

## Life of St. Nikolai Velimirovich

### The New Chrysostom, Bishop of Ochrid and Zhicha

Commemorated March 5/18 (+1956)

*Beloved, even if we should attain the very pinnacle of virtue, let us consider ourselves least of all, as we have learned that pride is able to cast down even from the heavens the person who does not take heed, and humility of mind is able to bring up on High from the very abyss of sin the person who knows how to be sober. For this is what placed the Publican before the Pharisee. By pride I mean an overwhelming boastful spirit, surpassing even incorporeal powers, that of the devil himself while humility of mind and acknowledgment of sins by the robber is what brought him into Paradise before the Apostles. —St. John Chrysostom*

In preparation for the celebration of the Bicentennial of Orthodoxy in America, we present the Life of a modern Serbian Saint who was a missionary to America, coming to this land four times, spending the last eleven years of his life here, and finally dying on American soil. Bishop Nikolai was canonized by the Serbian Orthodox Church in 1987. He is remembered by American Orthodox Christians as a protector, mover and inspirer of the Serbian Orthodox Church in America, as an instructor at the St. Sava Seminary in Libertyville, Illinois, as the dean and rector of the St. Tikhon of Zadonsk Seminary in South Canaan, Pennsylvania, and as the author of the valuable *Prologue of Ochrid* which has been published in English in four volumes. (from the original introduction to this article in *The Orthodox Word*—Webmaster)

Our holy and God-bearing Father, Bishop Nikolai of blessed memory, was born at dawn on December 23, 1880, on the feast of St. Naum of Ochrid, to pious Serbian Orthodox parents, Dragomir and Katarina Velirniovich, in the small village of Lelich, only five miles southwest of Valjevo, a city located in the valley of the Povlen Mountains of western Serbia. Because he was born physically weak, this divine child of God was baptized soon after his birth. He was given the name Nikolai, after his family's Krsna Slav (family Patron Saint), Sveti Nikola (St. Nicholas of Myra, Lycia; honored December 6th). Nikola was the first-born of Dragomir and Katarina, who had eight other children, all of whom unfortunately perished later during World War II. The baptism of young Nikola took place in Chelije Monastery; and was performed by beloved Pop Andrija (Fr. Andrew), the parish priest of the Serbian Orthodox Church in Lelich.

Nikolas parents were pious farmers who always interrupted their work schedule for daily prayer, which included keeping the yearly fasting routine as well as the liturgical cycle of the Orthodox Church. His mother Katarina, quite pious and truly a holy woman, provided Nikola with his first lessons about God, Jesus Christ, the lives of the saints, and the holy days of the Church year. Often Nikola was seen being led by the hand of his mother to Chelije Monastery—a walk of three miles—for prayer and Holy Communion. Later Nikola (as Bishop Nikolai) recalled these lessons on God and walks with my mother as being some of the most influential experiences in his life. He wrote of them in an autobiographical poem, written in Serbian, entitled *Prayers of a Captive in Prison* (1952).

Nikolas formal education began in Chelije Monastery; dedicated to the Holy Archangels Michael and Gabriel, where his father Dragomir had hoped he would learn to read the call to service from the government, in order to be a leading man and protector of his village Lelich. Pop Andrija taught mali Nikola (Little Nicky), as he was known in Lelich, his first lessons in reading, writing and mathematics. Besides these lessons, Fr. Andrew, being Nikolas spiritual father, taught him about the Scriptures and the teachings of the early Fathers of the Church, as well as the religio-national traditions of his Serbian heritage. This latter education was inspiring to Little Nicky from the very beginning. He demonstrated, even as a youngster, a tremendously penetrating mind and a zeal for learning. Quite often during summer breaks Nikola would climb the bell tower of the catholicon (main church) of Chelije Monastery and hide there all day long, occupying himself with prayer and the reading of books. Thus, due to the influence of his mother Katarina and the lessons of beloved Pop Andrija, Nikola seemed headed for far more than just being a leading citizen of his small village of Lelich.

After finishing sixth grade in grammar school in Valjevo, Nikola petitioned for entrance into the Military Academy. However, he could not pass the physical exam, as he was, in the words of the physical fitness commission, too small, not having large enough shoulders and a frame strong enough for such activities. This was certainly the divine will of our Heavenly Father, Who desired that Nikola travel on another path—to be a soldier of the Heavenly Kingdom and not of the earthly one. Immediately thereafter, Nikola applied for entrance into the Seminary of St. Sava in Belgrade, where he was accepted to begin studies

[Contact](#)
[About](#)
[Photos](#)
[Share](#) |

#### Related Content

##### Webmaster's Picks

- [The Orthodox Church in America and Its Future, by St. Nikolai](#)
- [Bishop Nikolai Velimirovich: Serbia's New Chrysostom](#)
- [Links to Writings by St. Nikolai](#)
- [Archimandrite Sebastian Dabovich: Honoring an American Apostle](#)

##### Google Results

- [Living an Orthodox Life: Miscellaneous Articles](#)

Keywords used: Velimirovich











