector of Kiev University. He received at baptism the name of Michael, his heavenly protector being the Archangel Michael. He was a sickly child and ate little.

He received his secondary education in the Poltava Military School, which he attended from 1907 to 1914. He loved this school and remembered it fondly in later years. Upon completing military school he entered Kharkov Imperial University in the faculty of law, from which he graduated in 1918, before it was seized by the Soviets. He was then assigned to the Kharkov District Court, where he served at the time Hetman Skoropadsky was ruling the Ukraine and while the Volunteer Army was there.

Kharkov, where Vladika spent his formative years, was a true town of Holy Russia, and the young Michael, impressionable to revelations of holiness, acquired there the pattern of his future life. There were two miraculous ikons of the Mother of God, the Oseryanskaya and Eletsкая, which were carried in a religious procession twice a year from the monasteries where they were treasured to the Dormition Cathedral. In the Protection Monastery, in a frescoed grotto underneath the altar, lay the remains of the holy Archbishop Melety Leontovitch, who after his death in 1841 rendered miraculous help to those who served a panikhida for him at his coffin. Even during his lifetime the Archbishop was venerated for his severe asceticism, especially for the ascetic feat of abstaining from sleep. He was known to spend nights on end standing motionless, with lifted arms, deep in prayer. He foreknew the day and the hour of his own death. The young Maximovitch was known to have a veneration for this holy hierarch.

Today Archbishop John may be seen to resemble the holy man of Kharkov in at least three respects: he was known not to have slept in a bed for forty years; he knew beforehand of his death; and he now rests under a cathedral in a special grave chapel where panikhidas (prayer service for the departed) are sung almost daily and the psalter is read over his coffin by those who ask for his help. This is a unique case of the transplanting, as it were, of a part of Holy Russia to contemporary America.

While at Kharkov University, Vladika spent more time reading the Lives of the Saints than attending classes; nonetheless he was an excellent student. Evidently his emulation of saints was apparent even at that age, since Archbishop Anthony of Kharkov, one of the great Church figures of that time (later Metropolitan, first candidate to the Patriarchal See of Moscow, and first Chief Hierarch of the Russian Church Abroad) took special pains to become acquainted with him, and then kept the youth close to him and guided his spiritual formation.

In 1921, during the Russian Civil War, Vladika, together with his parents, his brothers, and his sister, was evacuated to Belgrade, where he and his brothers entered the University of Belgrade. One brother graduated in the technical faculty and became an engineer, the other graduated in law and served in the Yugoslav police. Vladika himself graduated in 1925 in the faculty of theology. While he was a student he worked for his living by selling newspapers.

In 1924 Vladika was ordained reader in the Russian church in Belgrade by Metropolitan Anthony, who continued to exert great influence over him; and Vladika in his turn showed the utmost respect and devotion to his superior. In 1926 Metropolitan Anthony tonsured him a monk and ordained him hierodeacon in the Milkov Monastery, giving him the name John, after Vladika's own distant relative, Saint John Maximovitch of Tobolsk. On the 21st of November of the same year Vladika was ordained hieromonk by Bishop Gabriel of Chelyabinsk. From 1925 to 1927, Vladika was an instructor of religion at the Serbian State High School, and from 1929 to 1934 he was a teacher and tutor at the Serbian Seminary of St. John the Theologian at Bitol. There he served the Divine Liturgy in Greek for the local Greek and Macedonian communities, who had the greatest esteem for him.

The city of Bitol was in the diocese of Okhrida, and at that time the ruling bishop of this diocese was Nicholas Velimirovitch, a Serbian Chrysostom, a noted preacher, poet, writer, and organizer and inspirer of the popular religious movement. He, as much as Metropolitan Anthony, valued and loved the young Hieromonk John, and himself exerted a beneficial influence upon him. More than once he was heard to say, 'If you wish to see a living saint, go to Bitol to Father John'.

For, indeed, it began to become evident that this was an entirely extraordinary man. It was his own students who first discovered what was perhaps Vladika's greatest feat of asceticism. They noticed at first that he stayed up long after everyone else had gone to bed; he would go through the dormitories at night and pick up blankets that had fallen down and cover the unsuspecting sleepers, making the Sign of the Cross over them. Finally it was discovered that he scarcely slept at all, and never in a bed, allowing himself only an hour or two each night of uncomfortable rest in a sitting position, or bent over on the floor praying before icons. Years afterward he himself admitted that since taking the monastic vows he had not slept lying in a bed. Such an ascetic practice is a very rare one; and yet it is not unknown to Orthodox tradition. The great 4th century founder of a coenobitic monasticism, St. Pachomius the Great, when receiving the Rule of monastic communal life from an angel, heard the following concerning sleep: 'And they (the monks) shall not take their sleep lying down, but thou shalt make them seats so that when they are sitting down they shall be able to support their heads' (Rule 4).

Archbishop Averky of the Jordanville Holy Trinity Monastery, then a young hieromonk in Carpatho-Russia, was a witness of the deep impression Hieromonk John made upon the seminary students. When they returned home on vacations they would speak of their extraordinary instructor who prayed constantly, served the Divine Liturgy or at least received Holy Communion every day, fasted strictly, never slept lying down, and with true fatherly love inspired them with the high ideals of Christianity and of Holy Russia.

In 1934 it was decided to raise Hieromonk John to the rank of bishop. As for Vladika himself, nothing was farther from his mind. A lady who knew him relates how she met him at this time on a streetcar in Belgrade. He told her that he was in town by mistake, having been sent for in place of some other Hieromonk John who was to be consecrated bishop! When she saw him the next day he informed her that the situation was worse than he had thought: it was him they wished to make bishop! When he had protested that this was out of the question, since he had a speech defect and could not enunciate clearly, he had only been told that the Prophet Moses had had the same difficulty.

The consecration occurred on the 28th May 1934, Vladika was the last bishop of the very many to be consecrated by Metropolitan Anthony, and the extraordinarily high esteem in which that venerable hierarch held the new bishop is indicated in a letter which he sent to Archbishop Dimitry in the Far East. Himself declining an invitation to retire to China, he wrote:

But in place of myself, as my soul, as my heart, I am sending you Vladika Bishop John. This little, frail man, looking almost like a child, is in actuality a miracle of ascetic firmness and strictness in our time of total spiritual enfeeblement.

Vladika was assigned to the diocese of Shanghai.

II

Shanghai

Vladika arrived in Shanghai in late November, on the Feast of the Entrance of the Mother of God into the Temple, and found a large cathedral uncompleted and a jurisdictional conflict to resolve. The first thing he did was to restore Church unity. He established contact with Serbs, Greeks, Ukrainians. He paid special attention to religious education and made it a rule to be present at the oral examinations of the catechism classes in all the Orthodox schools in Shanghai. He at once became a protector of various charitable and philanthropic societies and actively participated in their work, especially after seeing the needy circumstances in which the majority of his flock, refugees from the Soviet Union, were placed. He never went visiting for tea to the rich, but he was to be seen wherever there was need, regardless of times and weather. He organized a home for orphans and the children of needy parents, entrusting it to the heavenly protection of a Saint he highly venerated, St. Tikhon of Zadonsk, who loved children. Vladika himself gathered sick and starving children off the streets and dark alleys of Shanghai's slums. Beginning with eight children, the orphanage later housed up to a hundred children at one time, and some 3500 in all. When the Communists came, Vladika evacuated the whole orphanage, first to an island in the Philippines, and then to America.

It soon became apparent to his new flock that Vladika was a great ascetic. The core of his asceticism was prayer and fasting. He ate once a day at 11 pm. During the first and last weeks of Great Lent he did not eat at all, and for the rest of this and the Christmas Lent he ate only bread from the altar. His nights he spent usually in prayer, and when he finally became exhausted he would put his head on the floor and steal a few hours of sleep near dawn. When the time would come to serve Matins, someone would knock on the door, to no avail; they would open the door and find Vladika huddled on the floor in the ikon corner, overcome by sleep. At a tap on the shoulder he would jump up, and in a few minutes he would be in church for services-cold water streaming down his beard, but quite awake.

Vladika officiated in the cathedral every morning and evening, even when sick. He celebrated the Divine Liturgy daily, as he was to do for the rest of his life, and if for some reason he could not serve, he would still receive Holy Communion. No matter where he was, he would not miss a service. Once, according to a witness -

Vladika's leg was terribly swollen and the council of doctors, fearing gangrene, prescribed immediate hospitalization, which Vladika categorically refused. Then the Russian doctors informed the Parish Council that they released themselves of any responsibility for the health and even the life of the patient. The members of the Parish Council, after long pleas for mercy and threats of taking him by force, compelled Vladika to agree, and he was sent to the Russian Hospital in the morning of the day before the Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross. By six o'clock, however, Vladika came limping to the cathedral on foot and served. In a day all the swelling was gone.

Vladika's constant attention to self mortification had its root in the fear of God, which he possessed in the tradition of the ancient Church and of Holy Russia. The following incident, told by O.

Skopichenko and confirmed by many from Shanghai, well illustrates his daring, unshakable faith in Christ.

A Mrs. Menshikova was bitten by a mad dog. The injections against rabies she either refused to take or took carelessly.... And then she came down with this terrible disease. Bishop John found out about it and came to the dying woman. He gave her Holy Communion, but just then she began having one of the fits of this disease; she began to foam at the mouth, and at the same time she spit out the Holy Gifts which she had just received. The Holy Sacrament cannot be thrown out. And Vladika picked up and put in his mouth the Holy Gifts vomited by the sick woman. Those who were with him exclaimed: 'Vladika, what are you doing! Rabies is terribly contagious!' But Vladika peacefully answered: 'Nothing will happen; these are the Holy Gifts'. And indeed nothing did happen.

Vladika wore clothing of the cheapest Chinese fabric, and soft slippers or sandals, always without socks no matter what the weather. He often went barefoot, sometimes after having given his sandals away to some poor man. He even served barefoot, for which he was severely criticized.

By now it had become known that Vladika not only was a righteous man and an ascetic, but was also so close to God that he was endowed with the gift of clairvoyance and there were healings by his prayers. A striking account told by an eyewitness, Lidia Liu, testifies to Vladika's spiritual height.

Vladika came to Hong Kong twice. It's strange, but I, not knowing Vladika then, wrote him a letter asking him to help a widow with children, and I also asked him about some personal spiritual matter, but I never received an answer. A year passed. Vladika came to Hong Kong and I was in a crowd that went to meet him in church. Vladika turned to me and said, 'It is you who wrote me the letter!' I was astonished, since Vladika had never seen me before.

A moleben was sung, after which Vladika, standing before a lectern, was delivering a sermon. I was standing next to my mother, and we both saw a light surrounding Vladika down to the lectern - a radiance around him a foot wide. This lasted a rather long time.

When the sermon was over, I, struck by such an unusual phenomenon, told what we had seen to R. V. S., who told us: 'Yes, many faithful saw it'. My husband, who was standing a little way off, also saw this light.

Vladika loved to visit the sick and did it every single day, hearing confessions and giving Holy Communion. If the condition of a patient should become critical, Vladika would go to him at any hour of the day or night to pray at his bedside. Here is one undoubted miracle among the many worked by Vladika's prayers; it was recorded and placed in the archives of the County Hospital in Shanghai (source: N. Makovaya).

L. D. Sadkovskaya was very much taken by the sport of horse racing. Once she was thrown off her horse; she hit her head on a rock and lost consciousness. She was brought to the hospital unconscious. A council of doctors agreed that her condition was hopeless and it was not likely that she would live until morning. The pulse was almost gone; the skull was fractured in places so that small pieces of the skull were pressing on the brain. In such a condition she would die on the operating table. Even if her heart would tolerate surgery and the result were successful, she would still remain deaf, dumb, and blind. Her sister, after hearing all this, rushed to Bishop John in despair and begged him to save her sister. Vladika agreed: he came to the hospital and asked everyone to leave the room and prayed there

for about two hours. Then he called the chief doctor and asked him to examine her again. How surprised the doctor was to discover that her pulse was normal! He agreed to perform the operation immediately, but only in the presence of Bishop John. The operation was successful, and the doctors were amazed when, after the operation, the patient regained consciousness and asked to drink. She can see and hear perfectly. She is still living and can talk, see, and hear. I have known her for thirty years.

Vladika visited the prison also, and celebrated the Divine Liturgy for the convicts on a primitive little table. But the most difficult task for a pastor is to visit the mentally ill and the possessed - and Vladika sharply distinguished between the two. Outside Shanghai there was a mental hospital, and Vladika alone had the spiritual power to visit these terribly sick people. He gave them Holy Communion, and they, surprisingly, received it peacefully and listened to him. They always looked forward to his visits and met him with joy.

Vladika possessed great courage. During the Japanese occupation the Japanese authorities tried in every way possible to bend the Russian colony to their will. Pressure was directed through the heads of the Russian Emigrant Committee. Two presidents of this Committee strove to maintain its independence, and as a result both were killed. Confusion and terror seized the Russian colony, and at that moment Vladika John, in spite of warnings from the Russians who were collaborating with the Japanese, declared himself the temporary head of the Russian colony.

During the Japanese occupation it was extremely dangerous to walk on the streets at night, and most people took care to be home by dark. Vladika, however, paying no heed to the danger, continued to visit the sick and needy at any hour of the night, and he was never touched.

At the end of the war persuasion and pressure were brought to bear on Russian clergy everywhere to submit to the newly elected 'Patriarch' of the Soviet Church. Of the six hierarchs in the Far East, five submitted; only Bishop John, resisting all persuasions and threats, remained loyal to the Russian Church Abroad. In 1946 he was raised to the rank of Archbishop over all the Russian faithful in China.

With the coming of the Communists, the Russians in China were forced once again to flee, most of them through the Philippine Islands. In 1949 approximately 5000 Refugees from the Chinese mainland were living in an International refugee Organization camp on the island of Tubabao in the Philippines. This island is located in the path of the seasonal typhoons which sweep through that part of the Pacific. During the 27 month period of the camp's occupancy, the island was threatened only once by a typhoon, and it changed course and bypassed the island.

When the fear of typhoons was mentioned by one Russian to the Filipinos, they replied that there was no reason to worry, because 'your holy man blesses your camp from four directions every night'. They referred to Vladika John; for no typhoon struck the island while he was there. After the camp had been almost totally evacuated and the people resettled elsewhere (mainly in the U.S.A. and Australia), and only about 200 persons were left on the island, it was struck by a terrible typhoon that totally destroyed the camp.

Vladika himself went to Washington, D. C., to get his people to America. Legislation was changed and almost the whole camp came to the New World - thanks again to Vladika.

III

Europe

The exodus of his flock from China accomplished, Archbishop John was given in 1951 a new field for his pastoral endeavor: he was sent by the Synod of Bishops to the Archdiocese of Western Europe, with his see first in Paris, and later in Brussels. He was now one of the leading hierarchs of the Russian Church, and his attendance was frequently required at the sessions of the Synod in New York City.

In Western Europe Vladika took a deep interest not only in the Russians in Diaspora, for whom he exerted himself tirelessly in labours similar to those for which he had been known in Shanghai, but also in the local inhabitants. He received under his jurisdiction local Dutch and French Orthodox Churches, protecting them and encouraging their Orthodox development. He celebrated the Divine Liturgy in Dutch and French, as before he had served in Greek and Chinese, and as later he was to serve in English.

Vladika's interest in and devotion to the Church's Saints, of whom his knowledge was already seemingly limitless, was extended now to Western European Saints dating from before the schism of the Latin Church, many of whom, venerated only locally, were included in no Orthodox calendar of Saints. He collected their Lives and images of them, and later submitted a long list of them to the Synod.

In Western Europe as in China people learned to expect the unexpected of Vladika; for here he continued to base his life upon the law of God, thinking nothing of the inconvenience or surprise this might sometimes occasion in those who are governed chiefly by the standards of men. Once Vladika chanced to be in Marseilles, and he decided to serve a panikhida on the site of the cruel assassination of King Alexander of Serbia. None of his clergy, out of false shame, wished to serve with Vladika. Indeed, what a thing to do - to serve in the middle of the street! So Vladika went alone. The citizens of Marseilles were amazed to see a clergyman in unusual dress, with long hair and beard, walking with a suitcase and a broom in the middle of the street. News photographers caught sight of him and photographed him. Finally he stopped, swept with the broom a small portion of the pavement, opened his suitcase and began taking out its contents. On the swept spot he put a pontifical eagle rug, lit the censer, and began to serve a panikhida.

Vladika's reputation for holiness, too, spread among the non-Orthodox as well as the Orthodox population. In one of the Catholic churches of Paris, a priest strove to inspire his young people with these words: 'You demand proofs, you say that now there are neither miracles nor saints. Why should I give you theoretical proofs, when today there walks in the streets of Paris a Saint - *Saint Jean Nus Pieds* (Saint John the Barefoot)'.

Many people testify to the miracles worked by the prayers of Archbishop John in Western Europe.

IV

San Francisco

In San Francisco, whose cathedral parish is the largest in the Russian Church Abroad, a lifelong friend of Vladika, Archbishop Tikhon, retired because of ill health, and in his absence the construction of a great new cathedral came to a halt as a bitter dispute paralyzed the Russian community. In response to the urgent request of thousands of Russians in San Francisco who had known him in Shanghai, Archbishop John was sent by the Synod in 1962 as the only hierarch likely to restore peace in the divided community. He arrived at his last assignment as bishop twenty-eight years to the day after his first arrival in Shanghai: on the feast of the Entrance of the Mother of God into the Temple, 21st November (4th December), 1962.

Under Vladika's guidance a measure of peace was restored, the paralysis of the community was ended, and the cathedral finished. Yet even in the role of peacemaker Vladika was attacked, and accusations and slanders were heaped upon his head. He was forced to appear in public court - in flagrant violation of church canons - to answer to preposterous charges of concealing financial dishonesty by the Parish Council. All involved were completely exonerated; but thus Vladika's last years were filled with the bitterness of slander and persecution, to which he unfailingly replied without complaint, without judging anyone, with undisturbed peacefulness.

Vladika remained true to the end to his path of faithful service to the Church. To those who knew him in his last years perhaps two aspects of his character stood out. First was his strictness in what regarded the Church and the law of God. He insisted on the proper conduct of Church servers, allowing no levity, or even talking, in the altar. Himself an expert in Divine services, he would correct errors and omissions in the order of service immediately. With the congregation, too, he was strict, allowing no women to kiss the cross or ikons while wearing lipstick, and requiring that the *antidoron* (blessed bread) distributed at the end of the Liturgy be received fasting. He spoke against the desecration of the eves of Sundays and feast days by the organization of balls and other entertainments on them. He staunchly defended the Church (Julian) Calendar against new calendar innovators. He forbade his clergy to participate in 'Pan Orthodox' services because of the dubious canonicity of some participants; and the activities of Orthodox 'ecumenists' caused him to shake his head in disbelief. He was strictest of all with regard to the holy doctrine of Orthodoxy; while he was still a young bishop in Shanghai his critical essay on the 'Sophiology' of Archpriest S. N. Bulgakov was instrumental in the Synod's condemnation of the latter's heresy in 1936. No one who has seen will soon forget Vladika's fierce look while lowering the pontifical candlesticks at the proclamation of the Anathemas against heretics on the Sunday of Orthodoxy - here he was one with the Church in excluding from her bosom all who reject the full and saving Orthodox faith. All this was not from any narrow-minded literalness or 'fanaticism', but from the same fear of God which Vladika preserved his whole life long, and which prohibits one from trespassing against God's law at the peril of one's salvation.

A recent example of Vladika's righteous severity invites comparison with an incident from the life of Vladika's beloved St. Tikhon of Zadonsk, who rode into the midst of a pagan celebration held during

the Apostles' Fast and delivered a heated accusing sermon against the participants. On the evening before, 19th October (2nd November), 1964, the Russian Church Abroad celebrated the solemn canonization of Father John of Kronstadt, whom Vladika greatly venerated, taking an active part in the compiling of the service and akathist to him. The Latins celebrate on this day the feast of All Saints, and there is a tradition that during the preceding night the dark spirits celebrated their own festival of disorder. In America this 'Halloween' has become an occasion on which children make mischief dressed in costumes of witches, devils, ghosts, as if calling on the dark powers - a diabolic mockery of Christianity.

A group of Russians organized on this night (which was also the eve of Sunday) a Halloween Ball. In the San Francisco Cathedral at the time of the first All night Vigil celebrated to St. John of Kronstadt, a number of people were absent, to the great sorrow of Vladika. After the service Vladika went to the place where the ball was still in progress. He climbed the steps and entered the hall, to the absolute astonishment of the participants. The music stopped and Vladika, in complete silence, glared at the dumbfounded people, slowly and deliberately making the round of the entire hall, staff in hand. He spoke not a word, and none was necessary; the mere sight of Vladika stung the conscience of all, as was evident from the general consternation. Vladika left in silence; and the next day in church he thundered his holy indignation and his flaming zeal calling all to the devout Christian life.

Yet Vladika is not best remembered by his flock for his sternness, but rather for his gentleness, his joyfulness, even for what is known as 'foolishness for Christ's sake'. The most popular photograph of him captures something of this aspect of his character. It was especially noticeable in his conduct with children. After services he would smile and joke with the boys who served with him, playfully knocking them on the head with his staff. Occasionally the Cathedral clergy would be disconcerted to see Vladika, in the middle of a service (though never in the altar), bend over to play with a small child! And on feast days when blessing with holy water was called for, he would sprinkle the faithful, not on the top of the head as is usual, but right in the face (which once led a small girl to exclaim, 'he squirts you'), with a noticeable glint in his eye and total unconcern at the discomfiture of some of the more dignified. Children were absolutely devoted to him, despite his usual strictness with them.

Vladika was sometimes criticized for upsetting the usual order of things. He was often late for services (never on his own account, but because he had been visiting the sick or dying), and he would not allow them to begin without him; and when he celebrated the services would be quite long, as he allowed few of the standard abbreviations. He would appear at various places unannounced and at unexpected times; often he would visit hospitals late at night - and always be admitted. At times his judgments would seem to clash with common sense, and his actions would seem strange; and often he would not explain them.

No man is perfect; Vladika was sometimes wrong (and he did not hesitate to admit it when he found out). But usually he was right, and the seeming strangeness of some of his actions and judgments could later be seen to fit into a different pattern of things. Vladika's life was governed by the standards of the spiritual life, and if this upset the routine order of things it was in order to jolt people out of their spiritual inertia and remind them that there is a higher judgment than the world's.

A remarkable incident from Vladika's years in San Francisco (1963) illustrates several aspects of his holiness: his spiritual boldness based on absolute faith; his ability to see the future and to overcome by his spiritual sight the bounds of space; and the power of his prayer, which beyond all doubt worked miracles. The incident is related by the woman who witnessed it, Mrs. L. Liu; the exact words of Vladika were confirmed by the Mr. T. who is mentioned.

In San Francisco my husband was involved in an automobile accident and was seriously injured; he lost control of balance and suffered terribly. At this time Vladika had many troubles. Knowing the power of Vladika's prayers, I thought: if I ask Vladika to come to my husband, my husband would recover; but I was afraid to do this because Vladika was so busy then. Two days passed, and suddenly Vladika came to us, accompanied by Mr. B. T., who had driven him. Vladika stayed with us about five minutes, but believed that my husband would recover. The state of his health was at its most serious point then, and after Vladika's visit there was a sharp crisis and then he began to recover and lived four more years after this. He was quite aged. Afterwards I met Mr. T. at a Church meeting and he told me that he had been driving Vladika to the airport. Suddenly Vladika had said to him: 'Let's go now to the Liu's. He had objected that they would be late for the plane and that he could not turn around at that moment. Then Vladika had said: 'Can you take the life of a man upon yourself?' He could do nothing but drive Vladika to us. Vladika, as it turned out, was not late for the plane, because they had held it up for him.

With the announcement by Metropolitan Anastassy in 1964 of his retirement, Archbishop John became a leading candidate to succeed him as Metropolitan and Chief Hierarchy of the Russian Church Abroad. On the second ballot he was one of the two candidates, with the difference of a single vote between them. To resolve the equal division of the bishops, that night Vladika asked the youngest of the hierarchs, Bishop Philaret, to his quarters, and there he persuaded this unexpected candidate to accept the awesome responsibility of this office. The next day he withdrew his own candidacy and recommended the election of Bishop Philaret, whom the bishops elected unanimously, seeing in this sudden turn of events the grace of the Holy Spirit.

To such eminence among the hierarchs of the Russian Church was Vladika raised before the end of his earthly life. It was an eminence based not on any external qualities, for Vladika was frail, bent, without ambition or guile, unable even to speak clearly. It was an eminence based solely on those inner, spiritual qualities which made of him unquestionably one of the great Orthodox hierarchs of this century, and a holy man. In him, righteousness shone.

V

Repose

Among those who knew and loved Vladika, the first response to the news of his sudden death was: it cannot be! And this was more than a reaction to the suddenness of the event; for among those who were close to him there had unaccountably developed the notion that this pillar of the Church, this holy man who was always accessible to his flock - would never cease to be! There would never be a time when one would not be able to turn to him for advice and consolation! In one sense, in a spiritual sense, this has since turned out to be true. But it is also one of the realities of this world that every man who lives must die.

Vladika was prepared for this reality. While others expected of him many more years of fruitful service to the Church of Christ - for he was a relatively young hierarch - he was readying himself for an end which he had foreseen at least for some months, and the very day of which he apparently knew in advance.

To the manager of the orphanage where he lived, who had spoken in the spring of 1966 of a diocesan meeting to be held three years later, he indicated, 'I will not be here then'. In May, 1966, a woman who had known Vladika for twelve years - and whose testimony, according to Metropolitan Philaret, is 'worthy of complete confidence' - was amazed to hear him say, 'I will die soon, at the end of June... not in San Francisco, but in Seattle...' Metropolitan Philaret himself testifies of Vladika's extraordinary final farewell to him when returning to San Francisco from the last session of the Synod which he attended in New York. After the Metropolitan had served the customary moleben before traveling, Vladika, instead of sprinkling his own head with holy water, as is always done by hierarchs, bent low and asked the Metropolitan to sprinkle him; and after this, instead of the usual mutual kissing of hands, Vladika firmly took the Metropolitan's hand and kissed it, withdrawing his own.

Again, on the evening before his departure for Seattle, four days before his death, Vladika astonished a man for whom he had just served a moleben with the words, 'You will not kiss my hand again'. And on the day of his death, at the conclusion of the Divine Liturgy which he celebrated, he spent three hours in the altar praying, emerging not long before his death, which occurred at 3:50 pm. on the 2nd July (19th June, OS), 1966. He died in his room in the parish building next to the church, without preparatory signs of any illness or affliction. He was heard to fall and, having been placed in a chair by those who ran to help him, breathed his last peacefully and with little evident pain, in the presence of the miracle-working Kursk Ikon of the Mother of God. Thus was Vladika found worthy to imitate the blessed death of his patron, St. John of Tobolsk.

Today Archbishop John reposes in a chapel in the basement of the San Francisco cathedral; and there a new chapter has begun in the story of this holy man. Just as St. Seraphim of Sarov told his spiritual children to regard him as living after his death, and to come to his grave and tell him what was in their hearts, so our Vladika also has proved to be hearing those who revere his memory. Soon after his death a one-time student of his, Fr. Amvrossy P., saw one night a dream (or a vision, he could not

tell which): Vladika, clad in Easter vestments, full of light and shining, was censing the cathedral and joyfully uttered to him just one word while blessing him: 'happy'.

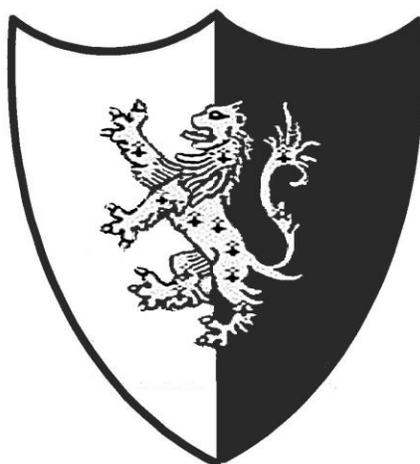
Later, before the end of the forty-day period, Fr. Constantine Z., long Vladika's deacon and now a priest, who had lately been angry at Vladika and had begun to doubt his righteousness, saw Vladika in a dream all in light, with rays of light shining around his head so brightly that it was impossible to look at them. Thus were Fr. Constantine's doubts of Vladika's holiness dispelled.

Many others have seen Archbishop John in unusual dreams that have a particular significance or message. Some affirm that supernatural help has been granted them. The modest grave chapel, soon to be adorned with icons by Pimen Sofronov in remembrance of Vladika, is the witness already of how many tears, confessions, heartfelt requests ...

The manager of the St. Tikhon Zadonsky Home and long a devoted servant of Vladika, M. A. Shakmatova, saw a remarkable dream. A crowd of people carried Vladika in a coffin into St. Tikhon's Church; Vladika came to life and stood in the royal doors anointing the people and saying to her, 'Tell the people: although I have died, I am alive!'

It is yet too early to be able even to grasp the fact that we, cold and sinful, living in this evil age, have been witnesses of such a glorious phenomenon - the life and death of a saint! It is as if the times of Holy Russia have returned to earth, as if to prove the fact that Jesus Christ is *the same yesterday, and today, and forever* (Heb. 13:8). Amen.

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