



FULLY ALIVE

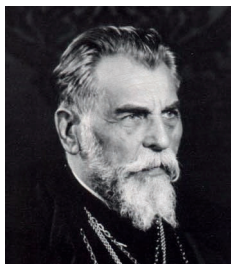
Bishop Velychkovsky National Martyr's Shrine

THE STORY OF A BISHOP'S STAFF

Bishop and Martyr Vasyl Velychkovsky's story was little known. We can learn about his early years from Redemptorist archives, annals, letters, newspaper articles, and the like. However, much of this precious information was destroyed when western Ukraine came under Soviet rule. Churches, archives, and records were also destroyed and forever lost. The Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church was declared illegal in 1946. Even keeping records of important information became dangerous.

After Blessed Vasyl was beatified and his Holy Relics were transferred to St. Joseph's Ukrainian Catholic Church in Winnipeg, Manitoba, the staff from the Shrine began to travel to Ukraine seeking to find more information about him from witnesses and perhaps documents. Much has been found, but still much more will someday be revealed. Such is the story of his bishop's episcopal staff.

In our first years of interviews, we heard from Sister Mykola, who cooked and kept house for Bishop Vasyl, that she was present when he received a note in 1963, through the Sisters, from Metropolitan Josyf Slipyj that Fr. Vasyl should come to Moscow immediately, to Hotel Moskva, and bring empty luggage, for he had something to pass on to him. The 'empty luggage' meant bringing an open heart. Fr. Vasyl left what he was doing and immediately travelled to Moscow. Secretly, in that Hotel room, Metropolitan Josyf ordained Fr. Vasyl Velychkovsky to the episcopacy and gave him authority over the Church in Ukraine. The Metropolitan was released from eighteen years of imprisonment to attend Vatican II and would not be returning to Ukraine. As a sign of Bishop Vasyl's authority over the Church, Metropolitan Josyf passed onto him a simple wooden walking staff, primitively crafted, bearing a roughly made curved eagle's head on top attached with small nails. When Bishop



Metropolitan Josyf
Slipyj

Vasyl returned to his apartment in Lviv, Sister Mykola was there. Showing her this simple walking stick, the Bishop asked her: "Do you know what this is?" She replied, surprisingly "a Bishop's crozier."



Over the years, many interviews followed - approximately 40. We asked everyone whether they had seen that Bishop's staff. No one had seen it. We were getting discouraged that we would never find it. Blessed Vasyl had different plans. At the end of our second year of interviews, we were told to see Sister Yustyna. Some encouraged us, while others discouraged us. It was a very busy year. We were trying to restore Blessed Vasyl's apartment. In the last week of our research visitation (we were leaving Lviv early Friday morning), a friend from the Historical Institute at the Catholic University called me to come to her office on Monday where she showed me a volume of KGB files on Blessed Vasyl. I was very excited.

However, I had no time to peruse them then, so I said I would come back later. On Wednesday, we were cleaning Blessed Vasyl's unfurnished apartment when I got a frantic phone call from that person to come see the files. The files would be placed in a secret archive and would be difficult to access. I hurried over there and began to read and make notes. One name kept popping up. Julia Tverdohlib, 7 Kutuzova St., Lviv. I asked the historian if she knew the person or the place. The answer was no. The street name had changed, and she did not know the new name.

On Thursday, I spent the morning delivering the original furniture back to Blessed Vasyl's apartment.

Mary Jane, my co-worker, was running other errands. We took the afternoon off since it was our last chance to do some personal things before we left for Canada early the next morning. However, at 2:30 pm, I received a phone call from Mary

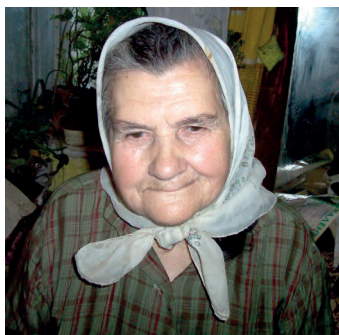


Blessed Vasyl's apartment

Jane that a certain Sister had been waiting to give us her interview. I travelled the half hour to the monastery and interviewed her. At the end of the interview, Sister gave me a small book of addresses of people

we should interview. We saw most of the people; however, the last name was Sister Yustyna and in brackets (Julia Tverdohlib). I immediately went to the other Sisters to ask them to take us to her place. They were too busy and refused. We had no other choice. We planned to see the newly furnished apartment, do some shopping, have supper, and rest for the morning trip. When we arrived at Blessed Vasyl's apartment, we realized that we had forgotten the camera back at the monastery. We returned to the monastery, only to be invited to have supper since it was all ready. We changed our plans and had supper at the Sisters. We had barely finished supper when a person walked through the door and said: "Oh, you are still here. I just returned from Sister Yustyna, and she is waiting for you." Quickly, we followed her to Sister Yustyna's place. It was a very precious interview.

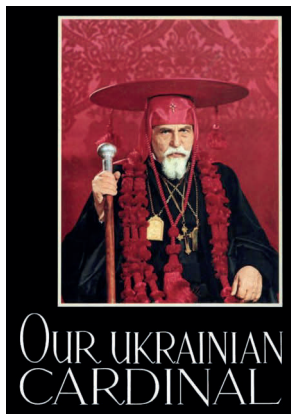
Sr. Yustyna shared how she was a very close collaborator with Blessed Vasyl. Retreats were held in her home. She sewed priestly and episcopal vestments for him. She made antimensons for him (a cloth placed on every altar where a Divine Liturgy is celebrated). She kept religious supplies at her place and saw him very often. After he was released from his second imprisonment in 1972, she travelled to Kyiv and spoke with him before his exile



Sister Yustyna

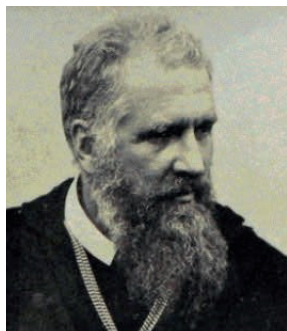
from Ukraine. She had been personally interrogated and imprisoned for the items found in her place by the KGB. In the end, I asked her if she ever saw the bishop's stick (staff) that he received from Metropolitan Slipyj in Moscow. With a smile on her face, she related that when Blessed Vasyl returned from Moscow, he gave her that ordinary stick for safekeeping. She placed it in her closet. When the KGB raided her place, they simply ignored it as ordinary and insignificant. After the Church was freed in 1991, she passed this bishop's staff to a Redemptorist priest, who later gave it to Bishop Kurchaba. By the time of this interview, both these people had already died. I knew who had Bishop Kurchaba's items but it was too late to contact them. I had to wait two years before I returned, approached that priest and received this precious relic. Fr. Michael, who had the staff, had no idea of this item's importance, its origins, or that it was given to Blessed Vasyl when he became a Bishop. It is now in our museum in Winnipeg. It could have been lost forever, but God wanted us to find it.

This past year, in April, I received a commemorative booklet marking the occasion of Metropolitan Josyf Slipyj being elevated to Cardinal. The booklet was called "Our Ukrainian Cardinal," written in 1965. It includes an article written in 1962 by Rev. Meletius Solowij, OSBM, published on the 70th birthday of Cardinal Josyf, at the time still



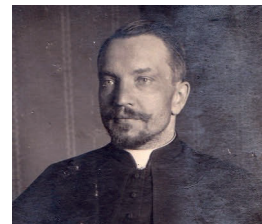
Metropolitan and prisoner.

Upon reading it, I discovered some precious information. In 1939, Lviv, Ukraine, found itself under Soviet occupation. Metropolitan Andrey Sheptytsky, together with Bishop Chametsky and Bishop Budka, secretly ordained Fr. Josyf Slipyj to the episcopacy in the Metropolitan's Chapel on December 22, 1939. As a sign of Archbishop Josyf's authority, Metropolitan Andrey passes on to the new Archbishop an ordinary stick, not the episcopal crozier. *"The staff of a bishop-martyr which he received at his consecration was perhaps prophetic of the sufferings that he was to bear. It was an ordinary stick, previously given by Metropolitan Sheptytsky to Bishop Josyf Botsian at the latter's consecration in a Russian prison in 1914."* (taken from *Our Ukrainian Cardinal*)



Metropolitan Andrey Sheptytsky

The Russians arrested Metropolitan Andrey and Fr. Josyf Botsian when the war broke out in 1914. While in prison together in Kyiv, the Metropolitan secretly ordained Fr. Josyf as Bishop of Lutsk and gave him a simple walking stick as his episcopal staff. Bishop Josyf was sent to Siberia, while in 1917 Metropolitan Andrey returned to Lviv. Later, Bishop Botsian returned to Lviv and, in



Bishop Josyf Botsian

1924, was named auxiliary Bishop of Lviv. Bishop Botsian ordains Blessed Vasyl as a priest on October 9, 1925.

Could the staff in our museum be the same staff (stick)? It is highly likely that it is the staff from 1914, perhaps older. Archbishop Josyf Slipyj could very well have kept this staff throughout his imprisonment, knowing its historical importance and its importance to him, since it was the physical sign of his authority as head of the Ukrainian Catholic Church. He could easily have used it as a walking stick and thus maintained possession of it. In the same above-quoted article, it also describes, from a fellow prisoner, that one day Metropolitan Josyf was taken from them. They thought that perhaps he would be freed. Then all of a sudden he was allowed to come back to the barracks to take his stuff. Surely, he would not allow this precious staff to be lost in some prison camp. On

February 3, 1963, Metropolitan Josyf secretly ordained Blessed Vasyl to the episcopacy in a Moscow hotel and gave him authority over the Ukrainian Catholic Church in Ukraine. Blessed Vasyl was given the same title that Bishop Botsian had, the Bishop of Lutsk and was given the same episcopal staff, his walking stick.

The wonders of God's providence!!!

Article by Fr. John Sianchuk, C.Ss.R.



EXTRAORDINARY WITNESS FROM UKRAINE

On the first Sunday of July, on the Feastday in honour of the Icon of Our Mother of Perpetual Help, I thanked God for being able to come to Lviv and attend the Divine Liturgy at the Church of Blessed Mykolay Charnetsky with my three children. My two eldest sons had a strong desire to serve at the Divine Liturgy. I thank the Redemptorist Fathers for encouraging and allowing the young boys to serve. For me, this was a special opportunity to attend the Divine Liturgy inside the church; otherwise, when the younger children are with me, they prefer to stay in the church courtyard.

During the sermon, Fr. Ihor Pavlii spoke to the children about the icon of Our Mother of Perpetual Help. I learned a great deal of new information and realized how little I actually knew about this icon. I felt a strong desire to learn more. I shared this with a friend after the Divine Liturgy. I expressed regret that I knew so little about this miraculous icon—specifically the bullet-pierced copy—before which I had so often sought silence and solace in the Church of St. Josaphat. I admitted to myself that I did not know how to truly connect with the Mother of God—with genuine faith rather than fanaticism.

There were brochures in the church about the Archconfraternity of Our Mother of Perpetual Help. They emphasized the importance of visiting the icon at least once a week. When I lived in Lviv, I prayed before the icon even more frequently than that. One could visit the Church of St. Josaphat on Zamarstynivska Street at any time of day; the church was always open. Finding and visiting a copy of the miraculous icon in Warsaw—where my family and I now live—proved to be a challenge. I felt a sense of longing and a need to pray more to the Most Holy Mother of God. With these thoughts in mind, I arrived in Poland and shared them with my husband, Maksym. He found a list of churches that housed copies of the icon of Our Mother of Perpetual Help. However, he asked me not to go on the upcoming Sunday (July 12, 2026), as various events related to the Volhynia Tragedy were taking place in the city.

On the night of July 13, I woke up, as if emerging from a dream-vision. I share it here (based on what I remember):

I am walking with my daughter through bright, semi-basement spaces that strongly resemble the corridors and refectories of old monasteries. I am looking for someone, glancing around while holding my daughter's hand. As we move from one room to another, figures begin to appear—I realize they are monks. They are preparing for some event and clearly seem preoccupied. Standing there among them and observing, I notice a man I do not know. I spontaneously call out: "Bless me, Bishop!" The Bishop stops and gives his blessing. I kissed his hand. My lips felt the actual touch of his skin, even though his clothes seemed to have crumbled away. I was overcome with confusion. I wondered: whom had I asked for a blessing? Whose hand had I

kissed? I began to rush frantically among the monks.

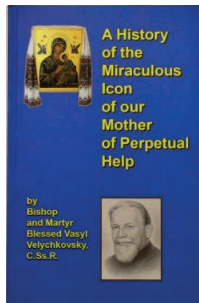
I made my way to a group of kneeling Brothers who were holding an unclothed man bearing crucifixion wounds. I fell to my knees and wept bitterly. He looked at me and tried to comfort me. I cannot recall exactly what he said. What stayed with me was the sense of peace and the smile on his face.

Waking up terrified in the middle of the night, I roused my husband and asked him to pray with me. Throughout the day, I kept thinking about the dream; the image of the Bishop from it remained vivid in my mind. In my heart, I understood that he was a Redemptorist, though my mind raised many questions. I began searching for information about the blessed martyrs of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church. This happened to coincide with the 25th anniversary celebrations of the beatification of the 20th-century martyrs by Pope John Paul II in Lviv.

While looking through information about the Blesseds, I recognized the man from my dream in one of the photographs. It was Bishop Vasyl Velychkovsky, C.Ss.R. I began reading more about him, and with every sentence, I realized that he had appeared in my dream to draw me closer to the Mother of God. After all, it was the Bishop who wrote the book "History of the Miraculous Icon of the Mother of God of Perpetual Help," a profound work detailing the history of the veneration of the miraculous image of the Mother of God.

I thank God for drawing me closer to the Most Holy Mother of God in such a gentle way, through the intercession of Blessed Vasyl Velychkovsky.

Received August 28, 2026 from Lviv Ukraine



In the early 1920's a copy of the original icon of "Our Mother of Perpetual Help" was brought to the Redemptorist seminary chapel in Zboisk, near Lviv, Ukraine. During WW II, a soldier walked into the chapel and shot several times at the icon, piercing it. During the Soviet occupation the icon was hidden. Later Brother Irene, a Redemptorist, took this

icon into his apartment in the center city of Lviv. After Blessed Vasyl Velychkovsky returned from prison in 1955, he lived with Brother Irene. Blessed Vasyl prayed and celebrated the Divine Liturgy before this holy icon from 1955 to 1969. Before it, he wrote the book "A History of the Miraculous Icon of our Mother of Perpetual Help". This pierced icon reminds us of the Mother of God's protection and co-suffering with the faithful during the time of persecution by the Soviets. Today this icon is in St. Josaphat's Church in Lviv, where many faithful continue to pray before it.

THANK YOU!!!

Your generous donations make it possible 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 National Martyr's Shrine. Through the intercession of Blessed Vasyl may each of you be blessed. Contributions listed below are from May 29, 2026 until September 16, 2026.

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BLESSED VASYL FEASTDAY

On June 27th, 2026, the faithful gathered for a day of prayer, reflection and fellowship at the Bishop Velychkovsky National Martyr's Shrine. The Feastday commemorated the 25th anniversary of Beatification of Ukrainian Martyrs Blessed Nicholas Charnetsky, C.Ss.R. and 24 Martyr Companions by Saint Pope John Paul II; among them was Blessed Vasyl Velychkovsky.



We were blessed to have Father Jay Korban as the guest homilist for the day. Father Jay passionately shared four different homilies based on the theme "A Martyr for the Ages". As someone who spent 10 years



volunteering to give tours at the Blessed Vasyl Shrine, he shared how, through that experience, he came to know him as if he were an old friend. Fr. Jay shared that his relationship transformed from sharing the story of a historical figure to encountering Christ, whom Blessed Vasyl loved so dearly. "Through his example of life, martyrdom, and beatification, we now receive Blessed Vasyl's intercession. We are called to allow Christ to work through him. When we come and spend time before Blessed Vasyl's holy relics, we leave knowing Jesus Christ more deeply because of Blessed Vasyl. We are witnessing his mission continuing today through the many graces and blessings that have taken place."

Fr. Jay concluded his final homily by inviting all of us to continue the mission of Blessed Vasyl and live as witnesses of Christ to others.



PILGRIMS TO THE SHRINE



*Redemptorist
Consultors General
visitation in July
Shrine Staff—
Khrystyna Shved,
Helen Stockburn,
Lesia Sianchuk,
Fr. Paul Vinh &
Fr. Ivel Mendanha
from Rome,
Tanya Pokeza,
Arianna Bogdan*

*Br. Scott Partin,
C. Ss.R. with
Redemptorists
Partners in Mission
from St. Alphonsus
Catholic Church
Minneapolis, MN*



St. Basil's Ukrainian Catholic Church (Winnipeg)

BLESSED VASYL MINISTRY IN UKRAINE



*Bishop Venedykt (Benedict)
Aleksiychuk, from the
Ukrainian Catholic Eparchy of
Chicago recently visited the
Blessed Vasyil Apartment/
Museum in Lviv*



*Fr. Viktor Frolov from Chernivtsi.
He was ordained by
Metropolitan Volodymyr
Sterniuk, a Bishop that was
consecrated by Bishop Vasyil.*



*This summer a kayak adventure
Retreat was organized by our staff
in Ukraine. The Retreat centered on
reflection of the life of Blessed
Vasyil. His Holy Relics were a part
of this journey with a saint.*



SHRINE SCHEDULE

Monday: Shrine is closed
Tuesday to Friday: 10:00 am to 5:00 pm
Saturday: 10:00 am to 1:00 pm
Sunday: Shrine is open during Divine Liturgies.
The Museum is open after the Divine Liturgies.

Group tours are available. To make a reservation
call **204-338-7321** or e-mail: **info@bvmartyrshrine.com**

EVERY WEDNESDAY:

8:00 a.m. Divine Liturgy in the Shrine
1:30 p.m. Praying for Ukraine
7:00 p.m. Devotions to Blessed Vasyil
(Acafist or Moleben followed by anointing)

1st Wednesday of each month
Divine Liturgy for Healing

LIVE STREAMING of the Devotional Services are
broadcast every Wednesday at 7 p.m. CDT on



Intercessory Prayer

*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 Vasyil to be a faithful witness to You
unto the point of death. Through the intercession of Blessed
Vasyil I ask for the following favour _____
for your Name is glorified forever. Amen*

**The upkeep of the Shrine and Museum relies on donor
support to be able to continue our ministry
to promote the knowledge of and devotion to
Blessed Vasyil**

*Please consider a gift to the
Bishop Velychkovsky National Martyr's Shrine.
It can be a wonderful way to remember family and friends by
choosing to make your donation a
Tribute Gift in memory, in honour,
or for the health of someone special.
Donations can be mailed in, called in or made online
through the Shrine website. Thank you*

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