

**SERMON. SUNDAY, December 3, 2017 on St. Alexander Hotovitsky, Glorified on  
December 4**

Our parish was originally organized by 19 laymen with the help of St. Alexander Hotovitsky and the blessing of St. Tikhon, who was serving at that time in the United States as Bishop of the Aleutians and North America. St. Alexander was the rector of St. Nicholas Cathedral in NYC, the current structure built in 1902 under his supervision, efforts and labors. Designated as a landmark, it is currently the seat of the Russian Orthodox exarchate in America. St. Alexander blessed and laid the cornerstone of our first church on November 21, 1901. In the early days of our parish, St. Alexander traveled from NYC to conduct liturgical services for the faithful of St. Basil's. Although St. Alexander's glorification is celebrated tomorrow, I have chosen as our central icon today the depiction of a young St. Alexander and St. Tikhon holding our parish church and symbolizing their role in the founding of St. Basil's. St. Tikhon was later called back to Russia where, in 1917, he was elevated as Patriarch of Moscow and All Rus. He suffered terrible persecution and imprisonment under the atheist Bolshevik regime. His health was ruined and he aged prematurely. He ultimately died in 1925 at the age of 60 under questionable circumstances. This year we are celebrating the 100th anniversary of the enthronement of St. Tikhon as Patriarch.

Upon graduation from St. Peteresburg Theological Academy, St. Alexander came to America in 1895 as a layman in order to do missionary work. At St. Alexander's ordination to the priesthood in 1896, Bishop Nikolai (Ziorov) said, "Your special sense of decency, your good upbringing, your noble idealism, and your sincere piety immediately caused me to look favorably upon you and compelled me to single you out among the young people, with whom you used to visit me in Saint Petersburg...I could see that you had that special spark from God, which makes any service an action truly done for God's sake, and without which a vocation becomes soul-less and dead work...Your first experience in preaching has shown you the power of this kind of inspiration: you saw how the people gathered around you and how attentively they stood and listened at length to your discourses... Why did these people listen to you rather than going to hear other preachers? Clearly the spark which burns within you attracts the hearts of these people like a magnet." Young St. Alexander was a zealous laborer in Christ's vineyard. He applied his gifts of piety, pastoral love and theological brilliance in many diverse ways while serving our Lord and Orthodoxy in America. He is known for his widespread missionary work in America. In addition to our parish here in Watervliet, he helped to establish many new Orthodox parishes, among them in Passaic, Yonkers and Philadelphia. St. Alexander helped to bring many Uniates newly-emigrated from Galicia and Carpatho Russia back to the Orthodox Faith. It is inevitable that all good laborers for Christ will suffer many temptations and sorrows. Metropolitan Platon (Rozhdestvensky) testified to the following incident in St. Alexander's life: "One morning, during the years we worked together, you came to my room and, without saying much, unbuttoned your shirt, revealing a very large, bluish, bloody abrasion on your chest. That wound from a fanatic, who in a fit of rage attacked you wildly with a stick, followed the meeting of Russian people at which you had encouraged your own ethnic brother to renounce the pernicious Unia with Rome... My entire being was shaken to the core and I was profoundly moved, for before me at that moment was a genuine example of witness for Christ."

St. Alexander concluded his service in America in 1914, exactly 18 years after his ordination to the priesthood. In his farewell address St. Alexander said: "Farewell, American Orthodox Rus — my dear Mother, the Holy American Church. I, your ever-grateful son, bow fully to the ground before you. You gave birth to me spiritually, you nurtured me, from your depths you inspired me by your strength. Through the shining witness of your founders, through the enlightened apostolic teachings of your preachers, through the fervor of your faithful flock, you have given me the greatest possible joy—to be your son."

The Passion-bearer St. Alexander returned to Russia where the most terrifying persecutions against Christians in world history was about to begin. In 1917 the second Russian Revolution occurred, the monarchy was abolished and civil war resulted. This ended with the establishment of an evil, atheistic anti-Christian regime which severely persecuted the Orthodox Church and sought its complete annihilation. Churches, shrines, icons, relics and sacred vessels were destroyed, desecrated, and stolen. It became virtually illegal to practice the Orthodox Faith or to believe in God. It is unimaginable how the courageous and zealous clergy struggled to serve under these conditions. Countless clergy were arrested and a wave of court cases took place against Russia. The Tsar, the Royal family, and the aristocracy having been imprisoned and executed, now countless faithful servants of the Church of Christ were sentenced to death and suffered torture and execution, shedding their blood as hieromartyrs and martyrs. Many perished in concentration camps, living and working under the most inhumane conditions imaginable. St. Alexander somehow managed to survive, constantly being arrested, interrogated, sentenced, persecuted and hounded. The New martyr Alexander's final arrest occurred in the summer of 1937. Oral reports testify that he was sentenced to death and shot on August 19, 1937. He was 65 years old. We have a large icon of St. Alexander in the back of our church, donated by our parishioner Bill Rentz. In Bill's icon, St. Alexander is depicted how he would have looked in his later years of life, now older with gray hair. Just before St. Alexander's arrest and martyrdom, one of his parishioners left us the following recollection: "In 1936, Father Alexander did not preach, as he was apparently forbidden to do so. In 1936-7, I was present many times when Father Alexander served. He was a tall, gray-haired priest with gentle facial features, who looked extremely intelligent. Gray, trimmed hair, a small beard, very kind gray eyes, a high-pitched, loud tenor...pronounced exclamations distinctly and with inspiration...His appearance reminded me of many priests who were exiles from the western regions...Father Alexander had many parishioners who greatly revered him...Even today, I remember Father Alexander's eyes. It seemed as if his glance penetrated your heart and embraced it with affection. I had the same feeling when I saw the holy Patriarch Tikhon...The same light also shining in Father Alexander's eyes was testimony of his sanctity." Through the prayers of our Holy Father, the New Martyr and Passion bearer Alexander, may our souls be saved! Amen.