

TRIBUTE TO METROPOLITAN VALENTINE

New York
January 22, 2012

It is with pain in my heart and tears in my eyes that I am writing these few words as a tiny tribute to our departed Hierarch, the beloved Metropolitan Valentine. It would be an understatement to say that I am deeply saddened for the tremendous loss we suffered in our Church. My words are insufficient to describe this incredible personality, this illustrious Hierarch, this Pillar of Orthodoxy. The enormity of the loss of Metropolitan Valentine unfortunately cannot be imagined by those of us who watch ROAC from a safe distance, as we do from our perch here in the U.S.

I have met, watched and listened to numerous Bishops and Archbishops during my life but nobody has electrified me like Metropolitan Valentine. In this person I saw truly rare qualities: A man of deep conviction, a selfless fighter for Orthodoxy, a true and caring shepherd for his flock, a genuine believer who lived by his words, an uncompromising Hierarch, a decent human being, grateful and absolutely graceful in his ways. I speak from experience. He was indeed a very serious man who recognized the gravity and seriousness of his position, yet during light moments he often displayed a very personable and amicable side full of joy, respect, humanity, and yes humor. Again, I speak from experience.

Metropolitan Valentine was a man who possessed something very special that attracted me from the very first moment that I met him. It was shortly after Fr. Vladimir Shishkoff realized the machinations of ROCOR to unite with the impostors of the MP and begun conducting services in Staten Island, NY. It was at the humble Church of Saint Nicholas in Staten Island where I first met Vladyka Valentine and heard his sermon. I remember how I was moved that day seeing this imposing man who came from the vast land of Russia and unceremoniously conducted the Divine Liturgy in a tiny basement chapel. I wonder now, as I wondered then, how the head of the Russian Church went from the enormous and imposing Cathedrals of the motherland to celebrating the Divine Liturgy in a poor and dilapidated chapel in America. I guess, this gives a glimpse into the soul of this remarkable man who for the sake of Christ and His Church had no personal ego and earthly ambitions. My admiration and respect for him have only grown during the relatively short period that I have known him. I remember those days vividly and with nostalgia as we had among us Bishop Antony Grabbe, Protopresbyter Vladimir, Matushka Anastasia, Hegumen Gerasim and of course our Metropolitan. Unfortunately, those days are gone. One by one, those genuine believers have left us and sadly now the head of our Church has also departed for the heavenly Kingdom.

I remember Vladyka's visits to the United States with fondness. Each time that he arrived, it was as exiting as the first time I met him. Each time that he arrived it was a time of expectation, a time of rejoicing that we had our Metropolitan with us, a time of uplifting of our spirits. I recall his presence at the burials of Bishop Antony and Father Vladimir, I recall the trips to Jordanville and most definitely I recall his visits to my house. I felt particularly blessed to have such a Hierarch come to my house, to honor me with his visit and to sanctify my household with his presence.

The Metropolitan has died, his journey has ended and we are now left with just his memories. At the same time, we are also left with some serious responsibilities. A responsibility to follow Vladyka's path to unadulterated Orthodoxy, a responsibility to honor him in death as we honored him in life, to memorialize him and pray for him as he has prayed and cared for us while he was alive. At this point I can only wonder what thoughts are emanating from the heads

of those who slandered him, connived against him, betrayed him, double crossed him, abandon him, or just simply stole what they could from his spiritual palace and moved on to easier and more comfortable postures. And as I understand there were quite a few who betrayed him during the climbing of his Golgotha. I hope that they are thoughts of remorse, repentance and sorrow. I hope that they are thoughts of guilt emulating the behavior of Saint Peter after he denied our Lord, because betrayal is dishonor, betrayal is evil and betrayal is punishable by the Almighty. I hope that those thoughts lead to shedding of tears for the injustice towards this man of God who suffered to the very end. Eulogizing him in death while crucifying him when he was alive, in addition to being hypocritical, it is clearly too little too late.

How and when the Antichrist will come, no one can say. And it is unknown how many shall be able to recognize him when he comes, because he will come as a benefactor of humanity. For the present, one thing can be said with certainty: All these movements towards union among nations and “churches”, all these compromises, all this uniformity of humanity gradually produced under the steamroller of technological culture are paving the way for the coming of the Antichrist. This development of humanity, according to the criteria of the world, is wonderful. But according to Christian criteria, it is a development towards destruction. Metropolitan Valentine worked all his life to avert this destruction. He abandoned his well-being to actively and tirelessly pursue the salvation of souls, he was betrayed and double-crossed but he never lost his orientation, he was slandered but was exonerated, he was beaten and tortured but he did not capitulate, he was evicted from his Churches by the offsprings of the Bolsheviks and the Pharisees of the MP but he did not bow to the Godless masters, he was persecuted but he never gave up the fight for the Truth of Christ and the True Church, he suffered but he endured, he never sold out for easy self- accommodation, he was a Hierarch like no other during these times of apostasy. He was a lighthouse in the cold and the darkness where the faithful in their desperation could find the hope of reaching a safe spiritual harbor. The Russian Orthodox Church has added another faithful servant to its endless list of worthy clergymen who paid the price for going against the Godless regime. The last century since the scourge of Atheism has plagued the martyric land of Russia, is full of enlightened and glorious Hierarchs who became shining examples of personal sacrifice, selflessness and endurance. The Metropolitan has remained Axios to the very end, a most worthy descendant of the glorious Russian Orthodoxy. Even into his old age and in poor health, he always treaded the Orthodox way without deviation despite the enormous pressures, physical threats, slandering and ridicule that was applied by his enemies to force him to give up and join the synagogue of impostors and heretics.

I am grateful to the Lord for granting me the privilege to meet such a Hierarch, I am grateful to have been able to witness how a true Christian bears the Cross of Christ, I am grateful to have had the chance to take a glimpse into the life of Russian Clergy who have had to live under Atheist governance and persecution for the last hundred years. I am also grateful to have been able to go to Suzdal last September and to spend a week with the Metropolitan, to celebrate the elevation of the Holy Cross with him, to witness his struggle for survival in an openly hostile environment, to receive his hospitality but more important to receive his blessing. Those memories will always remain with me.

As I bid farewell to our beloved Metropolitan, I pray to the Lord that the Holy Synod elects a new Metropolitan who will stand as tall and brave as the departed Metropolitan. May an army of

Saints and Angels come to the aid of the Russian Orthodox Autonomous Church to overcome the organized persecution from the state and its accomplices in the MP.

May the Lord God grant Metropolitan Valentine a place in Paradise together with Tsar Saint Nicholas, Patriarch Saint Tikhon and all the new martyrs of Holy Russia.

Antony