

Veneration of Icons and the Iconostasis

One of the most striking features of a Byzantine church is the abundance of icons. These images are the distinctive art form of the Christian East. Icons are often referred to as windows into Heaven. The honor which we show icons by bowing in front of them, praying in front of them, kissing them, or incensing them is not going to the paint or the wood in front of us, but to the person depicted who is now in Heaven. The ancient church used sacred images such as these from its very beginning, and the veneration of icons in prayer and liturgical life was affirmed at the Second Council of Nicaea in 787. This holy practice was conclusively established in 842 and is celebrated as a Feast Day in our church on the first Sunday of the Great Fast.



The *iconostasis* (Greek for “icon screen”) is one of the most distinctive features of a Byzantine church, as it is adorned with icons large and small and is impossible to miss. The iconostasis represents the separation of Heaven (the altar) and Earth (the nave where parishioners are), as well as the veil before the Holy of Holies in the ancient Jewish temple, or the East Gate in the Garden of Eden. Because the destruction of Hades and resurrection of Christ has re-opened the gates to Eden, torn the veil in the Holy of Holies, and reconciled man and God, the iconostasis is opened during the Divine Liturgy when God (through both the Gospel and the Holy Gifts) comes out in procession to us. In the Divine Liturgy we are surrounded by the host of heavenly saints depicted in the icons all around us, worshipping with us, and the presence of God is not restricted behind a wall – every Divine Liturgy the Gospel and the Holy Gifts come through the iconostasis and surround us, who are waiting hungry for nourishment and Communion with the Lord.

On the first row of the iconostasis, images of Jesus and Mary flank the Royal Doors. Christ is often shown as the Teacher; Our Lady, the Theotokos (Greek for “God-bearer”, or Mother of God), is to His right. Saint Nicholas, the patron saint of the poor and of children, and of our Byzantine Catholic Church in America, is on the north end. The patron saint of the parish is at the south end. The second row contains icons of the Twelve Feasts, the great events in the lives of Jesus and Mary. The third row has the Twelve Apostles, and the fourth row the Twelve Patriarchs of Israel. The Mystical Supper, or Last Supper, is over the Royal Doors and in direct line with the holy altar.

Carrying Christ into the World

All liturgies of the ancient church end quickly after the reception of Holy Communion. Why? This is because we leave the church as a walking Tabernacle of Jesus Christ. Being united with Him through Holy Communion, we are now able to carry Him out into the world. The Sunday social is our first step in going out into the world as Christians who have been renewed by our participation in the Divine Liturgy.

Please feel free to ask our priest, deacon, or any parishioner questions that you may have about today's worship. You are most welcome to join us again.



Written By Very Rev. Christopher Zugger



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Welcome to the Ruthenian Byzantine Catholic Church



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Welcome to the Ruthenian Byzantine Catholic Church!

Below are some answers to Frequently Asked Questions. Please feel welcome to introduce yourself, we hope you enjoy your time with us.

Are You Catholic?



Bishop Artur Bubnevych of the Eparchy of Phoenix with Pope Leo XIV

Yes. We are part of the Holy Protection of Mary Byzantine Catholic Eparchy (the Greek word for “diocese”) of Phoenix, which belongs to the Byzantine Catholic Metropolitan Archeparchy of Pittsburgh. Our bishop, Most Reverend Artur Bubnevych, was named Bishop of the Eparchy of Phoenix by the Holy See in 2024.

What is Eastern, or Byzantine Catholic?

The Catholic Church is composed of a number of self-governing Churches. The Holy Father, the Pope of Rome, serves as the visible head of the Church on Earth as the Vicar of Christ. The largest of these Catholic Churches is the Roman, or Latin, Church. There are approximately 22 different Eastern Catholic Churches following the Armenian, Byzantine, Coptic, and Syriac Rites. All of these Churches can trace their founding to Jesus Christ and his commission to the Twelve Apostles to go out and make disciples of all nations. The ancient Byzantine Rite has its origins in the Middle East, and then most especially in Constantinople. The word Byzantine refers to the liturgy, prayer life, and theology that come from the Church of Constantinople, or Byzantium. Our Ruthenian Byzantine Catholic Church has its origins in Eastern Europe in the lands of modern Ukraine, Slovakia, Hungary, Croatia, and Serbia. The Byzantine Catholic Church has been present in the United States since the late 19th century, and the first diocese was founded by the Pope in 1924. Parishioners today are a mix of descendants of these people and other Catholics, converts, and visitors from across the United States. On Sundays we celebrate the Divine Liturgy.

What Is the Divine Liturgy? Do you use English?

The Divine Liturgy (what is called Mass in the West) is celebrated with great solemnity and is chanted or sung in its entirety. The Byzantine tradition is to use the local language of the people wherever the liturgy is celebrated, therefore this liturgy will be in English (with a very occasional amount of Church Slavonic or Greek sprinkled in). Incense is always used; this represents our prayers ascending to heaven and is a sign of purification. The priest celebrates the Divine Liturgy facing the altar towards the East (the altar is “liturgically” if not always physically facing East), because he is leading the people in prayer, praying with them. We face East when we pray as it is from the East where Christ will return (Matthew 24:27). You will see clergy face the congregation when addressing them, but in prayer we all face the East.

You may notice that we do not kneel on Sundays, as kneeling is considered penitential in our tradition, rather than reverential. The posture of prayer on Sundays in the Christian East, dating to the First Ecumenical Council, is to stand. Because the Divine Liturgy can be thought of as one long prayer sung by the clergy and the faithful, this might mean a lot of standing. Anyone in need is encouraged to sit and rest, and you may see many who do. We do, however, kneel and prostrate throughout weekdays of the Great Lent.

If this is your first time attending a Byzantine Catholic Divine Liturgy, feel free to just follow the service and listen to the chant and prayers. Attending an Eastern Catholic Church fulfills any Catholic’s Sunday or Holy Day obligation.

Making the Sign of the Cross



How: We make the sign of the cross by bringing together the first two fingers and thumb of the right hand, representing the Holy Trinity. The last two fingers, tucked in our hand, represent the duality of Christ as God and man. We bless ourselves from forehead to chest, and then right to left.

We have always gone right to left because in the Nicene Creed we say that the Son is seated at the right hand of the Father, which means that He is equal to the Father.

When: The easy rule to follow is 1) At an intonation of the Holy Trinity or 2) Whenever the priest blesses us. Additionally, people may also bless themselves before they venerate an icon or during solemn parts of the liturgy.

How to Receive Holy Communion

All Catholics in a state of grace may receive Holy Communion in a Byzantine Catholic parish. The consecrated bread and wine are both



served from a chalice. To receive the Holy Eucharist, come forward with the congregation. When you approach the chalice please remain standing, cross your arms, tilt your head back, and open your mouth without extending your tongue. The priest or deacon will drop a particle of Our Lord’s most pure Body soaked in his precious Blood into your mouth, while reciting a prayer. You do not say “Amen” as you wait for the prayer to be completed. Please note: the priest may ask your name to include it in his prayer. We do not administer Holy Communion in the communicant’s hand.

If you are not receiving the Eucharist, you are still encouraged to receive a blessing by approaching and bowing your head, and the priest or deacon will hold the chalice over your head and give you a blessing.

Social Hall: The liturgy after the Liturgy



Most of our parishes host a Sunday social after the Divine Liturgy with food, coffee, drinks and fellowship. If you leave after the Liturgy is over and do not get to know the people in our parish, you have not experienced all that there is to our Faith! It is an opportunity to visit with other members of the faith community and relax while continuing the fellowship from worship into the day. For many people the Liturgy on Sunday feels incomplete without it. Please join us!

The decorated candle echoes the lit candles given to babies and converts after the Mystery of Baptism. Jesus is the Light of the world, the true light Who fills the newly-illuminated soul. This is put into the basket as a visible reminder of our sacramental life.



If one abstained from other foods or beverages, then those can be included. One can also put in Easter food from a family's heritage: everything from enchiladas to lasagna to sopapillas can be used. Thus, each of the foods in the Pascha basket have rich meaning, as does everything in the Byzantine Catholic Church!

Basket Cover



The beautifully embroidered covers can depict the Risen Lord, or symbols of new life such as birds and flowers. The phrase "Christ is Risen" is stitched in English, Slavonic, or another language. These cover the entire basket of food and call to mind the Burial Shroud in which Jesus' body was wrapped.

Written By Very Rev. Christopher Zuger

Prayers for the Blessing of Paschal Foods

O Holy Master, Almighty Father and Eternal God, through our Lord Jesus Christ Who came down from heaven, giving life and salvation to the world, bless this bread by Your holy and spiritual blessing so that it may be, to all who will eat of it, for the salvation of soul, the health of body, and the protection against every illness and hostile attack. For you are a merciful and gracious God and we give glory to You, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, now and ever, and forever.

O Lord Jesus Christ our God, look down upon these meat products and bless them as You sanctified the ram which the faithful Abraham offered to You, and the lamb which Abel presented to You as a holocaust, and as You also sanctified the fattened calf which You ordered to be slain for the prodigal who returned to You. As he was considered worthy to partake of Your goodness, may we also enjoy these meats which You blessed and sanctified for the benefit of all of us. For you are the true Nourishment and the Giver of all good things, and we give glory to You, together with your eternal Father, and your most holy and life-giving Spirit, now and ever, and forever.

O God, our Lord and Master, Creator and Maker of all things, bless this cheese and butter, and together with them, the eggs and all other foods here present. Keep us in Your goodness, so that, as we partake of them, we may be filled with all Your generous gifts and indescribable goodness. For you are the Supreme Ruler and Yours are the kingdom, the power, and the glory, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, now and ever, and forever.
Amen.



The Pascha Basket Tradition



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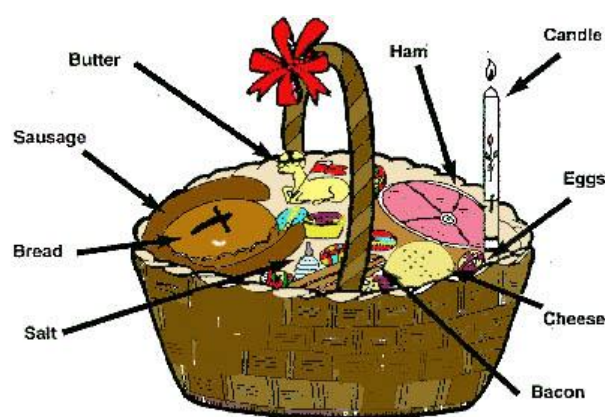
During the season of Great Lent, there are certain foods that are traditionally abstained from as penance for our sins. These include dairy (eggs, cheese, butter), meat, candy, alcohol, and other choices. As Pascha, we are invited to bring pre-cooked food to church in a large basket for the solemn blessing of the paschal food we have abstained from.

The celebration of the Resurrection always comes after the Jewish feast of the Passover. Jesus is our Passover. As Israel was delivered from slavery and idolatry in pagan Egypt, so too we are saved from the darkness of sin and false worship through Christ. The ancient Jews had to eat before their flight out of Egypt; we eat in celebration after the Resurrection. Remember that Jesus sat and ate with His disciples after His resurrection (Luke 24:30 and 43, Acts 1:3-4, Acts 10:41). Similarly, we gather with our parish family and our own families and friends on Easter Sunday to share the paschal meal.



The foods for Easter are prepared during Holy Week, though the making of the pysanky may be done all through Lent.

After the Paschal Liturgy, we all gather to bless the Pascha baskets. These baskets have been carefully prepared with many of the foods from which we've been fasting for the past month and a half during Great Lent. There are several foods traditionally included in the basket. These are: a yeast bread, a bitter herb, wine, cheese, meat, butter, salt, and a red egg. Each has symbolic significance.



Bread

Bread is obviously symbolic of the Eucharist. Both Passover and the Paschal meals are centered around bread. The *pascha* bread is always included, leavened with yeast. Its dough is usually made with an abundance of eggs. This is a symbol of the New Covenant and Jesus, the living bread from heaven (John 6:51). While the Jews made unleavened bread for Passover, we who are the Children of the New Covenant make leavened bread for Pascha. The letters X and B, Slavonic for Christ is Risen, can be put on top of the paschal loaf. Tsourekia is the traditional Greek braided bread, which is a display of the Trinity.



Herbs

The bitter herb, often horseradish or garlic, serves as a reminder of the first Passover (horseradish is eaten as a traditional part of the original Passover meal) and their suffering in Egypt. This also represents the bitter sufferings which Christ endured for our sake in His Passion; sometimes the herb is colored red with beets, symbolizing the Blood of Christ.

Dairy

Cheese and butter were traditionally given up during Great Lent. The traditional sweet cheese (*hrudka* or *sirets*)

represents the richness of the new life in Christ. Butter can be carved or molded into the shape of a lamb holding a little banner of the Risen Lord, as Jesus is the new Paschal Lamb.



Brightly decorated eggs (*pysanky*) are filled with symbols of baptism, new life, and the Resurrection. Red eggs (*krashanky*) are likened to the tomb from which Christ arose. This is because of the miracle of new life which comes from the egg, just as Christ miraculously came forth from the tomb.



Meat

Meat (ham, bacon, sausage) is included in remembrance of the sacrifice of the paschal lambs of the Old Testament Passover, which are replaced by Christ, the New Passover and Lamb of God. These are seen as a sign of God giving us the abundance of the earth. We can also call to mind the sacrifice of the fattened calf that was killed to welcome back the Prodigal Son.

Other Items

Salt serves as a reminder to us that we are "the salt of the earth." We are preserve ourselves in purity and goodness, having been raised into new life in Christ.

Wine represents the Precious Blood of Jesus. At the Last Supper, before He was betrayed, He sanctified the wine which became His life-giving Blood. It is the same blood the gushed forth from His pierced side, along with water. Together those two elements call to mind the Mysteries of Baptism and the Eucharist.

Blessings At Home

The laity are encouraged to use holy water generously. The head of the household can bless bedrooms or beds after one has bad dreams, bless the children before bedtime, and bless the house if someone of a bad disposition has visited. Many saints have written about using holy water to drive away demons or bring peace into their dwellings. Holy water can be kept in a little font by the door, to use for blessing oneself when leaving the home.



Sickness

At the Theophany services, cups are provided to drink the holy water. This can be done at home, especially at times of sickness.

Work

If it is possible, one can invite the priest to come and bless one's business. If done in the presence of employees, this is a gentle form of evangelization and introducing people to our

Church's ceremonies. If that's not possible, one can quietly bless a workspace or cubicle 'In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.' This is especially good to do if there are problems at work that need God's mercy.

Storing Holy Water

One should bring containers to church on January 5/6 and August 1 to take the new holy water home. The water can be kept in special holy water containers which can be bought in parish stores or religious goods companies. These have tops which allow for sprinkling the water as needed. If one intends to use the Jordan Water all year, larger containers can be brought to the service. The water can be transferred into the smaller containers as needed, so that one can then sprinkle it easily.

Old holy water should be disposed of by pouring it against the walls of a building or on the very top of plants where animals would not be present.

Make good use of this great sacramental of our Church!



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Holy Water And Its Uses



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Water is sanctified at least twice a year, on Theophany / Epiphany on January 5-6, and on August 1, the feast of the Procession of the Holy Cross. It can be blessed at any time though as needed.

Why Sanctify Water?

In the Book of Genesis, we read that God speaks the entire universe into existence. This is the Word of God, Who becomes incarnate in the God-Man, Jesus Christ, “through Whom all things were made.” After God created all things, He saw that it was good. The human race and the world were damaged by original sin, which necessitates the coming of Our Lord Jesus Christ. God’s creation remains, and the Church uses blessings of elements of the world to bring about sanctification. Thus, olive oil is blessed to use for the sick, bishops consecrate chrism for the Mystery of Chrismation, and above all, bread and wine for the Holy Eucharist. These practices demonstrate the creation can still be used to glorify God and assist His servants. The symbolism of water is especially important, as it stands for our death to sin and rising with Jesus to new life. Blessed water welcomes us at baptism, blesses us at our deaths, and should be used throughout our lives.



Baptism of the Lord

Christ’s great humility in accepting baptism from John’s hands and descending into the waters of the river shows us that He comes to redeem us and restore creation to its original purpose.

Because of His presence in the water, and because water is used for Baptism, the Sanctification of Water is one of the most important and popular rites of the Eastern Churches, both Catholic and Orthodox.

The Great Sanctification of Water is celebrated during the Vespers and Divine Liturgy of Theophany, which celebrates the Baptism of Jesus in the Jordan River by



Saint John the Baptist. Because of this, holy water is often called Jordan Water. The water is literally made holy by the descent of the Holy Spirit into ordinary tap water. First the priest will exorcise the water, ordering any evil powers to flee. The prayers make it very clear that the sanctified water is transformed by the Spirit, and that it is used against Satan and his wiles, to bring blessings to those who use it, that it dispels all evil forces, that it sanctify both homes and individuals, bring healing to the sick, and provide purification for all.

Theophany Blessings

Following the sanctification, the priest blesses the nave and sanctuary of the church, including the members of the congregation. He may go outside also and bless the exterior of the church. In many places, the clergy and laity will process to a local river or lake and the sanctification is repeated. A hand cross can be thrown into the water for the youth to retrieve. At both events, the people are blessed with the water – sometimes quite generously!



Throughout the Theophany octave and beyond, the parish priest goes out to bless the homes of those parishioners who request it. The parish priest comes to homes in order to celebrate this annual blessing. It is also an occasion for the pastor to visit with families in their own comfortable setting.

Because of the widely dispersed nature of parishes in America, it can be difficult for the pastor to reach every family. In those circumstances the head of the household may perform the blessing.

Why Bless the House Every Year With Holy Water?



Kingdom of God, where the Lord wants to be fully present.

Every home suffers spiritually during the year – fights, bad

dreams, illness, miscommunication. Blessing the house at the start of the New Year is a wonderful way to heal the house, to bring in the blessing of the Holy Trinity as we move from Christmas to the preparation for Lent. We have to be vigilant at driving out the evil one and his minions, at getting rid of bad influences by bringing in sanctified water to purify our hearts, and to distribute God’s holiness through the sprinkling of the holy water into our homes.

August 1 Blessing

Water used to be sanctified on the first day of the month all year long. This day is the only one on which that is consistently done. This is because it is connected with the mystery of the cross and deliverance from sickness. August 1 is the feast of the Procession of the Holy and Life-giving Cross. During the hot summer months the cities of the Eastern Roman Empire were often hit with epidemics. A relic of the True Cross was carried through the streets of Constantinople and water was sanctified afterward.



The faithful blessed their homes as protection against sickness, something which can be done all year. As at Theophany, the priest immerses the hand cross into the water three times, while asking the Holy Spirit to descend into the water.

Other Blessings

Sanctified water is used in the rites of blessing the baskets of food on Easter Sunday; for the blessing of cars on the feast of Saint Elijah the Prophet (July 20); for blessing of fruit on Transfiguration (August 6); and for the blessing of flowers and herbs on the Dormition (August 15); blessing of animals for Saint Francis of Assisi (October 4); and for the blessing of fields for crops and family gardens. The priest uses holy water to bless any religious object brought to the priest.

The Confession

After proper reflection with sorrow in your heart for sins committed, approach the priest at the place of confession.

- After the blessing of the priest, state the last time you made a confession.
- Your opening Prayer: *I confess to Almighty God, one in the Holy Trinity, to the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God, to all the Saints, and to you, Father, all my sins. My last confession was:*
- Confess all the sins you remember to the priest with all honesty and humility. The confession may take the form of a series of questions by the priest.
- According to a long-standing tradition of the Eastern Church, a person makes his or her confession of sins while looking upon an icon of Christ because Jesus is the one who forgives our sins and who reconciles us back to the Heavenly Father.
- As a spiritual father, the priest may offer words of counsel and encourage you in advancing in the Christian life. The priest will assign a work of penance or prayer that you are to perform as soon as you are able.
- Your Act of Contrition: *For these and all my other sins which I cannot remember or call to mind, I am sorry that I have offended God. I am sincerely repentant and promise, with the help of God, to better my life. For this I humbly ask of you, Father, penance and absolution.*
- When you finish your confession, the priest will lay his *epitrachelion* upon your head and say a prayer of absolution. This gesture symbolizes that the grace of God is being poured upon you through the ministry of the priest.

When Should One Make a Confession of Sins?



A grave sin is a serious and intentional turning away from God, committed with awareness and freedom, that deeply wounds our relationship with Him. While all sin calls us to repentance, grave sin represents a profound rejection of God's love and commandments. If we commit a grave and deliberate sin, we must confess our sins so that our communion with God and His Church may be restored. Through the Mystery of Repentance, Christ forgives our sins, heals our wounds, and restores us to the life of grace.

It is also a good practice to go to confession before making important decisions or changes in life (marriage, baptism of one's child, a new career, entering college, etc.). Even if we have not committed a grave sin, the Church encourages regular confession, perhaps monthly or during the four fasting seasons. The Mystery of Repentance gives us an opportunity to examine our lives and humbly rededicate ourselves to God.

Receiving the Eucharist and Confession

The Divine Eucharist brings pardon for sins and the grace to overcome sin in our lives. Forgiveness of sins is among the graces given to those who receive Communion with faith and love. For our spiritual health, regular Communion is life-giving and vitally important. Pope Saint Pius X stressed that Holy Communion is not a reward for good behavior, but medicine for the soul. The Eucharist is also a visible sign of our shared communion with Christ and with one another in His Church, and we must approach with sincerity and purity of heart. If we are conscious of having committed a grave and deliberate sin that has wounded our communion with God and the Church, we should first confess our sins and receive absolution. If uncertain, seek the guidance of your priest or spiritual father.

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The Mystery of Repentance *Be Reconciled to God*



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Part of Christ's ministry was to heal people. He worked many healings of people's bodies. Christ did not come to merely bring healing for the body, but especially for the soul. He brought spiritual healing through the forgiveness of people's sins. Christ made a point of telling us this through the famous Parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke

15:11-32). In the story, the younger son insults and defies his father and abandons him, to lead a sinful existence. When he returns, the father sees him and runs to him, embraces him, and restores him to the family and to his life. This is what God the Father does: He waits for us, rushes to embrace us at the first sign of our return, and floods us with His divine grace so as to restore us as we once again walk on the road to the heavenly Jerusalem.

Reconciliation

In our relationships with family members, friends, and others, we sometimes experience hurt and resentment. Sometimes, due to our own selfishness or neglect, we hurt other people. If we hurt people by our wrongful actions, we have the responsibility of trying to make up for our offences against them and seek to be reconciled. Re-establishing our relationships with others is known as reconciliation.

Sin Is a Disease

Physical diseases weaken the body and can even lead to death. In a similar way, sin is an illness of the soul. Over time sin will:

- weaken our desire for prayer
- draw us away from loving God
- impair our ability to judge rightly
- make us self-centered
- enfeeble our will to do good and reject evil
- enslave us to our passions
- aggravate emotional and physical ailments
- lead to self-hate and self-destructive behavior
- deprive us of life in the Kingdom of God forever

Christ is the Healer, the Divine Physician

Christ once healed a paralyzed man (see Mark 2:1-12) who was brought to Him on a stretcher by his friends. The man's

paralysis prevented him from walking and from doing things for himself. Christ healed the man in the sight of many people. The Lord told them that just as He had the power to restore the man's body, so He had the power to restore His soul by the forgiveness of sins.

Christ Saves Us From Sin

At the Mystical Supper on the evening before His death, Christ said that His body would be broken for us and His blood would be shed for us - for the remission of sins. By His resurrection, Christ grants life to those who were dead in sin.



On the evening of His resurrection, Christ made His Apostles the ministers of pardon and reconciliation and granted them the power to forgive sins in His name (John 20:19-23). This same ministry of the Apostles is continued in the ministry of the Church's bishops and priests. Saint John Chrysostom said:

"Priests have received a power which God has given neither to angels nor to archangels. It was said to them: 'Whatsoever you shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever you shall loose, shall be loosed.' (Matthew 18:18) . . . 'Whose sins you shall forgive,' he says, 'they are forgiven them; whose sins you shall retain, they are retained.' (John 20:23). What greater power is there than this? The Father has given all judgment to the Son. And now I see the Son placing all this power in the hands of men."

(*On The Priesthood* 3:5 [A.D. 387]).

Saint Paul the Apostle said that God has given the ministry (service) of reconciliation to the Church (2 Cor. 5:17-20). One of the primary ways the Church fulfills this ministry is through the Mystery of Repentance, or Confession.

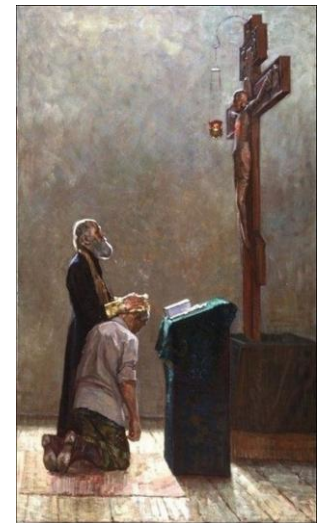
Mystery of Metanoia

Metanoia is a willful change of mind, intention and way of acting. It is humbly returning to God. One way we express metanoia is through the prostration or metany (metania). Metanoia or repentance is a process. There are several important elements in this process of healing and reconciliation:

- **God's Initiative:** Repentance begins with the **impulse of God's grace within us**. Although fallen and wounded by our sins, God still loves us and draws us back to Himself.
- **Compunction:** To be **pierced in spirit**. It is heartfelt and sincere sorrow for sins committed knowingly and unknowingly. (The word contrition, to be crushed in spirit, is also used to express this sorrow).
- **Confession:** **Disclosing or admitting one's sins** to a priest, in a spirit of humility and honesty, to receive forgiveness from God.
- **Work(s) of Penance:** Meant to be **therapeutic works prescribed to counter the sinful passions** to which we are prone.
- **Absolution:** **To be released from sin**. After hearing our confession, the priest says the prayer of absolution, granting the forgiveness of sins in the name of the Lord.

Preparing to Make Our Confession

In the Mystery of Repentance, we return to God with humbled hearts. Like the prodigal son, we confess that we have strayed and done wrong. And just as the prodigal son's father forgave him and embraced him with love, so God pardons us and restores our relationship with Him. Before confessing our sins, we first pray to the Holy Spirit to help us know our failings. Then we reflect on what we have done in our lives - in our words, deeds and thoughts. Having sincere sorrow for our sins, we form an ardent desire and intention to avoid these sins in the future.



We confess our sins. He is faithful and just and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. (1 John 1:9)

would gain fame as the only Catholic bishop in a heavily Catholic country to publicly defend the Jews throughout the Tiso era. He was condemned by the secret police for it.

Unlike any of the Latin bishops, he went right up to a deportation train in the Prešov rail yard. Holding a baptismal certificate for Erica Fleischer, the bishop convinced the Hlinka Guards to free the entire extended family. He and Vojtech Kolenka helped the Spitzer family find refuge; ten lives were saved. Erika Kardoš testified that the bishop personally saved nearly three dozen people. The secret police complained about the bishop's actions in Michalovce at a large baptismal ceremony for Jews. After his arrest by the communists, several Jewish survivors tried to submit testimony on his behalf to save him from prison.

Arrest, Torture, and Abuse By Communists

Violent attacks against him took place in the press and radio, accusing him of espionage and treason. When a false sobor (council) was forcibly attended by clergy and laity on April 28, 1950, a mob of Orthodox collaborators went to the cathedral, broke open the doors and stormed inside. Gojdič was arrested on charges of "opposing the will of the people."



He was offered money and the post of "patriarch" of the Orthodox Church of Czechoslovakia. To all of it he replied quite bluntly, *"I am already 62 years old, and I am sacrificing all my property and residence, but I will not betray my faith under any circumstances, because I want my soul to be saved."*

In prison he was subjected to physical and psychological torture, forced to stand or walk for hours on end. He had to write his biography with the interrogators' questions and desired answers by heart, and was denied food and sleep. He was beaten with closed fists, and electrocuted with iron rods put in between his fingers. He continued to pray, unmoved by his suffering.

He was isolated from other prisoners, especially priests or Catholic laity. When in forced labor he prayed with inmates, shared his rations, and helped the sick. He managed to celebrate the Divine Liturgy using prison bread with wine made from fermented raisins, and a spoon for a chalice.

A Special Gift at Death

Gojdič prayed that he would begin his heavenly life on his birthday, absolved by a priest. A fellow prisoner testified that the bishop died on his birthday, July 17, 1960 after absolution by a priest-prisoner. Bishop Hopko wrote in a letter smuggled out of prison: *"We no longer pray for him, we pray to him ... When it is possible, the world will know whom it condemned."*

He was beatified by Saint John Paul II on November 4, 2001, and declared a Righteous Gentile by Israel in 2007 for his rescue work on behalf of the persecuted Jews.

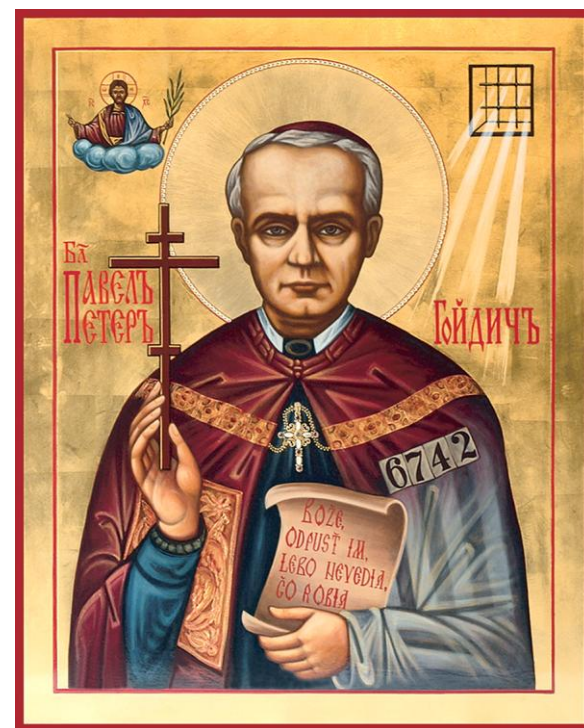
Written By Very Rev. Christopher Zugger

Prayer for the Canonization of Blessed Pavel Peter Gojdič

Heavenly King, Comforter and Spirit of Truth, You poured divine love into our hearts in order that we may love one another as we love ourselves. With that same love, You inspired Your faithful servant, that Man of Charity, Bishop Paul P. Gojdič to practice Christian charity to a heroic degree, making him a model of charity. To prove his heroic love of his people he chose to become a prisoner of Christ and offered his life for them. Encouraged by that love, O gracious Lord, we humbly implore You and glorify Your loving servant, Bishop Paul, and through his kind intercession grant that ... (here make your request). For You, O gracious Lord, are the treasury of blessings and deserving of all my love, now and ever, and forever. Amen.



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The Life of Blessed Martyr-Bishop Pavel Peter Gojdič (1888 - 1960)



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Peter Gojdič came from a long line of priests on both sides of his family. He was a good student, cheerful, and excelled at gymnastics. Neighbors later spoke of how as a boy he would spend time praying at the village crucifix and in the church. He had to go to the Greek Catholic Boarding School in Prešov to finish his education in his fourth year. There he was given his first

prayer book, in which he wrote down his goals of the spiritual life: *Humility of the heart; Constant prayer; Versatile in penitential practices; Surrender to God's will; Satisfaction in God's will.* These hallmarks remained with him until his death.

He was sent to the theological faculty in Budapest in 1908. When the time came for ordination to diaconate, he surprised his family by declaring himself as a candidate for the celibate priesthood as he wanted to give himself entirely to God.

Priesthood

He was soon marked for a successful career in the Church. In 1919 he was named the chancellor for Prešov eparchy and was already being spoken of as a future bishop in the new country of Czechoslovakia.

In 1922, he shocked the clergy and his family when he gave up all talk of a career and entered the Basilian Order, which had begun a major reform of its life and work. He entered the Saint Nicholas monastery in Mukachevo in the humble roles of being a postulant and then a novice, just as any beginner in the ascetical life would. He wrote to his parents that he most definitely did not want the episcopal rank or the office of a Canon, as he saw himself as being unworthy. He was given the name Paul in 1923 as a professed monk; he now bore the names of the two great apostles.

He soon proved himself a successful and popular missionary whose sermons inspired wavering Greek Catholics to stay in their Church and new Orthodox converts to return to it. To his own dismay, Paul Peter was named the apostolic administrator of the eparchy; he arrived in Prešov in 1927, still hoping that he could avoid this burden. In his homily he emphasized that he had not sought out this office, and that he came to serve as *"a doctor for your wounds ... your teacher of truth and interpreter of the joyful gospel... I will try to be all things to everyone."*

On March 25, the feast of the Annunciation, he was consecrated bishop in Saint Clement Basilica in Rome and Pope Pius XI received the young bishop in an audience in which he exhorted Bishop Gojdič to stand firm, prophetically telling him, *"do not hesitate, if need be, to shed your own blood in defense of the Holy Union."* In yet another symbolic moment, the pope presented Bishop Gojdič with a metal cross to wear, as a sign *"of all those heavy crosses that the good Lord will deign to place upon your shoulders."* The bishop wore that cross until his arrest in 1950 and often meditated on that prediction while he was in prison.

Spirituality

"How happy I am that I can belong entirely to God!"

As a seminarian in Budapest, he spent much of his free time praying in the chapel before the Eucharistic Christ. This became a daily practice until his arrest in 1950. His life of prayer and fasting fortified him for the fierce struggles he would endure. While working in his office, he was known for taking breaks from his routine to pray silently in church in front of the Most Holy Eucharist. He recited the Office of Matins and the Hours and made a point of reciting the Holy Rosary every day, usually all fifteen mysteries. At night he made a long visit to Christ in the Eucharist again before retiring at midnight.



Slovak Nationalism and the Greek Catholic Church

Czechoslovakia was much more religious than Bohemia, with a vibrant Catholic Church, both Greek and Latin, along with strong Lutheran and Reformed Churches, and religious Jews. Father Andrej Hlinka founded the Slovak People's Party which carried 40% of the Slovak vote. Priests were active in the party, which called for greater autonomy for Slovakia and an end to Prague's anti-Catholic attitudes. The slogan "One God, One People, One Party" reflected Roman Catholic beliefs mixed with a worsening authoritarian trend after the Munich Crisis of 1938 which destroyed the Czechoslovakian state. A radical, anti-Jewish wing began looking to Nazis in Germany despite Nazi persecution of the Catholic Church and Pope Pius XI's fierce condemnation of the Nazis in 1937. Father Josef Tiso became the leader of both the HLS'S and Slovakia.

The new state closed the 65 Ruthenian-language grammar schools, the Eparchial high school, and all Ruthenian-language publications, both secular and religious, were forbidden. Slovak priests were encouraged to denounce Gojdič as favoring the Ruthenian identity or language.

Defending the Rusyns

"... the majority of my faithful, the Ruthenians, have no one to defend their national, political and cultural interests."

Throughout the war years and under the communists, Gojdič defended the Ruthenian schools, use of Church Slavonic in worship, and tried to protect Rusyn civil servants from dismissal or forced removal to other areas. He was thoroughly disliked by the new

government, and this was made known by suspension of priests and reduction of salaries for the Greek Catholic clergy, propaganda that the bishop impeded the growth of the Slovak nation, and pressures on the eparchy's Teachers' Academy to use only Slovak and recruit only ethnic Slovaks. To relieve pressure on the eparchy, on November 22, 1939, the bishop informed the Slovak government that he was submitting his resignation to Rome. The Holy See intervened, however, and on July 19, 1940, the pope named Bishop Gojdič as the Ordinary of the Prešov eparchy. When he was enthroned on August 8, the government officials and Roman Catholic bishops boycotted the services.



Saving Jews

The Holy See refused to open a nunciature in Bratislava after the collapse of Czechoslovakia. Instead, the pope sent a *chargé d'affaire*, Msgr. Giuseppe Burzio Burzio, who would figure prominently in publicizing the truth about Auschwitz and interventions for the Jews of Slovakia. The state deported 69,000 of its Jews to their deaths in Auschwitz; the Greek Catholic Church energetically resisted and saved at least 1,500 Jews.

Gojdič protested the persecution of the Jews and personally intervened in rescuing many from deportation and death, inspiring priests, sisters, and laity to do the same. Gojdič

Prague Spring 1968

An attempt to bring about “socialism with a human face” launched a rapid de-Stalinization of the country. There were high hopes for liberalization and freedom for political prisoners, including restoration of the Greek Catholic Church. Through the help of some of Hopko’s former students, the Communist Party asked for the formal recognition of the Greek Catholic Church.



It was in this atmosphere that 132 surviving Greek Catholic priests and sixty-six laypeople met in Kosice at Hopko's request. When he entered the assembly, the survivors recognized him as bishop.

An Action Committee was founded under Bishop Hopko's leadership, but with Father Jan Murín as the chairman, a Slovak

nationalist. The Vatican was informed that the laity regarded Hopko as their legitimate leader. However, some Slovak Greek Catholic clergy refused to have an ethnic Rusyn as the bishop.

Thwarted Restoration

On August 20, 1968, the Soviet Union invaded Czechoslovakia. The Prague Spring was crushed, but the restoration of the Greek Catholic Church continued. When the Action Committee had its first meeting since the invasion, Bishop Hopko expressed his frustration with the Slovak nationalists' continued opposition. At a time when the Church needed unity under the threat of suppression, nationalism was wreaking havoc.

Hopko received permission to go to Rome in December. When he met with the pope, Hopko was greeted warmly. But at the airport, Hopko was given a sealed letter in which the Vatican declared that Hopko was to serve as Auxiliary Bishop, and Father Jan Hirka, an ethnic Slovak who had also suffered for the Faith, was Apostolic Administrator. On May 13, 1969, the feast of Our Lady of Fatima, Hopko issued a pastoral letter calling on everyone to accept Hirka as administrator.

As the ordaining bishop for the eparchy of Prešov, he ordained many priests. Despite his worsening health, the bishop continued to do parish visitations and consecrated newly-built Greek Catholic churches, and held no anger against any of those who had persecuted him. In his bed on his last day, he murmured to the Sisters that he was going home. "You are home" they told him. "Eh, you do not understand," he replied. He died quietly shortly thereafter, on July 23, 1976.

When his body could be examined in the 1990s, it was discovered that he had 100,000 times the safe limit of arsenic accumulated in his bones because of the communists' poisoning. On the feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross, September 14, 2003, he was beatified by Saint John Paul II in Bratislava as a martyr.



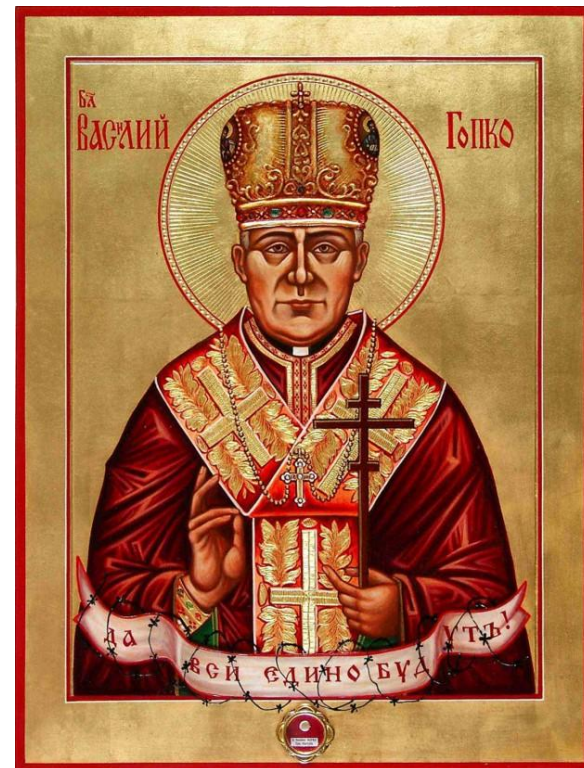
Written By Very Rev. Christopher Zuger

Prayer for the Canonization of Blessed Basil Hopko

O Christ, our Lord and Savior, in Your boundless love for the human race, You assured us that whatever we will ask You, You will do it for us. Encouraged by your living promise, we humbly ask You to glorify Your faithful servant, Bishop Basil Hopko, who by his trials and tribulations gave living testimony to his complete trust in You, hoping to receive from You “a great reward in Heaven”. Inspired by his trust in You, we humbly implore you to hear our prayer, and through the intercession of that Man of Hope, Bishop Basil, grant us... (here make your request). For you, Christ our God, are Help to the helpless and Hope to the hopeless, and we render glory to You with Your Eternal Father and All-holy Spirit, now and ever and forever. Amen



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The Life of Blessed Martyr-Bishop Basil Hopko (1904 - 1976)



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Blessed Basil Hopko was a priest of the eparchy of Prešov in Czechoslovakia, who was dedicated to the missions of strengthening the faith of the Byzantine Catholics; producing materials for evangelization; serving the poor during the Great Depression; helping Jews facing Nazi persecution; rejecting racist ideology; and combating all

attempts by the communists to lead the Byzantine Catholic Church away from unity with the Pope.

Background

Basil was born into a peasant family in 1904 in the Rusyn village of Hrabské in northern Slovakia. His widowed mother emigrated to America and sent money to young Basil's grandparents to care for him. Later he was taken in by his uncle, Father Demeter Petrenko, whose spiritual example and kindness profoundly affected Basil, who decided to apply to the eparchy of Prešov in 1924.

In 1925 the young man was summoned for military service. When he was stationed at the barracks in Prague, he would gather the Greek Catholic recruits every Sunday morning and take them to the Divine Liturgy at Holy Cross church. Being far from home, searching out fellow Greek Catholics, and finding consolation in a strong spiritual life helped him greatly when he was assigned as the pastor in Prague.

Priesthood

After his ordination in 1928, Hopko was assigned to Prague, the capital city of Czechoslovakia. By 1930 there were over 12,000 faithful registered with the parish, a mix of Ukrainians, Rusyns and Slovaks. He strove to deepen their faith and emphasized the need for the different ethnic groups to cooperate to have a flourishing parish and build up the Body of Christ.

Hopko's relations with the local Latin Church helped secure the gift of the church of Saint Clement in 1931 from the Archdiocese of Prague, and a second Greek Catholic parish was founded in Brno. Unfortunately, ethnic tensions resulted in most of the Ukrainians boycotting the services until a Ukrainian priest came. Hopko himself established as his motto for the parish "*I did not come for Russians, nor for Ukrainians, nor for Ruthenians, but for Greek Catholics*".

Hopko had written in the Prešov eparchy's journal that chauvinism and nationalism were the main enemies of Christian love. Nationalist chauvinism would unfortunately cause him many difficulties.

His energetic work resulted in his being recalled to Prešov in 1936 to serve as the spiritual director of the seminary. He transmitted lessons of pastoral work to the seminarians, who noted that he spent more hours in prayer in the chapel than he did in his own room. Union with God, he told them, had to be the foundation of their future work and of their personal development.

Wartime Service and Trials

In 1938 the Munich Crisis resulted in the collapse of Czechoslovakia, becoming a quasi-independent republic and an ally of the Third Reich. Slovakia eventually betrayed most of its Jews by sending them to death camps, and the new regime persecuted non-Slovak minorities. The state ordered the removal of Hopko from his positions as Spiritual Director of the seminary because he was Rusyn.



Bishop Peter Gojdich named Hopko as the professor of moral and pastoral theology in 1943 for the seminary, but he was denied his salary by the state. He continued his work for the Church and as secretary to Gojdich. Throughout these terrible years, Hopko remained at the bishop's side and collaborated in his work for the Jews and against the Nazis. In addition, he produced many books and pamphlets defending the Catholic Faith and explaining the Byzantine Rite, kept by the believers as religious guides during the long years of persecution.

Bishop

In 1945 Czechoslovakia was occupied by the Red Army, and the Communist Party was given great influence. That included steadily worsening conditions for the Catholic Churches, and growing support for the Russian Orthodox Church. Gojdich applied to the Holy See to have an auxiliary bishop appointed in 1947. Pope Pius XII chose Hopko. His episcopal motto "*That all may be one*" was aimed at healing the ethnic divisions in the eparchy along with the hope of the return of Orthodoxy

and Catholicism, but his consecration as bishop was opposed by some of the Slovak clergy. He and Gojdich agreed to focus their efforts on the religious education of the young and apologetics against atheism, and they poured their energy into publications and pastoral visits around the country.



Communism and Persecution

They were arrested in 1950, and the state suppressed the Byzantine Catholic Church. Hopko was locked into a dark cell in solitary confinement, and forced to spend four days and nights standing, with no rest. His legs ballooned in size due to swelling. He was given one piece of bread and one glass of water per day and was forbidden to sit or lie down for 122 days. While walking he repeatedly prayed, "*Dear Savior, I love you. Give me more and more love.*" Hopko spent over thirteen years in a series of prisons.

When he was not subjected to isolation or interrogation, he was put to work at harsh and menial tasks. The demands were absurdly high, so that the prisoners could never meet them and thus be accused of sabotage. Prison survivors emphasized that no matter what he was doing, he was constantly praying. He made a point of forgiving the guards, his interrogators, the torturers, and those who betrayed him. He never demanded revenge, nor even ordinary justice for all that he suffered. He had diabetes, asthma, clinical depression, and he was secretly poisoned with arsenic.

At Osek

On May 12, 1964, the communist authorities released Hopko early from prison; his physical health was in serious decline, and his emotional state was fragile. They did not want him to die in prison, fearing adverse publicity in the West. He was sent to Osek, a concentration camp monastery in Bohemia filled with 300 Czech, Hungarian, and Slovak Roman Catholic nuns and Sisters. They took Hopko in with great kindness and slowly nursed him back to health. They conducted a novena to Our Lady of Lourdes on his behalf, and on the last day he suddenly improved. Since he spoke all three languages, he was able to serve as their confessor and spiritual director.

The most telling evidence comes, ironically, from the Soviets' own secret police. They denounced him publicly as not only a bishop, but also as leader of the Catacomb Church. There was a cash reward of 500 rubles for his capture, dead or alive. While several underground priests were murdered in hospitals or staged traffic accidents, Oros was shot publicly in the street by a policeman. It was a shocking and unique execution: the young bishop was feared by Moscow.

Martyrdom

When the Soviets began pressuring priests to sign to join the Orthodox, Petro Oros firmly refused. He told the parishioners in Bilky that while he would give his body to the state as a martyr, they could never have his soul. He also predicted to the clergy, his relatives, and his helpers that he would be shot by the Chekists.



He was captured several times and taken in for interrogation, with demands that become Russian Orthodox. He suffered psychological and physical torture, so much so that people who were children then still remembered as adults his sunken eyes and bloodied feet and hands.

When the bishop was captured in May 1953, he was told that times had changed. Interrogators came and asked questions about the differences between the Catholic and Orthodox Churches, what was Confession, what is the Eucharist. Oros himself told the Sabov family *"I held a retreat for them ... they didn't beat me"* and he began a novena for his deliverance. The local KGB told him to apply for a Soviet passport, get his photo taken for it, and that he would be able to give up his hidden life. They even gave him a letter stating that he could travel openly and no longer had to hide.

Unfortunately, he did not know that orders had been given at a higher level to have him assassinated. On August 28 Bishop Petro was denounced at a train station and a policeman, Povshyk, arrested him. When they reached a wayside crucifix, the bishop knelt at the cross and asked that the officer allow him to finish his journey to anoint a dying man. Sensing danger, Oros took out the pyx and consumed the Holy Eucharist. The killer pulled out his gun and shot Oros in the neck, piercing the artery. He then walked behind Oros and shot him in the back of the neck.

In Irshava the police shoved the body into a shed. For three nights people heard the voice of Oros chanting the Liturgy. Only after 1991 did secret police officers confess that they buried his body under layers of concrete because they could not stand the sound of that voice. Our second bishop-martyr was only thirty-six years old, the same age as Bishop Romzha when he was killed. On September 27, 2025, Petro Oros was beatified in Bilky where he served, mere miles from the spot where he was martyred.

Written By Very Rev. Christopher Zugger

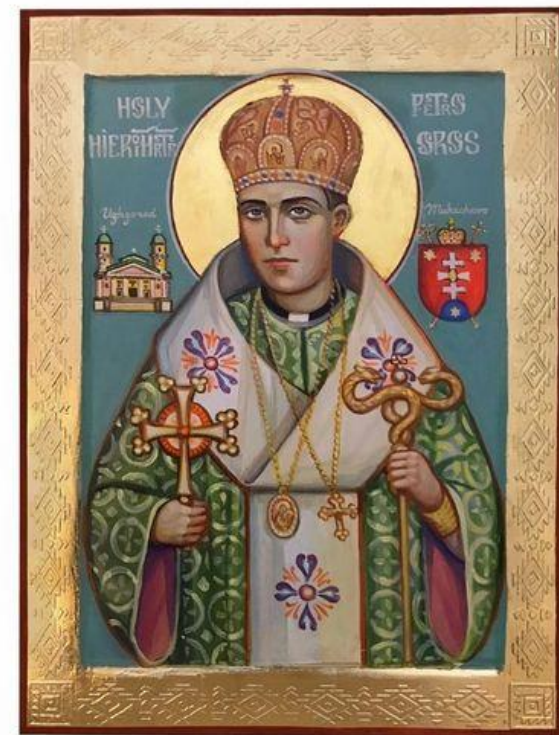
Prayer for the Canonization of Bishop Martyr Petro Oros

**O Lord Jesus Christ! We praise You and thank You for
deserving Your faithful servant, Bishop Peter, to give one's
life for the Catholic faith. For Your greater glory, for the good
of souls, for the increase of faith in our people, glorify Your
faithful servant, Bishop Peter, and grant us that grace for
which we so fervently ask You
(make your request) through his intercession.**

Our Father; Hail Virgin Mother; Glory.



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The Life of Blessed Bishop-Martyr Petro Oros (1917 – 1953)



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Born into a priestly family in 1917, Petro Pavel Oros had a challenging life. His father died in 1918; his mother remarried but died in 1926. After their stepfather remarried, the new wife did not want the Oros boys, and they had to move in with relatives in another region, only to have their uncle die. Finally, the boys settled with the Sabov family, with whom they would remain. They were

treated as equals to the rest of the large family.

Like Theodore Romzha, Oros was an enthusiastic athlete and excelled at soccer. As a priest, he encouraged the villagers to keep up their physical health and he himself served often as a referee at games, wearing a white shirt with his black priest slacks.

Spirituality

Petro chose to be ordained as a celibate priest in 1942, despite his own family's long history of married priests. Petro chose celibacy as part of his dedication of his entire self to God. The people preserved their memories of the young martyr-bishop. They describe how his baritone voice filled their church, how devoutly he recited Psalm 50 while doing the incensing, and how people would crowd into services because of his preaching. Fifty years later, they could describe how devoutly he offered the services. In violation of Soviet laws, he gave religious instruction to the children. He lived in poverty and gave of himself as much as he could.

There were signs of divine protection over him. He crossed high-running streams but arrived on the other side completely dry and had no memory of going through the water. When Oros was celebrating the Liturgy in a church once, the two people present saw the sanctuary filled with angels who descended in response to the bishop's prayers. Oros carried a large icon of Our Lady of Czestochowa with him that he would set up on the table being used for the Liturgy in different homes. There were occasions when that icon, venerated in a dark house, shone brightly.

Once he had to cross the Borzhava river at night. He could not find the safe ford and tried to cross over. Suddenly he was

caught in a powerful current. Despite his own strength, he was soon drowning, water was pouring down his throat. He cried out, "Holy Mother of God, save me!" At that moment, the water receded, and he found himself on the shore. He reached inside his shirt, and the little image of Mary was not only safe but dry, as were the items for the Liturgy he kept there.

Mother of God

His Marian devotion was quite strong. He always kept a little icon of Our Lady on his person, next to a small epitrahil that he used for confessions.

After 1945, people lamented that the visible structures of the Church were being destroyed, but he always told them that the actual Church would survive. There would be fewer believers he predicted, but they had to put their confidence in the intercession of the Mother of God.

While walking from village to the village at night, he had to be very careful that he was not seen. On all these walks he would recite the Holy Rosary, putting his trust in Mary's motherly protection. For one who had lost his mother at a young age, he had a heavenly Mother in whom he had full confidence.

Charity

The phrase "he'd give you the shirt off his back" quite literally applied to Father Petro. He was famous among the villagers for literally taking off his clothes to give to the poor. As Soviet rule hardened, more and more people were pushed into poverty, and so there were always more recipients of his charity. He gave away his food to workers and the poor, and mothers in the villages warned their children not to accept treats from their priest because he was starving himself.

Like Bishop Romzha, Oros served all people. He spoke Magyar and Rusyn perfectly and was one of the few underground priests who could minister effectively among the Hungarians, Rusyns, and Ukrainians. He wanted to serve all those who were loyal to the Catholic Church.



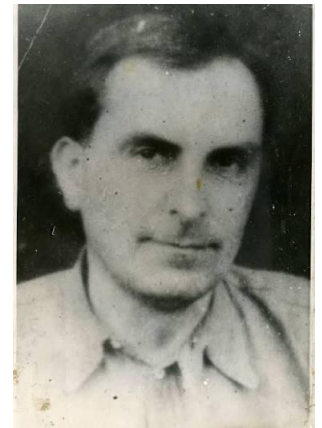
Ascetical Life

During his underground years, the young bishop fortified himself with ascetical practices. He ate only once per day, in the morning, to strengthen his soul. He kept the Holy Eucharist reserved in his room in the mountains after he began his underground life and spent hours in silent adoration and prayer. After his execution, witnesses saw the hard callouses that had formed on his knees from all his kneeling. Christ's cross and the protection of Our Lady were the spiritual bases for his career as a clandestine missionary.

During his last imprisonment in 1953, he was kept at Uzhhorod city jail for nine days. He made a novena for his release and subsisted on water and tea for the entire time as an act of penance.

Was He a Bishop?

There have been debates about his episcopal consecration, because there were no written records. Bishop Khira mentioned to another prisoner that he was consecrated alongside another priest in December of 1944. A letter to the Russicum in Rome in late 1947 confirms that two consecrations were done by Romzha.



Underground priests and their families testified to his episcopal authority. His own sister, Elizabeth Dudynska-Sokach, affirmed that he was consecrated by Romzha in December 1944, and it was common knowledge among the local people. In 1946, Father Petro consecrated a church; this ceremony could only be done by a bishop. Bishop Petro sent out written "epistles" that were read at gatherings of underground clergy. These assigned priests to different areas and gave instructions as to how to celebrate the Sacred Mysteries in their catacomb existence. In his own handwritten book of prayers, the last entry, from 1953, was signed by Oros with a cross in front of his name, which only a bishop can do. The L'viv Institute for Church History lists Oros along with four other titular bishops who were secretly consecrated.

Martyrdom



After three years of increasing persecution, confiscation of churches and institutions, arrests and murders of priests, threats against Romzha's life and even foreign radio broadcasts announcing his

death, the Soviets decided to eliminate the last known Greek Catholic bishop in 1947. In October, Romzha was promised that he would become the Orthodox archbishop of Mukachevo, with an Orthodox metropolitan province created for him to lead, if only he would sign the papers and officially convert. Romzha refused, but this time he was told, *"In two weeks' time, you will be killed."*

On October 27, 1947, an "accident" was staged in which a Red Army truck plowed into a carriage carrying the bishop and three companions. When the truck was following them, he pulled out his rosary and began to lead his companions in prayer. It was at the seventh Hail Mary of the last decade that the truck sped up and rammed through the carriage. Said a witness, *"I will never forget that day. The bishop's head was next to the front wheels of the truck – it stopped right there. It was a miracle ... they were stabbing and beating all of us – they didn't want anyone to live."*

Soldiers beat Romzha and the victims with iron rods, until they were suddenly interrupted by local farmers and a mail truck. With that, all of the soldiers fled in a waiting jeep. The victims were rushed to Mukachevo in the mail truck and taken to the city hospital. After surgery on his broken jaws and ribs, the public announcement was made that the bishop would live. Sister Teofilia was assigned to care for him. Father Daniel Bachinsky was in a coma in the same room. In a true Christian spirit, Romzha said of his attackers *"Whoever they might be, I forgive them."* After his surgery, he asked for his rosary, which Sister Teofilia returned to him, after she washed off the blood that had soaked it. He immediately took it, kissed the crucifix, and began praying.

That Romzha would live was unacceptable to Moscow. An agent was brought into the hospital. With the connivance of a communist doctor this agent injected him with poison late on October 31. When Sister Teofilia forced her way back into the

room, the bishop was dying, murmuring the name of Jesus. Bachinsky had awakened and reported what happened. Huge crowds attended the martyr's funeral.

Within two years, the Byzantine-Ruthenian Catholic Church of the USSR was a catacomb Church, leading a hidden life. But in 1990 as restrictions began to lift towards the end of Soviet rule, the Church reemerged into public life, to the surprise of many and as a result of the example of Romzha.

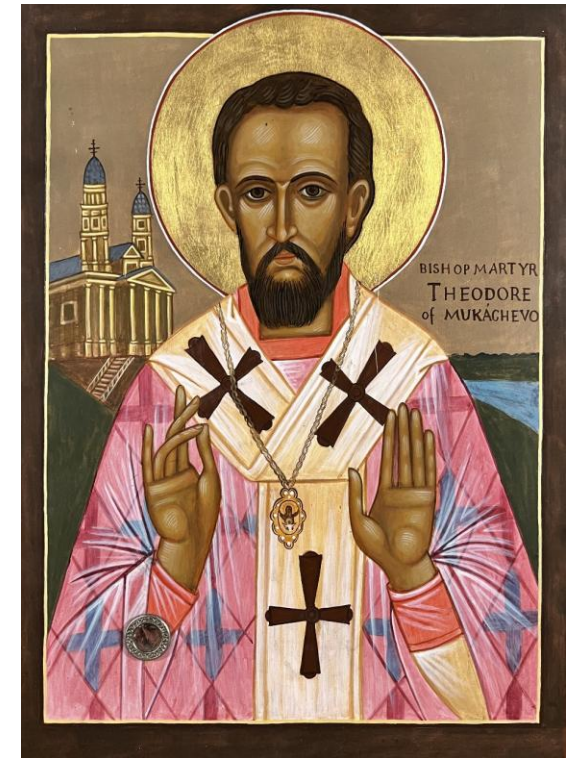
Written By Very Rev. Christopher Zugger

Prayer for the Canonization of Blessed Theodore Romzha

O gracious Lord, in Your infinite goodness You have given us a fearless Bishop, Theodore G. Romzha, who by his uncommon courage, sufferings, and violent death gave a heroic witness to his unshakeable Faith and inspired our people to hold fast to their Faith in time of persecution. Therefore, we humbly beseech You to glorify Your faithful servant, that Man of Faith, Bishop Theodore, and to strengthen our Faith by granting us through his kind intercession . . . (here make your request). For you are a merciful and gracious God, and we render glory to you, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, now and ever and forever.
Amen.



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The Life of Blessed Bishop-Martyr Theodore Romzha (1911 – 1947)



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Those who knew Blessed Theodore Romzha often said: *"If you met Romzha, you had met Christ."* Also repeated by priests and laypeople alike was: *"Without Romzha's example, there would be no Greek Catholic Church today."* He was martyred at age thirty-six, serving as bishop for just over three years.

At his consecration on September 21, 1944, he was the youngest Catholic bishop in the entire world, only thirty-three. For his motto, he chose from the Divine Liturgy: *"I love You, O Lord, my strength and my rock; You are my stronghold and my refuge!"* (Psalm 18: 1-2).

At the time of his appointment, the Soviet Red Army was crossing through the Carpathian Mountains, and the territory of the eparchy of Mukachevo was becoming a bloody battleground. Within days of the Soviet arrival, pressure began on him and every priest to convert to the Russian Orthodox Church, under tight control of the Soviet state. "Visits" to interrogation sessions were constant, as was police surveillance. Churches were attacked, priests murdered or beaten, people harassed, and buildings assigned to the collaborating hierarchs of the Moscow Patriarchate.

Origins

Born into a working-class family in Velykyi Bychkiv in 1911, in the eastern Máramaros region, young Theodore George Romzha was an avid athlete who excelled at soccer, volleyball, skiing, and climbing the Carpathian Mountains. The area was home to Rusyns, Romanians, Jews, Germans and Hungarians, so he grew up in a multi-lingual world. He worked hard on his parents' farm after school hours and during his vacations from boarding school.

He was known for his beautiful singing voice, and he served with the cantors as a teenager. In addition to his native Ruthenian dialect and Hungarian, he quickly learned Czech, Latin and French at the boarding school in Khust. While his teachers thought he would go into engineering or the military, Theodore applied to the Mukachevo seminary. Recognizing his abilities, the bishop sent him to Rome where he entered the Gregorian in 1930.

Desire For the Salvation of Souls

In 1934, Theodore chose to transfer to the Russian College, or Russicum. This had been founded to train future priests who would cross into the hostile Soviet Union to do clandestine missionary work among the persecuted Catholics. Students learned how to counter communist dialectics, celebrate in the Byzantine-Russian Rite, and face imprisonment or martyrdom. Theodore had a great desire to see Orthodoxy and Catholicism reunited, and to save souls from atheistic communism.



After serving in poor mountain villages around Nizhni Bistri, the young priest was called to Three Holy Hierarchs Seminary in Uzhhorod as a spiritual director and professor. He was a well-liked teacher and had a good reputation among the faculty and students. He did not get angry with the young men and urged them to learn the truths of the faith well so that they could explain them to the laity. Those who were ordained in 1939-47 as priests said that his personal teachings sustained them throughout their priesthood, including in prison camps and underground ministry. The young men saw him as an extraordinary figure who they quickly incorporated into their membership as a father and a mature friend who loved them. During the ongoing political crises of 1938-1944, there were episodes of ethnic animosity, but for Romzha, the most important factor was unity as Catholics.

Devotion to the Mother of God

At the seminary he celebrated the Moleben to the Mother of God every evening in May, and he was devoted to the Rosary. This is notable, since he was a stickler for following the traditional rubrics of the Byzantine-Ruthenian Rite, and not popular latinized customs. But he wanted the seminarians to have a strong devotion to Mary, and he respected these devotions as being dear to the hearts of ordinary people and as instruments of evangelization. Pope Pius XII nominated Romzha as bishop on the Feast of the Nativity of the Theotokos, 1944.

The messages of Fatima (1917) were well-known in pre-war Czechoslovakia, as was the fact that the Soviet Union absolutely forbade any mention of the Fatima apparitions. Romzha consecrated the eparchy to the Immaculate Heart of Mary on May 13, 1946, the twenty-ninth anniversary of the first Fatima apparition. *"To your Immaculate Heart, we present and dedicate ourselves, O Mother of Mercy. Ask the Lord for mercy that will move the human heart"*, and he specifically prayed for the return of those who had abandoned the Faith. *"Return to the one Church of Christ those who have been torn away from it by errors or strife ... Awaken in the faithful a love for purity and a life worthy of Christians ..."*



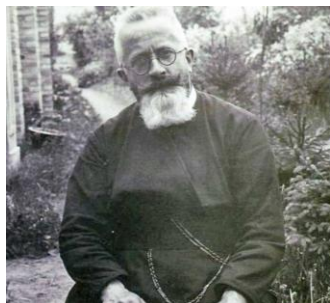
As the bishop, Romzha was "invited" to the Soviet secret police offices repeatedly after the annexation of the territory to the Soviet Union in 1945. These "visits" were really interrogations. After one such "visit" the young bishop came

out, pale and soaked in sweat, his hair plastered to his head. When two older priests inquired as to what had happened, he would only say that it was purely through the protection of the Blessed Virgin that he was able to resist.

Loyalty to the Holy See

Romzha knew that Soviet persecution would be aimed directly at the Greek Catholics, and that the members of the Church must be strengthened in their faith. He traveled to every one of the 495 parishes to encourage the clergy and people to remain in the Catholic Church and resist all enticements to join Moscow. When clergy or laity would waver in the face of persecutions, he would repeat to them, *"Faith is our greatest treasure on this earth. To preserve our faith, we must even be ready to lay down our life. If we must die, then let us die as true martyrs, defending our faith. One thing is sure that we never will abandon our faith nor betray our Church."* He prophesied that he would die rather than apostatize from the Catholic faith. At every sermon he led the people in a renewal of their baptismal promises and concluded with his mission motto, *"To die for Christ is to live forever!"*

that had windows that opened into the hallways. Trčka was sitting by such a window on Christmas Eve, and there he committed his final “crime”: humming a Christmas carol, *Vo Viflejemi*. A passing guard recognized the tune and denounced him. He was thrown into the punishment cell, a room so small that one could not lie down in it, with a bucket as a toilet, completely unheated, with a concrete floor and a concrete block. The window was thrown open, and the priest could not close it. The only sustenance was a little bit of water and a small piece of bread every other day. He was left there to starve and to freeze, and he contracted a fatal double pneumonia.



Finally he was moved to a “regular” solitary confinement cell with the privilege of a straw mattress and a wooden floor. A jailed student obtained some penicillin for him and tried to get him to the hospital for antibiotics and decent food,

but the warden refused repeatedly. As the old priest was dying, he consoled the student by telling him that he forgave those who had done this to him. Finally Trčka was moved back to the “Vatican” where he continued to suffer. In the evening of March 23, 1959, his death agony began, with four elderly priests attending him. He died that night.

Prague Spring

When the Greek Catholic Church was partially restored in 1968, permission was obtained to move his remains to the cemetery in Michalovce. Stories about his ministry and suffering kept his memory alive among the people, and he was revered as a martyr. In 1990, Czechoslovak Communism went to the grave. He was beatified on November 4, 2001, by Saint John Paul II at Saint Peter’s in the Vatican.

In his homily, Saint John Paul II said:

“Indeed, the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost’ (Lk 19,10)... Bishop Pavel Peter Gojdic and Redemptorist Father Methodius Dominic Trčka, today proclaimed Blessed, profoundly shared the saving mission proclaimed by Christ in the passage of the Gospel of Luke. They passed through the same sufferings on account of their fidelity to the Gospel and to the Successor of Peter and now they share the same crown of glory.

“...Methodius Dominic Trčka also passed his life in the service of the Gospel and of the salvation of his brothers and sisters, even to the supreme sacrifice of his life... With the support of prayer he faced with courage and determination the suffering and humiliation he had to bear on account of the Gospel. His calvary ended in the prison of Leopoldov where he died worn out by suffering and sickness, forgiving his persecutors.

“...By their example and their powerful intercession they announce the salvation that God offers to humanity in Christ. Let us learn from their witness so that we may serve God in a ‘praiseworthy way,’ walking without obstacles toward the promised goods. Amen!”

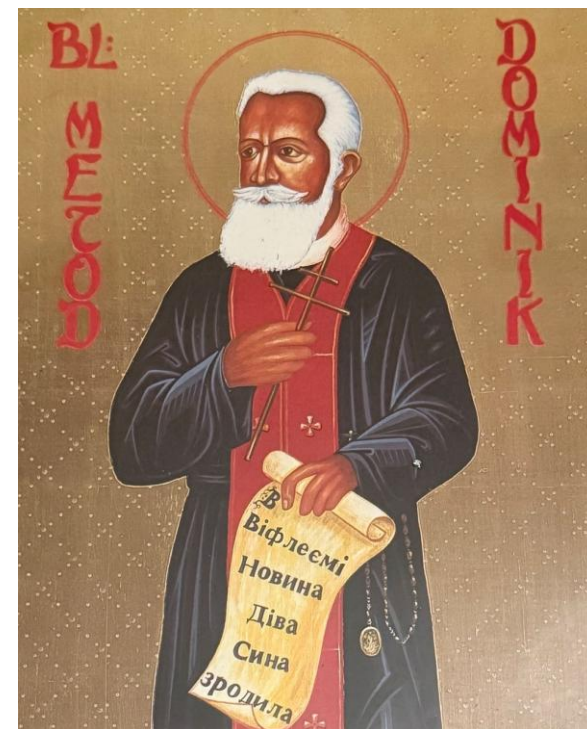
Written By Very Rev. Christopher Zugger

Prayer for the Canonization of Blessed Dominic Methodius Trčka

O God, strength of the weak and support of the suffering, through the intercession of the blessed priest and martyr Dominic Methodius Trčka, whom you endowed with firm faith in exhausting trials and terrible sufferings, we beseech you, grant us also the courage of faith, make us worthy to defend the truth of the Gospel and to attain joy and sing to you for all eternity, beloved Father. Grant to us through his intercession (here make your request) For you are our God and we give you glory with your only begotten Son and your most holy Spirit, now and ever and forever. Amen.



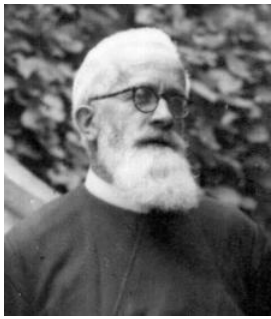
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Byzantine Catholic Eparchy of Phoenix
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The Life of Blessed Martyr Dominic Methodius Trčka (1886 - 1959)



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Byzantine Catholic Eparchy of Phoenix
Department of Religious Education



Born into a Roman Catholic family in 1886 and ordained in 1904 as a Roman Catholic priest, Father Dominik Methodius Trčka became an enthusiastic Byzantine Catholic. His heroic work as a Redemptorist priest-missionary inspired members of his community and many secular priests and believers to remain faithful to the Holy See despite

communist persecution.

He entered the Roman Catholic minor seminary when he was just a boy, in sixth grade. He took his vows in 1904 and soon became inspired by the idea of the reunion of the Catholic and Orthodox Churches. In 1910 he was ordained a Redemptorist priest. The outbreak of the Great War in 1914 caused great hardship in Austria-Hungary. Young Trčka worked among Greek Catholic Rusyns displaced by the fighting and so encountered the Ruthenian Church and the Byzantine Rite.

Meeting the Greek Catholics

In 1919, he took the name Methodius, in honor of the great missionary to the Slavic nations and completely abandoned the Latin Rite. *"I thanked God for the grace to be allowed to offer the New Covenant Sacrifice in a Slav language and to be able to sacrifice myself for the Unity [of Churches]."*

He came to eastern Czechoslovakia, establishing a foundation for the Redemptorists at a ruined church in Stropkov in 1921. The Stropkov monastery originally contained both Latin and Greek Catholic clerics, but in 1931 a purely Byzantine branch of the Order was founded at Michalovce. These Redemptorists were dedicated to not only the Greek Catholics but hoped to enter the Soviet Union as missionaries. Since that was not possible, they focused on serving in the three Ruthenian eparchies: Mukachevo, Prešov, and Križevci. Their preaching missions included sermons for an entire parish, as well as others aimed at people of all ages. Although the monks were well educated, they did not talk "down" to the village congregations and used the local languages in their sermons and confessions.

In 1935 Trčka was named the Apostolic Visitor to the Basilian Sisters in Czechoslovakia, and in 1936 he became the Superior for the new Greek Catholic monastery at Michalovce. There he built a church and worked with the Rusyn population, a practice which would cause him grief.

Slovak Republic (1938 – 1945)

The highly nationalistic government attempted to expel the Redemptorists because they were mostly Czechs who also supported of the Rusyn people against forced Slovakization, and soon because of rescue work that they conducted among Jews in 1940-44. Father Trčka tried to step aside from the public eye in 1942 to reduce the amount of pressure from the Slovak state on his Order. Bishop Gajdich held baptism ceremonies for Jews at the Michalovce monastery, which were condemned by the secret police. Trčka also worked with Father Teodor Prislak in creating forged baptismal certificates to save Jews from deportation.

Postwar



With the restoration of Czechoslovakia in 1945, the pressure was off the Redemptorists. In December 1945 the Order established the Michalovce Greek Catholic Vice-Province and in March 1946 Trčka was

named as the superior. The community expanded its work in preaching missions in the parishes, promoting a publishing apostolate, and as communist propaganda increased, focused on encouraging Greek Catholic young people to hold to their faith. The future seemed bright, until the communist takeover.

The new communist regime began "inspections" of the monasteries of the Greek Catholic Church in July 1948. These were viewed with great foreboding. Trčka's attempts to negotiate with the authorities in both Prague and Bratislava failed. The regime intended to destroy all monastic life in the entire republic. Secret policemen began recording sermons, and since he was the superior Trčka was hauled off for interrogations and accused of allowing the pulpits to be used for anti-state sermons. Once again, the Redemptorists were in the line of fire from a hostile regime.

Prison and Martyrdom

In Operation K on the night of April 13-14, 1950, all monasteries were raided, and the priests and brothers were put into different concentration monasteries. They only had on their shirts and pants, not even shoes. A survivor later wrote, *"Added to it was the atrocious interrogation day and*

night with all the psychological and physical coercing (brutality) ways and means, which the modern communist criminology had at its disposal... In every moment, you wished you were dead instead of living." Throughout seventy days of torture, survivors emphasized that Trčka kept up a spirit of good humor and tried to give small gifts to those being transferred to other prison sites. Others said that to protect his confreres Methodius would take the blame and calmly endure torture.

In Podolinec prison, the priests began to celebrate the Divine Liturgy. This was difficult though for the Redemptorist superior, as he could be called in at any time for more interrogations. At every call, he would simply sigh, "Lord, here I am" and then walk to the waiting car. In 1951 he was moved to Bratislava. Conditions were a little better in terms of food and being given blankets, and they were even given fish on Christmas Day. The priests were not kept together, so it was dangerous to pray out loud, and they had to pray the Office from memory or the Rosary and whispered their confessions. It was here that Father Trčka took onto himself all the suffering destined for his confreres. He continually told the interrogators that as the superior, he oversaw everything and therefore was responsible. After his conviction in 1952 of trumped-up charges of espionage on behalf of the Vatican, he was sentenced to twelve years in prison as a "reactionary priest."



He was now much weaker, but he managed to celebrate the Liturgy frequently. He wrote to his relatives for prosphora and raisins to make wine. On April 22, 1958, he was moved to Leopoldov prison and put into a cell in the section for priests known as "the Vatican" at age 73. Because "the Vatican" used to be a dormitory for guards, the cells were former rooms