



FULLY ALIVE

A Bishop Velychkovsky Martyr's Shrine Publication

GIFTS FROM UKRAINE

Encounter in the Mountains

By Fr. John Sianchuk, C.Ss.R.

This past fall we again went on a fact finding mission to Ukraine, searching for living witnesses of our Blessed Martyr Vasyl Velychkovsky. As we have often experienced in the past, the hand of God's providence guided us and led us to discover some precious people who knew Blessed Vasyl personally and who shared their stories with us. Such is one story from our trip.

This saga began several years ago, when we received news from a Canadian priest that he was in the Carpathian Mountains and found a Fr. Ivan, who had on his finger a ring which he had received from Blessed Vasyl. He was from a village named Rossohach somewhere in the mountains. Fr. Ivan was an Orthodox priest. Although, I was glad when I received this news for perhaps there would be a story, at the same time, it seemed to me very unlikely that I would ever meet him. It would be like finding a needle in a haystack. I put this project on hold, believing that it would be a waste of time to look for a priest no one knew, in a small village, which is not even on the map and in the Carpathian Mountains where there are thousands of villages and hamlets.

This fall I began taking this quest seriously and with Mary Jane, the Shrine Administrator, began asking questions. There were three villages named Rossohach in Western Ukraine. Only one was in the mountains, but it could not be found on the detailed maps that I had. One Saturday, we were on our way to visit an orphanage (that we have been sup-

porting) south of the city of Strij. This orphanage is at the very edge of the Carpathians. We were quite disappointed upon realizing that on Saturday many of the students would be home and not at the school. However, this was the only day that Sister Julia, SSMI could go. On the way there, we mentioned to Sister Julia about finding Fr. Ivan. Upon arriving at the orphanage, we spoke with the staff about the where-

this was the way to Rossohach and the locals would say - "just go further in". We finally reached Rossohach and asked a woman whether she knew a Fr. Ivan. She said yes, but that he lived in Skole (some 30 kilometers back from where we came). However, he would come to this area on Saturday afternoons for the weekend services and would stay in the next village. We travelled on and the road got worse and more abandoned.

Reaching the village, we again stopped and asked the local villagers. They were not sure if Fr. Ivan had arrived, but if he did he would be staying in a house up the road. This last road, we had to walk because a car could not travel on it. Finally, we arrived at a house, knocked on the door, and to our surprise Fr. Ivan answered. We knew that Blessed Vasyl guided us to this place.

After we introduced ourselves, he welcomed us in and with great enthusiasm, he vividly began to share with us his experience of Blessed Vasyl.

It was back in the early 1960's, the Catholic Churches in the town of Skole had already been confiscated by the Soviets. The Ukrainian Catholic Church became an Orthodox Church. Since Fr. Ivan was then a cantor, he had the keys to the church. Blessed Vasyl would travel occasionally to Zakarpatia (Transcarpathia) by train to do his



Fr. Ivan Batkovsky, pastor of Rossohach

abouts of Rossohach. One of the staff members knew where this hamlet was and gave us directions.

With a photo of Fr. Ivan in hand, we took the challenge to go and find him. At first we traveled through the mountains down one of the best roads in Ukraine, and then unto a narrow paved road deep into one of the mountain valleys. As we progressed further into the mountains, the paved road turned into a gravel road, with plenty of pot holes. The very picturesque mountain valley became narrower and inhabited with the poorest of people. The gravel road became a dirt road. Every so often we would stop and ask if

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ministry. On his way, Blessed Vasyl would stop off in Skole for a rest and to celebrate the Divine Liturgy. The cantor Ivan would open the door of the former Ukrainian Catholic Church, let Fr. Vasyl in, and then lock the door behind them both. Blessed Vasyl then celebrated the Divine Liturgy, while Fr. Ivan would cantor for him. Fr. Ivan would go to Blessed Vasyl and make his confession. Fr. Ivan described Blessed Vasyl as a very good confessor, one who was sensitive, gentle, firm and compassionate. They had opportunities to speak together about church affairs and ecumenism. Fr. Ivan saw in Blessed Vasyl a holy man of God and a man of great courage. At the end of one of his confessions, Blessed Vasyl gave him a ring with the image of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Fr. Ivan has worn this ring ever since that



Fr. Ivan received this ring of the Mother of God from Blessed Vasyl

time. This by itself is a great testimony to Fr. Ivan's respect and devotion for Blessed Vasyl. Fr. Ivan told us that he prayed to Blessed Vasyl every day for the needs of the church

and to help him to be a good priest. Blessed Vasyl celebrated the Divine Liturgy in this church in Skole on five occasions. Fr. Ivan was called to become a priest in 1968 for the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Kyivan Patriarchate. He has been serving those two remote villages ever since his ordination.

What a joy it was to meet a man who loved Blessed Vasyl so much! What a joy for Fr. Ivan to receive holy cards, medals and third class relics from us! As we drove away, we became very much aware of God's hand which guided us to meet Fr. Ivan and to hear his story. Had this not happened on a Saturday afternoon who knows if we would have ever been able to meet Fr. Ivan. Our four years of waiting were not in vain. May God be praised for the wonderful work He does through his saints!

A Treasure from Vorkuta

When news came almost eight years ago that Blessed Vasyl Velychkovsky would be beatified, we began to make plans for the construction of a shrine and a museum in his honour. With very little knowledge about Blessed Vasyl or his life story and circumstances, we began reading about him and inquiring about him from people who knew him in Canada. One story that came down to us caused us great sorrow and sadness.

We heard that when Blessed Vasyl arrived in Canada, at one of the banquets at which he spoke, he had shown to the people a lid of a jam jar, which he had used as his chalice in his last imprisonment. This lid was mentioned by Metropolitan Hermaniuk in his eulogy at Bishop Vasyl's funeral. As we began to search for this lid/chalice, we discovered that it was placed in an unmarked box in a museum storage room. In this room there were many other articles that were not part of a museum collection. When people were cleaning this room, unknowingly they discarded this precious jam jar lid. Thus we lost a very precious relic of Blessed Vasyl – the "chalice" he used during his three-year imprisonment in Kommunarsk prior to his exile to Canada. Nothing could replace that relic, or so we thought.

This past fall, while in Ukraine on our second last day of our mission, we (Fr. John and Mary Jane) heard some wonderful news. There existed a

spoon that Blessed Vasyl used as his chalice during his first imprisonment (1945-55) in Vorkuta, north of the Arctic Circle. This large soup spoon was broken into two pieces, the stem and the scoop. Both were used during the Divine Liturgy; the scoop as a chalice and the stem as a spoon to distribute the Eucharist. After returning from Vorkuta and settling in Lviv, Blessed Vasyl gave this spoon/chalice to a Basilian Sister, Sr. Innokentia. She worked very closely with Blessed Vasyl and was his "secretary". She kept these precious items safely throughout the time of the persecuted underground church. In the early 1990's, Sr. Innokentia met a young priest, Fr. Ihor Tsar, who had a great devotion to our martyrs/confessors of the faith and in particular to Blessed Nicholas Charnetsky and Blessed Vasyl Velychkovsky. In fact, long before they were proclaimed as Blesseds, Fr. Ihor was spreading devotion to them among the faithful. He was particularly impressed with the life of Blessed Vasyl, as it is recorded in Fr. Stefan Bachtalowsky's book. Seeing this devotion, Sr. Innokentia, who was already up in years, gave these precious relics to Fr. Ihor.

After a museum was created in Lviv to display articles related with Blessed Nicholas Charnetsky and other Redemptorists, Fr. Ihor passed on the scoop/chalice to the Redemptorists. Unfortunately, it was placed in an archive room and was "lost" or forgotten. This fall Fr. Ihor presented us with the stem of the spoon/chalice for our mu-

seum. Within a day we were able to find the other part of the spoon. We now have this precious treasure in our museum.

Blessed Vasyl offered the Eucharist on this spoon when he himself was suffering the cross, sacrificing his life for the faith. He offered the Eucharist on this 'chalice' in the dark coal mine shafts in the middle of the night. He offered the



Blessed Vasyl used this holy spoon as his chalice during his imprisonment in Vorkuta.

Divine Liturgy on his bunk bed in the barracks in the early hours of the morning. This spoon was his whole church. Through Christ who was offered on it, Blessed Vasyl received his strength to endure all and to courageously continue to witness Jesus to the prisoners and to the guards. It was the source of his strength and of his faith. Now, as we gaze upon this holy spoon, we can contemplate those moments when Blessed Vasyl silently celebrated the Divine Liturgy.

THANK YOU!!!

Your generous donations make it possible for us to conduct our ministry at the Shrine and to promote the knowledge of Blessed Vasyl throughout the world. Thank you to all the contributors to the Bishop Velychkovsky Martyr's Shrine. May Blessed Vasyl bless each one of you.

Contributions listed below are from September 1st until November 30th, 2008

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Our 25th Wedding Anniversary

Rev. Dc. Stefan & Maria Tyrawski

Please consider Bishop Velychkovsky Martyr's Shrine when planning your estate. This will help to secure the future of this ministry. Thank you.

A SPECIAL GUEST FROM UKRAINE



Fr. Boris Gudziak, with Olga Zarichynska, a student from the Lviv University visit with Mary Jane at the Shrine.

Our Shrine was honoured with a visit from Very Reverend Boris Gudziak, the rector of the **Ukrainian Catholic University in Lviv, Ukraine**. This was Dr. Gudziak's first visit to the Shrine. When the Ukrainian Catholic Church was freed from the underground in 1991, Dr. Boris Gudziak went to Ukraine and began organizing an institute of higher learning for theology students. This institute grew in stature and has recently been given the status of an accredited university. This unique institution is invaluable for the life of the whole Ukrainian Catholic Church. Beginning in those early years, Fr. Boris began organizing interviews with people from the underground church. Very little was written down from that period, so the only sources of history were these living witnesses. To date they have made thousands of interviews. We have been able to benefit from his work in our research on the life and actions of Blessed Vasyl Velychkovsky, especially about his activities in the underground Church. We are very grateful to Fr. Boris for his help in furthering our research on this very timely topic and wish him God's blessing as he continues his ministry.



Fr. Boris interpreting some of the mysterious documents in the museum

Please notify the Shrine of any graces received through the intercession of Blessed Vasyl.

VELYCHKOVSKY PILGRIMAGE TO UKRAINE

July 6 to July 28, 2009. Visit and pray at the sites in Ukraine where Blessed Vasyl lived, worked and suffered. Total cost: \$3800. For more information e-mail: bvshrine@mts.net

SHRINE SCHEDULE

Monday: Shrine is closed
Tuesday to Friday: 10 am to 5 pm
Saturday: 10:00 am to 1:00 pm
Sunday: opened until 1:00 pm

Shrine is open to the faithful during the times of Liturgical Services. The Museum is opened on weekends after each Divine Liturgy.

Group tours are available.
For pilgrimage group tours call for reservations
204-338-7321 or e-mail: bvshrine@mts.net

EVERY WEDNESDAY EVENING 7:00 pm
Liturgical Service to Blessed Vasyl
(Acathist or Moleben) followed by an anointing with Holy Oil blessed by his relics.

Prayer to Blessed Martyr Bishop Vasyl

*O Lord God, You are praised by the whole world for the marvelous works in your saints. I thank you for the grace you gave to **Blessed Martyr Vasyl Velychkovsky** to be a faithful witness to You unto the point of death. Through his intercession I ask for the following favour _____ for your Name is glorified forever. Amen.*

Please inform the Shrine of any favors received:
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*Wishing all of our supporters and their families
a blessed Christmas and a peaceful and healthy New Year*

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