



# FULLY ALIVE

A Bishop Velychkovsky Martyr's Shrine Publication

## WITNESS TO THE ABANDONED

### Reflections on Prison Life and Blessed Vasyl

The Association of Religious in Manitoba [ARM] represents nearly 500 Catholic religious sisters, brothers and priests in Manitoba. In October 2011, ARM sent a letter to Prime Minister Stephen Harper challenging Bill C-10, the "Safe Streets and Communities Act" crime bill. ARM suggests that "it is naïve to hope that society will be better protected by warehousing offenders away for longer periods. We believe that we will be safer when the emphasis of our criminal justice system is not on separation but on rehabilitation and healing. For both offenders and their victims, healing cannot be achieved through punishment alone." The following is a reflection offered by Fr. Larry Kondra, C.Ss.R. on the ARM letter in light of Blessed Vasyl's heroic witness.

The letter from ARM to the Prime Minister offers us a number of important learnings:

First, the letter offers us the point of view of those with first hand experience of ministering in our prisons and in the justice system. Who else would know what it is really like? Which would we trust more - an opinion based on real experience or one based merely on political ideology?

Secondly, in our context this evening, it calls us to be mindful of Blessed Vasyl's years in prison. There were many kinds of people in those prisons. Some fell into despair; others were heroic in the sacrifice & love shown to others. How

did Blessed Vasyl treat those around him, both the innocent and the guilty?

Thirdly, and most importantly, the letter offers us a larger view that emanates from the Gospel of Jesus. Jesus is the Redeemer. In the Old Testament the word for redeemer is "goel." The "goel" is the one who comes to save me in my "imprisonment" be it physical, emotional, or spiritual. Blessed Vasyl did that for those with whom he shared the experience of incarceration. He was being Jesus for those most in need of "plentiful redemption."



A prison in the Russian gulags similar to that where Bl. Vasyl was incarcerated.

The letter identifies the vocation of Consecrated persons as one of "walking with marginalized groups and with people suffering broken spirits." This most clearly and certainly includes people in our public jails today. In Redemptorist language, our vocation is found among "the poor & most abandoned."

The letter challenges an unfortunate attitude in our society today: When a person is proclaimed criminal, we seem to stop seeing him/her as a human being made in the image of God. The letter also challenges our attitude toward victims, as if they are healed and all is made "okay" by simply know-

ing that the perpetrator is punished! Whatever our own attitude is, it reveals to us what work we yet need to do on our own journey to holiness.

There are 3 things in our culture today that touch all of us and seem to go hand in hand: *Secularism, individualism and fundamentalism*. These are very good at convincing us that religion is only about inner consolation and private, personal salvation. These make it difficult for anyone to imagine that God could have a plan that includes "more than me and my self-serving interests." The fact is God does have a big plan and it includes those we often least expect.

The ARM letter speaks of the need for healing, both on a personal level and in the context of community and relationships. It suggests that if we paid better attention to this context of community & relationships, then we could actually prevent some of the personal damage individuals experience and therefore, the need for personal healing later in life would be less. Our Catholic and Redemptorist tradition teaches that conversion is a process that takes place in the context of community.

Was not Blessed Vasyl's confrontation with the civil authorities of his day & age also about prevention and the community? Whether it was marching in the streets of Stanislaviv accompanied by 20,000 people with the Icon of

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Bl. Vasyl on death row in Kyiv

Our Mother of Perpetual Help or going face to face with the KGB, it represented a clash between 2 kingdoms: Atheistic communism & its injustices & inequalities and the Church and the values of God's kingdom it represents. Blessed Vasyl stood on the front lines to prevent the spread of atheism AND to defend a rich tradition of a faith community

that holds human dignity & freedom in high regard!

We are called to do the same in our own time and in our own place in new and creative ways appropriate for today!

Dorothy Day is someone else who has and continues to inspire me. She was the co-founder of the Catholic Worker movement. Dorothy spent much of her life among the poor in the inner cities of the United States. She is also being promoted for sainthood.

Here's what she says: *Whatever I had read as a child about the saints had thrilled me. I could see the nobility of giving one's life for the sick, the maimed, the leper. But there was another question in my mind. Why was so much done in remedying the evil instead of avoiding it in the first place? Where were the saints to try to change the social order, not just minister to the slaves, but to do away with slavery?*

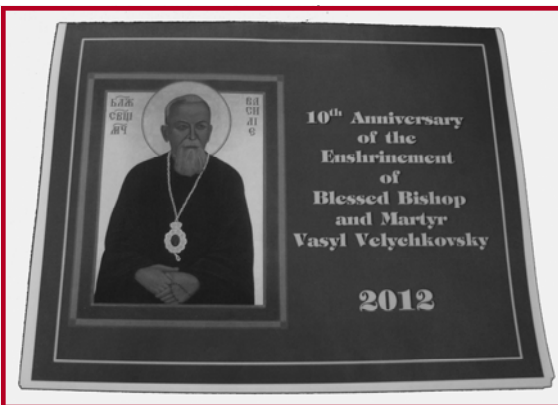
In our North American culture today, it is more likely that the practise of charity or even religious ceremony will be met with indifference rather than persecution or martyrdom. However, asking the tough questions, like Doro-

thy did, that seek truth and justice stands a better chance of getting us into hot water... this is the road less travelled that leads to the clash of kingdoms today.

When members of our Redemptorist General Council came to visit us in the spring, they told our Provincial council that *the message* of Blessed Bishop and Martyr Vasyl's life is bigger and more important than his tomb. They said that our first task is *to be the instruments* through which Blessed Vasyl's life *speaks the gospel of Jesus* in today's world! A gospel that challenges the status quo & the ideologies of the day!

According to Pope John Paul II, not every holy person is made a saint; the important thing is to see if this holy person really speaks the gospel in today's age and in our case, in Canada & North America. Blessed Vasyl is not a gift simply to individuals but to a community. As a community we need to listen deeply, to pray, to read the signs of the times, to learn the language of our culture and then to articulate that message both in word and action.

## NEW ANNIVERSARY SHRINE CALENDAR



2012 marks the 10th Anniversary of the Enshrinement of the holy relics of Bishop Vasyl Velychkovsky. To commemorate this milestone, the Shrine has produced a colorful 2012 calendar. Each month features a different important event in the Bl. Vasyl's life. It is also a church calendar following the Gregorian (New) calendar and includes the saint of the day and the readings. This calendar is available from the Shrine Office at a cost of \$6.00 plus shipping and handling. Please call 204-338-7321 or email: [info@bvmartyrshrine.com](mailto:info@bvmartyrshrine.com)

## Inviting Young Adults: BL. VELYCHKOVSKY PILGRIMAGE TO UKRAINE 2012

**August 20 - September 5**

Visit the cities and villages where Bl. Martyr Vasyl lived, worked and suffered. Some of the places we will be visiting are: Lviv, Ternopil, Ivano-Frankivsk, Kovel, Kamianetz Podilsk, Kyiv, the Carpathian Mountains, Zarvanytsia, Pochaiv, etc. On this pilgrimage we will have prayer services and hear stories of Blessed Vasyl's life as well as sight-seeing throughout Ukraine. **Cost is \$3600 CDN** which includes: flights from Winnipeg to Ukraine and back, bus travel in Ukraine, accommodations, meals and attractions. Travel/medical insurance not included. For more information contact by e-mail: [bvshrine@mts.net](mailto:bvshrine@mts.net) or phone 204-338-7321. **Book as soon as possible** as space is limited to 16 pilgrims.

# 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, 2011

- 500+**  
In memory of Hnat Pisiak, Pisiak parents,  
Zawada parents, & Michael Zawada  
*Sophia Pisiak*
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*Alexander and Olga Boychuk*

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

# SHRINE PILGRIMS



Visitors from Wisconsin seek Bl. Vasyly's intercession for their friend



Shrine Volunteers listen to a presentation during an appreciation evening



Confirmation Class from St. Nicholas Croatian Catholic Church



Archbishop Albert LeGatt, D.D. of St. Boniface Archdiocese and Fr. Rick Ginter from Indiana



Participants of the Welcome Home "Come and See" Weekend

## 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](mailto:bvshrine@mts.net)

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

## Prayer to Blessed Martyr Bishop Vasyly

*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 Vasyly 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:  
 Bishop Velychkovsky Martyr's Shrine  
 250 Jefferson Avenue  
 Winnipeg, MB R2V 0M6  
 Canada  
 Tel: 204-338-7321 or e-mail: [bvshrine@mts.net](mailto:bvshrine@mts.net)

*Wishing all of our supporters and their families a blessed Christmas and a peaceful and healthy New Year*

**Bishop Velychkovsky Martyr's Shrine**  
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