

HOLY NEW MARTYRS AND CONFESSORS OF RUSSIA

Luke 21:8-19

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St. Mardary, who was glorified by the Serbian Orthodox Church in 2017, left his native Serbia in 1907 to further his theological education in Russia. He had a deep love and respect for Russia, which he considered to be the mother of all the Slavic Orthodox nations. When entering Moscow for the first time, he describes¹ the staggering sight of the sea of onion domes and cupolas of the numerous Russian Orthodox churches. He tried to count them all, but it was like trying to count the stars in the sky. He further goes on to say that he observed thousands of Muscovites scurrying about the streets with their various tasks, people from all walks of life, and listened to the the din of thousands of voices — people talking and shouting, from newsboys hawking their newspapers to peddlers trying to sell their wares. When the hour of vespers approached, all the bells of the countless churches rang out at once, summoning everyone to prayer. Suddenly, all the human activity and noise of the thousands of Muscovites came to a halt. Their separate objectives and desires disappeared, and they were all transformed into an attitude of reverence and peace. This sea of humanity separated into different rills of people who streamed through the majestic arches of the many churches. Outside, only a moment ago, these same people were each contributing their bit to the noise and strife of a populous city. Now they were all praying in unison in the various churches, men with bared heads, women with scarves on their heads, and the children as well, tears in the eyes of many, crossing themselves with deep reverence, bowing and venerating the holy icons, and many joining in and singing with gusto along with the choir. This was holy Russia.

The events which lead to the collapse of the monarchy, the chaos which ensued, and the horrible aftermath of the Russian Revolution are many and diverse. Alexander Pushkin wrote in his novel *The Captain's Daughter* (1838) : “God save us from seeing a Russian revolt, senseless and merciless. Those who plot impossible upheavals among us, are either young and do not know our people, or are hardhearted men who do not care a straw either about their own lives or those of others.” What ensued after the atheistic Bolshevik takeover in 1917 was a reign of terror, murder and destruction which lasted for 70 years. All of the monasteries and churches were either destroyed or closed. All were desecrated in one way or another, and all sacred objects which had monetary value were desecrated and plundered. Countless bishops, monastics, clergy and lay people were executed or exiled to forced labor camps with the harshest conditions imaginable. No other nation in human history has ever witnessed such a massive number of executions of its own citizens. The result was that the world received a great cloud of Christian confessors and new martyrs. They preferred death rather than to renounce Christ or their Orthodox faith, and today they are triumphant in the heavenly Church where they pray for us and for their Fatherland. We don't know exactly how many martyrs there were, because accurate records were not kept. Many of the records of the Bolsheviks were falsified, and not all of the archives of that time period have been made available for examination. It could be tens of thousands, hundreds of thousands, or millions. We will never know, only God knows. However, the Church has glorified *all* of the New Martyrs of Russia, those whose names and stories we know, which are many, and those whose names and stories are known only unto God.

It was the goal of the Bolsheviks to completely destroy any vestige of religion or the Church, its representatives and bearers of the grace-filled spirit of Christ which spiritually nourished Russia for centuries, ever since the Russian people accepted the Orthodox faith and were baptized in the year 988.

At every Divine Liturgy we sing, “Put not your trust in men, in whom there is no salvation.” Governments, nations, and empires will come and go. You can read about the many mighty dynasties, governments, and empires which existed for many years, and which today are only a footnote in history books and no longer exist. Any government and any nation can collapse,

and the persecution of Christians can rear its ugly head at any time any where. There are many ways to persecute Christians, directly and indirectly. Christianity is today the most persecuted religion in the world. Communism in Russia eventually collapsed in 1989. The Soviet Union came to an end, and the Russian Federation was created in its stead. The symbol of the hammer and sickle was replaced with the restoration of the double-headed eagle and the pre-revolutionary tricolor flag. The doors to the churches were once again opened, and the Church was once again allowed to be free. The spirit of Christ and Orthodox Christianity is such an inimitable part of the Russian soul that it could not be extinguished, even after 70 years of the most severe repression and persecution. Tertullian, a Church father of the third century, once said: “The blood of martyrs is the seed from which a new crop of Christians will spring.”² St. Mardary writes: “Many centuries ago, the Turks, wishing to abolish the national reverence of the Serbians for St. Sava³, burned his relics in Belgrade and scattered his ashes to the winds. And it was as if the winds had blown those ashes all over Serbia, and as though churches and monasteries dedicated to the name of our national saint had sprung up wherever they fell.”⁴ May God grant that the renunciation of Christ may never happen again in Russia, that the people of Russia would follow Christ the same as their pious ancestors followed after Him for so many centuries. May we also in America be able to freely practice our Orthodox Christian faith without any fear of reprisal, repression or persecution, whether directly or indirectly, and may our progeny faithfully keep the Orthodox faith and pass it on as “the one pearl of great price (Matt. 13:45-46)” to all the generations to come. Amen.

1. *Incomprehensible Russia - memoirs*, by Saint Mardary (Uskokovich), Diocese of New Gračanica and Midwestern America, 2019.
2. *Ibid*, page 179.
3. St. Sava is the most popular saint of the Serbian Orthodox Church, considered to be the national saint of Serbia.
4. *Ibid*, page 106.



Looting and desecration of a Russian Orthodox Church by the Bolsheviks