

# New Martyrs of Optina Pustyn



*Edited for Christ is in our midst! by the handmaid Leah*

## Introduction

Much of the information for this article is gleaned from an internet radio program about the three martyred monks from Optina Pustyn Monastery, in Central Russia. The [Voice of Russia](#) website article, prepared by Tatyana Shvetsova, is from the original script of the internet radio podcast, and contributed vital information. As well, for more than ten years after their deaths, people in Optina Pustyn Monastery have been collecting information about monks. The three monks: Monk Vasily, Monk Ferapont and Monk Trophim; were brutally murdered by a satanist as they were ringing the bells of the bright and joyous news of our Lord's Resurrection on Pascha, 1993.

Tatyana Shvetsova writes:

We would like to pay homage to the memory of these three remarkable people, hoping their story will serve to strengthen the spirit of many Christians, who sincerely embrace the Faith.

It is with this spirit that I humbly attempt to offer, with the acknowledged help of the original [Voice of Russia](#) article and information gathered from other sources, this compilation of information: ***The New Martyrs of the Optina Pustyn***. I humbly ask forgiveness for any mistakes in this article. If someone has information about these precious new martyrs please contact me and allow me to add the information. May they always pray for us before the throne of our Lord in Heaven!

In Christ,  
the handmaid,  
Leah

## **A brief history:**

The beginnings of the Optina Pustyn Monastery are not formally known because there is no actual documentation as to when the Monastery was established. What is known is legend, which, as the tradition relates; in the 15th century, Opta the Outlaw renounced the world, asking forgiveness of his sins, and by embracing holy monasticism, became the Monk Makarii. It was he who founded the Monastery of Optina Pustyn.

Optina Pustyn means, “living together”, in Russian. A name earned because prior to 1504, both nuns and monks had residences within the cloister. The first evidence of this was discovered during Tsar Mikhail Feodorovich’s reign in the 17th century. At this point the Monastery was but a small wooden structure with a few monastic cells, one church and less than twenty monastics.

In the period of the 18th and the beginning of the 19th century, the Monastery increased significantly both in size and in income. The advent of the Staretz or Starchestvo, which means ‘a lineage of wisdom of prayer’ maintained by Startsi, the Russian Orthodox ‘Elders’, stimulated and contributed to the growth of the Monastery. St Sergius of Radonezh introduced this tradition to Russia, the roots of which are found in hesychasm (see St Gregory Palamas, 14-15th century). St Paisius Velichkovsky (November 15) was powerfully influential in bringing the almost-lost hesychastic tradition of Orthodox spirituality to Russia in the eighteenth century, and his labors found in Optina Monastery a ‘headquarters’ from which they spread throughout the Russian land. The monastery itself had been in existence since at least the sixteenth century, but had fallen into decay through the anti-monastic policies of Catherine II and other modernizing rulers. Around 1790, Metropolitan Platon of Moscow undertook a mission to restore and revive the monastery in the tradition set forth by St Paisius. By the early 1800s the monastery (located about 80 miles from Moscow) had become a beacon of Orthodox spirituality, partly through their publication of Orthodox spiritual texts, but more importantly through the lineage of divinely-enlightened spiritual fathers (startsi, plural of starets) who served as guides to those, noble and peasant, who flocked to the monastery for their holy counsel. The fathers aroused some controversy in their own day; a few critics (some of them from other monasteries) disapproved of their allowing the Jesus Prayer to become widely-known among the people, fearing that it would give rise to spiritual delusion (prelest). For a wonderful depiction of the deep influence of the Jesus Prayer on Russian life during this period, read the anonymously-written *Way of a Pilgrim*.

Optina Pustyn Monastery became a primary center of this holy tradition.

During the 19th century many Elders came from all over Russia to live and teach at Optina Pustyn Monastery. These Elders shared their spiritual wisdom with the laity, monks & nuns, ministered to the poor and sick and wrote and translated books. Optina Pustyn Monastery became a place of pilgrimage for important cultural personages, philosophers, peasant pilgrims and the writers; Tolstoy, Gogol and Dostoevsky, all came to be counseled by the Optina Elders. There were fourteen Elders during this period who attained sainthood. The Synaxis of the Saints of Optina Elders is on October 11/24.

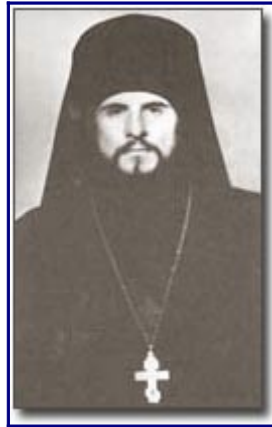
This holy tradition continued at Optina Pustyn Monastery until the Bolshevik’s bloody rebellion. In 1918 the Soviet’s closed the Monastery and its churches, imprisoning numerous monks. In 1923, the complex was turned into a museum. The 1930’s can be termed the era of the gulag – with many monks arrested, tortured, sent to Siberian labor camps or executed. December 26, 1938, the last Optina Elder, Archimandrite Isaachus II, was executed and martyred, being shot to death.

In the Twentieth Century, November 17, 1987 marks the moment of revival for the holy sanctuary of Optina Pustyn Monastery. This is the date of the decree declaring the return of the Monastery to

the Russian Orthodox Church.

## **The Monastery's New Martyrs**

### **Igor Roslyakov ~ Monk Vasily**



Muscovite Igor Roslyakov, is one of those who helped to begin the process of the revival of Optina Pustyn Monastery.

Three months before his arrival at the Monastery, Igor made this entry in his journal:

“March 12, 1988. Morning. Mother finds my small cross. I am 27. I first put this cross on after I had been christened, 27 years ago. An obvious sign from the Lord, reminiscent of Christ’s words: “...pick up your cross and follow me...”

At this point, here are a few words about the hand of the Lord in Igor Roslyakov’s destiny.

In 1984, upon embracing the Faith, Igor started attending church regularly, one pilgrim, upon looking in his direction, said: “A monk is praying.” At the time, Igor never even dreamed of monasticism. Yet, he could always be seen standing in the same spot at the Epiphany Cathedral, in one of Moscow’s central districts.

A long time ago, a village by the name of Yelohovo used to be situated there — it was the home of Moscow’s great saint — St Basil the Blessed.

When inside the church, Igor invariably stood near the icon of St Basil the Blessed. If one stands in this same spot, you will find yourself facing, in the iconostasis, the large icon of the Archangel Michael and above that — the Icon of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin. This is what Igor would have seen in Church each time he prayed.

Years later, when Igor became a monk, he received the name of Vasily, or Basil, — in honor of St Basil the Blessed.

Later still, on the day commemorating the memory of Archangel Michael, Basil was ordained to the priesthood at the Monastery church, which is consecrated in honor of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin...

However, way back in 1984, Igor Roslyakov had no way of seeing that far into the future.

On June 21, 1988 Igor Roslyakov entered the Optina Pustyn Monastery, which then lay in ruins. Together with the very few brethren there at the time, he faced the daunting task of helping to rebuild the holy site.

Upon entering the Monastery, Igor Roslyakov presented the Father Superior with his autobiography.

“My name is Igor Roslyakov,” the autobiography said. “I was born in Moscow on

December 23, 1960. Studied at secondary school 466 in Volgograd district of the capital. After finishing school, I spent a year working at an automobile factory. In 1980 I entered the department of Journalism of Moscow State University. In 1985 I graduated from the University as a qualified newspaper journalist. As a member of the University's water-polo team I appeared at All-Union and International competitions; got a Master's degree in sports. Was married. Then signed my divorce papers at the Volgograd district Department of Civic Affairs. I have no children. Since 1985 have been working as sports instructor at the Trade Union Sports Society."

The brethren at the Monastery knew nothing about this autobiography, since it is generally not the custom to ask each other about one's past, or offer details about yourself. It was only several years later that somebody brought an old copy of "Izvestiya" newspaper to the Monastery, sporting a faded snapshot of Igor Roslyakov holding a Champion's Cup. That is when they learned that at the University he'd been Captain of the Water polo team, and later — a sports instructor.

The first to suspect that Igor Roslyakov was a former athlete were youths from the Vocational College, at the time still housed on the compound of Optina Pustyn. These troublesome students were more than a handful for the monks. No sooner had the monks restored some wall or another, when the youths would write crude words on it, showing no respect for the work that had been done. First, they were reasoned with and patiently admonished, but to no avail. Then Igor Roslyakov took it upon himself to approach the hooligans. Lifting a couple of the fellows up bodily, and holding them aloft by their scruffs, he then sent them hurtling through the tall grass. This had a remarkable effect on the students, who lost no time in spreading the rumor that all the monks were one-time athletes. This instilled respect and admiration immediately, and put an effective end to all the trouble and pranks. From then on, peace reigned at the Monastery.

Hegumen Melkhisedek recalls how he was once christening a handmaid, Irina, and lay-brother Igor Roslyakov was helping him:

"I conducted the christening itself, while Igor was holding Irina by the hand, just in case, since the christening was done in a deep holy natural spring. After the third submersion, Igor saw that rays of light were emanating from Irina's eyes."



Grace is experienced at every christening ceremony, yet Igor was blessed with a God-given ability to not only sense it, but to actually see it.

He generally possessed a keen sensibility for and the perception of Grace. This became particularly evident at Pascha or Easter. He felt the spirit of Pascha so strongly, there would be tears in his shining eyes. He would be lost in a timeless space. He could stand through two lengthy liturgies in succession, unable to tear himself away from the Paschal benevolence and grace, pervading the very atmosphere. Pascha was, for him, a sacrament, wherein the Spirit hears the call of the world to come. It seemed he was able to hear this call.

Here are some entries from his journal:

"April 10, 1988. Easter. My third Pascha... Time is such a mystical entity. I ask myself: was there a Lent or not? Was there a service? One day, I shall thus have to ask about my life. What exists in reality? The Spirit. Pure of sin, or smeared with it.

"Exult now and rejoice Zion..." Yes, rejoice! This is a state of the spirit, for it is an inner manifestation, not provisional"

"April 30, 1989. Pascha. The Lord's grace is granted gratis, but we should bring the Lord all we have."

He was already Hieromonk Basil, when the believers asked him: “Father, do you have a special, sacred wish?” “Yes,” he replied, “I would like to die at Easter, to the chiming of bells.”

His wish was granted in 1993...

Father Basil was a profoundly Russian person; with the typical, for our people, inner guilt for all that is happening around us. This feeling is characteristic of a people, who are endowed with a force of sacrificial, elevated love.

Some more entries from Father Basil’s journal:

“Love your neighbor as you love thyself, pray for him, as for thyself, only to see that the sins of your neighbor are YOUR sins, and go down to hell with these sins for the saving of your neighbor.

Lord, You gave me love, changed me completely, and now I cannot do otherwise, but to embrace suffering willingly for the sake of my neighbor. I weep, I lament, but cannot do otherwise, for Your love leads me, and I do not want to part with it, for in it I find hope for Salvation, and despair not, seeing it within myself.”

One of the monks of Optina Pustyn shares some recollections of Father Basil:

“Prior to Pascha, I twice confessed to Father Basil, and was in a state of profound shock afterwards. Already at the confession I had the suspicion that Father Basil has the audacity to take upon himself other people’s sins. On the morning of Holy Saturday, Father Basil read the sermon. I was doing my novitiate in the church at the time; was entering and exiting the church, so I could not listen to the sermon in its entirety. But what I did hear made me suspect that, indeed, Father Basil was taking upon himself our sins, as his own. Just the night before that I had read of one Elder, who had died a true martyr’s death, for he had willingly accumulated many of the sins of others. So I thought of Father Basil, wondering how he would die if he was taking on so many of our sins?”

Only great Optina Elders and ascetics of old had the audacity to accept the sins of others and to avert them by prayer. Yet, Father Basil did not see himself as an ascetic. It really came down to forced means: Russian monasticism has led to heroic deeds in inimitable conditions, when monasteries were only just beginning to rise from the rubble of the Communist persecution. His was a period when there was a shortage of clergymen, and the young hieromonks were suffering terrific stress and overwork, all leading to amazing deeds.

The father of one monk, who fought the German fascists in the Patriotic war of 1941 — 1945, said of the monks at the end of the 1980’s to the early 1990’s:

“This is similar to what we had in 1941. Young, totally inexperienced, just off the train and — straight into battle. You crawl towards a tank clutching a bottle of incendiary, paralyzed with fear, yet knowing full well somebody has to do it.”

This is a remarkable comparison: monks of the end of the 20th century and soldiers of the Second World War. True, the monks of the end of the 20th century, just like their fathers during the war years, experienced hell, to save their neighbors...

Here is another testimony of Father Basil. This time, contributed by a worker, who took part in the restoration of the Monastery:

“A dreadful thing happened to me — in a moment of desperate weakness I felt a strong urge to commit suicide, to hang myself. There I was, going to work at the Optina Monastery, and crying all the way. Archdeacon Vladimir, upon learning what was the

matter with me, said: “You had better immediately go to see Father Basil!” And he led me to his cell...

Father Basil had been laundering his robes, and was wearing a pair of faded, patched jeans and a threadbare mohair sweater. We spoke some fifteen minutes. I recall how Father Basil said to me: “If you can — forgive, if you can’t — leave”. He prayed. And I remember leaving him in extremely good spirits. There I stood outside his cell laughing! If someone had told me fifteen minutes before that I would be laughing and rejoicing in life, I would never have believed it possible! Yet, there I was! From that moment on, Father Basil became like a true Father, a blood relative to me. In the 40 years of my life, I have never met another person like him, with such a beautiful soul. I regularly went to confess to him, even decided to plead for permission to become his spiritual child. However, while I was summoning the courage, Father Basil passed away. For a month and a half afterwards I wept with grief, and couldn’t force myself to go to the Monastery.”

Father Basil was so totally devoid of the desire to please, to win accolades and praise that many of the inhabitants of the Monastery and pilgrims to Optina Pustyn discovered for themselves this silent clergyman only briefly before his death.

He was destined to experience the rank of priest for only two and a half years. In the beginning only visitors confess to neophyte clergyman. And these were few, for as it transpired, his monumental, imposing figure was seen as fearsome by many. Behind his back, youths called him “The Monument”. Indeed, there was some truth in this nickname, for he could stand for hours immobile at the lectern. When hearing confessions, he never seated himself, preferring to stand. During Great Lent, he could stand through some 18 hours a day. He had little to say to those who came to confess, silently listening to what they had to impart. After his death, it was discovered from his journals that, not only did Father Basil hear every word spoken in the confessional, but he pleaded to God for each one of them, with sincere love:

“Tis I, Lord, who sins, forgive ME!...”

They say that Father Basil made a note of the names of all those who came to him for confession, or of whom he christened. Afterwards, back in the privacy of his cell, he bowed low, praying for all of them to our Lord.

The Nun Varvara, who used to confess to him, said that Father Basil never said a word, as was his custom, during confession, yet one always left him with an amazing sense of relief, as though one had been absolved from all sin.

One of the pilgrims recalls how he went to confess to Father Basil:

“I felt such compassion emanating from Father Basil, it was as though we had one pain and sorrow between the two of us.”

It is known that later this pilgrim went on to become a monk himself...

Father Basil had a large wooden cross that he’d been given as a gift, featuring an image of the Savior, a cross he preciously guarded. Russian pilgrims had carried this cross when entering Jerusalem, walking along Calvary to the Lord’s Tomb, where they had it sanctified.



It is often recalled how Father Basil would say that the most important thing in life was to carry one's cross to the end, never stumbling on the rise upwards before meeting our Maker.

This is why this cross, that had been carried through Jerusalem, along Calvary, and sanctified at the Lord's Tomb, had such special significance for him, occupying pride of place in his small cell...

Not long before his death, Father Basil took this cross and went with it to the icon workshop, where two monks — iconographers were working. One of them was celebrating his Name day. Father Basil congratulated him, and presented him with his cross, saying: "I should like you to keep it with you for a while. Let's go find a place for it together." The cross was hung on the wall near the Icon corner. Later it transpired that Father Basil had brought this Calvary cross to the place of his own personal Calvary: he was killed near the icon workshop, falling down right opposite the cross.

On August 9, 1993 holy chrism was seen to appear on this cross, on the left side, under the Savior's ribs. The drops were large and didn't dry for two weeks. It seemed as if the cross was miracle-working!

### **Alexei Tatarnikov ~ Monk Trofim**



Another monk, who died tragically on Easter night in 1993 at the age of 39, was Trofim, who came to Optina Pustyn in August of 1990. He was born Leonid Tatarnikov, in the village of Dagon, Irkutsk region on February 4, 1954.

When he was a baby, he cried day and night incessantly for almost two years, so much, that some people thought he was unlikely to survive. But he became quiet as soon as he was baptized, a smiling healthy boy.

Leonid grew into a tall beautiful young man, and girls liked him. Besides being handsome, he love to read and was even nicknamed Bookworm, he was hard-working and never touched alcohol. Girls tried hard to marry him, it is rumored that some even turned to magic. One of them actually told him, "either you will be mine, or no one's!" But Leonid stayed calm and had but one word to address the girls: "sister". He was a born monk, but he only understood this much later.

After finishing secondary school studies in his native village, Leonid studied in a railway services college, served in the army, after which he spent five years on fishing trawlers in the Russian Far East.

As a rule, the fishermen would go off for half a year at a time. Upon coming ashore, as was the sailor's custom, they'd make a bee line for a restaurant. Leonid was the heart and soul of the company, clever at keeping up his end of the conversation, and when he set his mind to dancing — nobody could keep still. As a rule, everyone quite forgot about the drinking, returning home sober and light-hearted. For this remarkable ability to ignite revelry without undue intoxication, Leonid was always invited to many diverse sailor's companies and weddings. Everyone could be certain of a grand old time, without drunken debauchery. Leonid was a quick hand at carpentry; a tractor-driver; baker, and many other trades. People were constantly approaching him for help and guidance. He, in turn, never turned anyone down. His help was always gratis and sincere.

For Leonid, everything he said was as good as done. If he'd promised something — you could be sure he'd see it through. He was remarkably hard-working, a quality that was destined to come in very handy later, when he was at the Monastery.

When Leonid applied for a foreign passport, for some reason he changed his name and became Alexei. Alexei tried quite a number of occupations: photography, horse-breeding for a local horse farm, and shoe-making (the shoes he made were of such quality that everyone in the town queued up to get a pair). He was a member of various hobby groups, such as a yacht-club, wrestling and karate societies, as well as classical and folk dancing schools. He was physically very flexible. At thirty years of age he could still do the splits without straining. Together with his sister Natasha, Alexei studied in a classical dance school and won prizes in competitions. Once he was even offered a contract to become a professional dancer, but he refused.

The future monk was searching for the meaning of life and as yet still could not understand what was lacking. He took up "well-being" and even gave up eating meat. In his room there hung a timetable, according to which, Alexei went without food for ten days twice a month in a vain quest to give up smoking, which he had taken to at a very early age. Then he began to go to church, and the priest told him he had to choose between God and nicotine. Alexei finally rid himself of his long-term habit.

On Pentecost day, 1990, Alexei had a vision. He immediately decided to become a monk and bought a ticket to Optina Pustyn Monastery. But when he was ready to leave, his passport, money and ticket were stolen, and he made it to Optina in only a month and a half. Alexei came to the Monastery with a strong determination to become a monk.

He possessed enviable looks, which invariably drew people's glances to him like a magnet. One artist, busy sketching on the grounds of Optina Pustyn, upon seeing him, exclaimed: "Look, a Viking! What a typecast image!"

Indeed, this comment was not without merit: Alexei was blue-eyed and blond, with powerful arms and legs, which carried him with a firm, and steady gait. His was strength that could enable him to tie a poker into knots, or, just for the fun of it, twist a thick nail, held nonchalantly between his fingers, into a spiral...

At the age of thirty-six, deciding to take monastic vows, Alexei became the monk Trofim.

Having settled in the Monastery, like the others there, he found Optina Pustyn in need of great repair. The locals, who after World War II built a village on the Monastery territories, cursed this land which bore nothing, although it had been very fertile before. Tomatoes used to grow there in such quantities that they were given for free to anyone who would ask. Now the land bears fruit again. The monks have managed to cultivate the poor soil, and the hard-working monk Trofim had a part in it.

The local farmers say that wherever monk Trofim planted potatoes for old people, there were no



Colorado beetles, while there were plenty of them in the neighboring gardens. Some people even came to the Monastery to ask what kind of prayer the monk was saying. His response was, ““I read only one prayer: Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me the sinner!”

By now some farmers take a pinch of earth from his tomb and, having dissolved it in water, use it to sprinkle their gardens.

Trofim valued time, and he had time for everything. His main duties were those of senior bell-ringer, sexton and tractor operator. Besides that, he worked as a receptionist, candle-seller, house-painter, baker; he worked in the bookmaker’s shop, in the warehouse, in the forge. People surrounding him had a feeling that he could do everything. Only after the murder did they learn that monk Trofim had never before been a forger, a tractor operator, a baker, a bookmaker, and had never learned how to ring the bells. God made him able to do all of these duties because of his prayers.

When they decided to bake their own bread in the Optina Pustyn Monastery (in the early nineties bread supplies in Russia were limited), the task was appointed to monk Trofim. Nobody knew how to bake bread in the Monastery. So the monk had to run around to find a recipe. But as a result his loaves were light and tasty. His bread was called “healing” in the neighborhood. Upon leaving the Monastery, one businessman even asked to have the special recipe of Monastery bread. The man explained that his sick stomach did not digest bread at all, except for the Monastery’s “healing” bread. They gave him the recipe but he did not know the most important thing of all: how earnestly monk Trofim prayed at each baking and how many prostrations he made in front of Icon of the Mother of God “The Grower of Crops” [”Sporitelnitsa hlebov”].

Trofim was a real monk—secret, focused inward, and there was nothing externally, ostentatious in him. There were no bad people in the world in his opinion, and anyone at any time of day and night could ask him for help and they would receive it. It was to monk Trofim that everybody went asking for repairs for a watch, photo camera or especially boots.

He prayed a lot but slept little, and he ate very modestly, limiting himself even in water. But in spite of those restrictions he was never sick and never seemed to be tired. And everybody in Optina Pustyn Monastery got used to his perseverance. It was difficult to imagine this strong monk, always happy and lively, to be an ascetic and to have the custom of eating nothing during the first and the last week of the Great Fast.

However, during what would come to be monk Trofim’s last Great Lent, one could notice signs of fatigue in him. It was getting clear for Optina’s inhabitants that the monk was on the verge of exhaustion. As a rule, at five in the morning, when all the monks were going to the midnight service, it was hard to recognize faces in the darkness. Yet one could always recognize monk Trofim even from a long distance because of his flying long gait. He was always hurrying to church overtaking many others on his way. But during his final days it became hard to recognize him.

Sasha the Proshpora-maker remembered an incident, when he was slowly going to midnight service and had overtaken somebody in the darkness. Turning around to see who it was, he could not believe his eyes that it was Trofim. Sasha noticed that Trofim was going so slowly and with such effort as if he was carrying an unbearable burden.



Friar Trofim had such a profound love for people, and dispersed it so generously, that each person saw him as his best friend. One of the clergymen who was acquainted with him, said that he had been “brother, friend, helpmeet and relative to each and every one.”

Incidentally, this last quality at times led him to rebel against Monastery rules and instructions. Here is an example:

There was only one tractor at the Monastery, and a great deal of work set out for it. So there was something of a list of priorities: first, the plots of

Monastery workers were plowed, and only afterwards — those of other civilians, such as the locals, who approached the Monastery for help. Thus, Trofim would be instructed to carry out the plowing, he'd dutifully set off, yet the noise of his tractor inevitably drew forth an impressive turnout of elderly, feeble women from the villages. Seeing them, tears would well up in Trofim's eyes. Each old woman would beg him to plow up her bit of land, or do some other chores. Some of these were lonely old souls, others had sorry excuses for husbands — pitiful drunkards, while their offspring had moved, and couldn't be relied upon to help. How could he turn these poor souls down? So, he never did. He helped as much as he could, frequently turning up late at the Monastery, and receiving punishment for this. The latter he stoically endured, for he was profoundly aware of the importance of Monastic obedience.

The village women, in turn, adored Trofim, and he loved them like a son. He would receive a money transfer from home, only to go and spend it on scarves for his Babas, just simple white cotton kerchiefs, edged with color. The old ladies, in turn, treasured these gifts more, than anything else, all the more so, since Trofim would apply them to the sacred relics at the Monastery, prior to presenting them as gifts.

The following incident is recounted. Once, Trofim was busy loading wood for the Monastery. However, upon hearing that in the neighboring village an old woman lay ill in a cold cottage, without any wood for the stove, he immediately made a detour. Trofim brought her wood, and stoked up a fire. He was already on his way back to the Monastery, when he heard the distant chiming of bells — there was just 15 minutes till Vespers... It was obvious he was going to be late for service, since there was at least another half hour's drive to the Monastery. Then, Trofim set his tractor straight off the road, and off he went, driving recklessly across the terrain, nose-diving and stumbling. Sitting in the cabin with Trofim was the icon-artist Olga, who was quite terrified: not of the breakneck speed or the rugged terrain, but of the look on the face of Trofim. As a rule always wearing an easy smile, he was now quite suddenly transformed. The man sitting next to her was sullen and aloof. She was struck by the sudden impression that he wasn't really there, so distant were his thoughts, so deep in prayer. A miracle happened and they reached the Monastery in time for Vespers.

Nobody was loved as much as Trofim at the Monastery. However, probably, nobody was reprimanded as often either. This is what he had to say about it:

“To begin with, through my pride, I wanted to do everything my way. However, once you've trained yourself to be obedient, peace settles on your soul.”

Translated from Greek, Trofim means 'disciple'. He was, indeed, a pupil, a disciple of Optina Pustyn, a beloved child, endowed with the — rare for our proud century — gift of being the ideal disciple. He knew how to learn from mistakes. And always dutifully accepted any meted out punishment as a gift from God. Here is one example.

They say that when the Monastery turned out its first loaf of bread, what a day it was: such joy... the very first bread baked at their Monastery! Half of Optina Pustyn assembled at the bakery to try it. The bread was so delicious and warm, that without the blessing of the Monastery Hierarchs, half the batch was eaten then and there! The baker was accordingly punished for this misdemeanor. Trofim had to pray to God with genuflection at length. Yet, Trofim accepted this, as with all other penances, as nothing short of the Lord's blessing, preceding Doomsday. Once, a Bishop, head of the Diocese, was visiting at the Monastery. Upon seeing how readily the monk Trofim was fulfilling a penance, he pronounced respectfully: “What a good monk!”

Trofim's brother, Gennady, says:

“When my other brother, Sanya, and I came to Optina Pustyn to visit our brother Trofim, we began by asking him why on earth he'd decided to be a monk?! Trofim told us that not long before his leaving for the Monastery he'd had sign — a radiance had

been emanating from one of the icons, and he heard a voice, that said something to him, two or three times. Alas, at the time Sanya and I didn't have much faith in such miracles, so we didn't remember what it was exactly that had been said by the 'voice'. What could we possibly know at the time, if all we were capable of was pleading with our brother to come back home with us? "How can I leave," Trofim said at the time, "if every time I enter the church each one of the icons speaks to me?"

Pilgrim Victor Prokuronov recalls:

"When I think of Trofim, I immediately conjure up a vision of him driving the tractor back from the fields. Children, dogs — all rushing towards him, eager for a sign of affection from him, while the horses stretch out their necks, for a pat from him..."

Children adored Trofim. He knew the behavioral patterns of the animals, the bird voices, and he had a way with horses. Prior to entering the Monastery, he'd worked for a while at a stud farm, riding the thoroughbred horses. So, he would be flying across the field on horseback while the Monastery folk would stop to watch him admiringly. The vision was just like out of a movie. He sat a horse beautifully! Once, somebody asked him if he were a Cossack. "Of course, I'm a Cossack!", he replied.

He was a joyful soul, and some over-the-top serious pilgrims reproached him for extreme childishness. However, few were privileged to know of his secret ascetic deeds. Only after his death did many discover what a wise and courageous man he'd been, with so spiritually charged an existence. One pilgrim recalls:

"Trofim was the quintessential monk — keeping everything to himself; Outwardly, he didn't manifest any assumed, hypocritical God-fearing attitude. It always amazed me, how deeply Trofim loved God and people! All people!!! There was no such thing as 'bad' people for him! Anyone could turn to him for help, any time of the day or night!"

One more episode, characterizing monk Trofim:

In the autumn of 1992, the weather was so rainy, that gathering the potato harvest became a nightmare! Rain came pouring down, our boots were full of water... Every one returned to the Monastery long after dark, so exhausted, there was no strength to go to church service. One of the hieromonks decided to shame the others for not showing up for midnight service:

"What have things come to? The church is empty while each one of you has an excuse: "We have returned so late from the fields!" You should follow the example of monk Trofim — yesterday he was the last out of the field, and the first to arrive for midnight service."

To this I might add that after midnight service, Trofim read all the prayers allotted to him, (this took up quite a lot of time), then lit the fire to hang up the other brother's wet clothes and boots for drying for the next day's work. After this, he mended those boots of his brother's, which desperately needed it. To top it off, one of the lay brothers showed up in the middle of the night with the words: "Imagine, I've misplaced my chotki! (prayer rope) I can't find it anywhere... I shall be in trouble if anyone notices its absence!" So, Trofim made him a new chotki that night out of some braid... Trofim didn't get any sleep that time. In the morning, he was off to harvest the potatoes again...

One of the Brothers from the Monastery recalled:

"I complained to Trofim that I usually sit so long pouring over a book, that afterwards I oversleep and miss midnight service. "As for me," he says, "if I sit up too long reading, I never bother to go to bed. I stand on my knees before the bed, and cushion my head on my arms. This way, the arms soon start to tingle, and you certainly won't fall asleep —

you'll be sure to spring up with the first chime of the bells..."

Muscovite Evgenya Protokina noted that monk Trofim was always brief in his speech, yet graphic: one of her acquaintance suffered from despondency. Trofim said to him:

"Read the Psalter. Sometimes the sky is overcast, and your spirits are down, yet once you begin reading, a sun ray bursts through, and such joy kindles your spirit! I've experienced it personally! Believe me!"

Once, Trofim admitted:

"I am with God, constantly, in body and soul! I live only for Him!"

When, after his death, people started to gather their recollections of him, it transpired he'd never conducted any mundane conversations with anyone. His thoughts were always addressed to God. One man, who'd come out of prison, told Trofim of some of the horrors experienced there. Trofim said:

"Prison is the Monastery of the devil. It's all just like a Monastery, only the other way around — we are taught humility, while there they cultivate pride."

And here are some excerpts from monk Trofim's last letter to his relatives in Siberia:

"This is the epitome — to live a life of the spirit! Money and all such (food and rags) — are nothing but the seeds of the devil, worldly rubbish we've all become obsessed with. God preserve you from all that. Try to step on the brakes more often when driving past the church, go and confess your sins. This is the principal thing in life. Have Sasha and the boys gone to church to receive the Eucharist after christening? If not, let them hurry. Every day is worth its weight in gold. The world, as we know, is rushing headlong towards disaster... May the Lord help you see this clearly. I'll try to remember you all in my prayers as often as possible. You may let me know the names of all our distant ancestors on mother's and father's side — I shall pray for them.

I do not write to anyone simply because I am studying to be a monk. If you take holidays, or have relatives come visiting, nothing will come of it. Experience of others has proved the truth of this. A monk must live in a Monastery, in secrecy. He must seek solitude. Monos — means 'alone'. A Monastery implies life of solitude and prayer for everyone. This is very difficult...

I wish you all spiritual joy... Pray for one another. Forgive one another. All the rest is but triviality that one can do without. You need to comprehend this fully. Let it sink in. May God help you make the right choices in life. Forgive me. Love. Unworthy monk Trofim."



Trofim had been ringing the bells, summoning all for Easter midnight service when the satanist, by the name of Nikolay Averin struck him in the back with a ritual knife... Thus ended the almost the three year monastic struggle of monk Trofim...

### **Vladimir Pushkariov ~ Monk Ferapont**



Monk Ferapont became the third victim of the horrendous act committed by the satanist on Easter night in 1993. He lived to be but 35 years, 7 months old.

The future monk Ferapont was born into the world Vladimir Pushkarev on the Feast of the Icon of the Mother of God, "The Unburned Bush," September 17, 1955. The town that his family called home was in a remote, desolate part of the Taiga, where cutting lumber paid only pennies, and many suffered poverty and alcoholism. Most all of the lumber workers were unbaptized since the nearest church could only be reached by plane, and money for this was beyond reach.

Vladimir 's life was considered normal. He attended school, in addition to his compulsory army service, he then volunteered for additional service. This was where he learned and studied the Eastern art of warfare, or Martial Arts, which he later discovered was intermixed with occultism.

One hieromonk recollected how, soon after entering the Monastery, Vladimir, then a lay-brother, said with bitterness: "I was wielding a sword in my thoughts again".

Having finished the army, he studied agriculture. Afterwards he worked as a technical-forester in a lumber range in Baikal. He didn't drink, never smoked, and everyone respected him. But his life in the world was made difficult because certain people considered him a sorcerer.

It was well known that Vladimir's conversion occurred during his time working as a lumber jack.

They say that once an old man appeared to him in the Taiga, and gave him a book about magic. The old man then arranged another meeting on the same spot a year later. Vladimir did not like sorcerers and he did not appear for their second meeting. But he did perform magic tricks for fun to impress the local girls. He would send them into some nearby brush and tell them to write a note, which he would proceed to read from a distance. It appears that he was mystically gifted by nature. Yet his fooling around with the occult almost ended in tragedy. According to the words of a friend, Vladimir lived through his own death. His soul separated from his body and he traveled to a “kingdom of terror”. He died. But an angel appeared to him and said that he would send Vladimir back to earth only if he agreed to go to church.

Vladimir soon left the forest farm, where a church wasn't even hundreds of kilometers distant, and moved to the Rostov-on-Don. There, he started working as a yard-keeper in the Cathedral of the Nativity of Virgin. It was soon noticed that he was an exceptional faster: during Great Lent he would take several prosphora and a bottle of holy water. After the service he would only eat this in the Church hidden behind a column.

Hierodeacon Serafim, who personally knew Monk Ferapont, recalled:

“Ferapont lived exclusively for God, and was so far removed from all earthly cares, even from among the brethren at the Monastery there were few who knew him.”

Indeed, even those, who shared the same cell with him, knew very little about him. For example, the bell-ringer Andrei Suslov. When after the monk's death this man was asked to say something about Father Ferapont, he replied:

“What is there to say? He would be praying assiduously the whole time in his corner, behind the curtain. He prayed and he prayed, that's all there is to tell.”



The future monk lived in Rostov-on-Don for three years, and on holidays he would travel around the monasteries in search of one to stay in. At that time his decision to become a monk had already been made and he had received the blessing of the elder Kirill (Pavlov) of the Trinity-Sergius Lavra. Vladimir later went to Vladika Vladimir, the present-day Metropolitan of Kiev and all Ukraine, and told him, “Vladyko, I will even clean the toilets, if only you give me a recommendation to the Monastery!” And it turned out exactly that the Cathedral needed a person to clean the toilets. The future monk did that for around a year, when he received a recommendation and left the city. He came to the Optina Hermitage from Kaluga (quite a long distance) on foot and took the veil with the name Ferapont.

When details were required for the newspaper obituary, it transpired that there were but two papers in Monk Ferapont's personal file: an autobiography, written by him upon entering the Monastery, and his death certificate. Here is his autobiography:

“I, Pushkariov Vladimir Leonidovich, was born on September 17, 1955 in the village of Kandaurovo, Kolyvansky district of the Novosibirsk region. I lived and worked in the Krasnoyarsk region. Served in the Soviet Army from 1975 until 1977, and from 1977 'till 1980 — joined service on re-engagement. Until 1982 I worked as carpenter at the Building office 97. Then came studies at the forestry technical college — until 1984. After completing studies I worked in my profession as forestry technician at Lake Baikal, the Buryat Autonomous Socialist republic. From 1987 until 1990 I lived in the town of Rostov-on-the-Don. I was employed as yard-keeper at the Rostov Cathedral of the Nativity of the Most Holy Virgin. Presently am free of all worldly affairs.

My mother lives in the Krasnoyarsk region with her children. My elder sister is married,

has two children; the youngest sister goes to school.”

The biography is dated September 13, 1990.

Vladimir Pushkariov was enrolled in the brotherhood of the Monastery a year after he had joined it, on March 22, 1991. On the day of commemoration of Forty from the host of Orthodox martyrs. That day Father Vasily, another of the new martyrs, read the following sermon during service:

“The blood of martyrs is still being spilled for our sins. The demons cannot bear to see the blood of martyrs, for it gleams brighter than sun and stars, scorching the demons. Presently, the martyrs are helping us, and come Doomsday they shall convict us, for to the consummation of ages there operates the law of blood: give blood and accept the Spirit... Each of our committed sins should be washed away with blood.”

Listening eagerly to that sermon, the future new martyr monk Ferapont, was later known to say: “True, our sins can be cleansed only with blood...”

Once he had the duty to keep watch at the Holy Gate of the monastery so that no inappropriately dressed woman would enter it. He had to give them scarves and work gowns. It turned out that he did not notice the women entering or how they were dressed. The warden was constantly criticizing and blaming him, “can’t you see that! You must carefully watch how they all are dressed!” But the monk was only repeating with repentance, “forgive me, father, I haven’t reached such perfection as to be able to look at the women! I am guilty!” Soon this duty was taken from him.

As far as the other kinds of work are concerned, many have admired his talent: an ability to study and pickup something new. He did everything very carefully. In the Monastery he became an excellent woodcarver. Half of the Optina bretheren wear his paraman crosses.

Artist Sergey Lavrov called Ferapont “Titian” for the his shape of his cheekbones, bright-blue eyes and “golden curls on the shoulders”. Lavrov recollected the day when Ferapont showed him his first piece, a carved paraman cross. The impression it produced was very strong. Today there are, of course, elegant crosses decorated with many details. Each curl is trimmed so gracefully, that it is possible to admire each detail as independent from the whole work. In Ferapont’s work there was modesty, severity and a sententious quality—the eye at once is drawn to the figure of the Savior.

Monk Makarius Pavlov remembers how once the wood-carvers, of whom Vladimir was one, were sharing details of how each one of them had come to embrace the Faith, while continuing their work. Vladimir, then already monk Ferapont, listened to his brethren in silence, and then added how, after he had embraced Orthodoxy, the demons had plagued and harassed him: appearing to him, attacking and throttling him... Just like in the narratives of the lives of the ancient Christians, described in the Holy books.

Gathering material about the life of monk Ferapont, those who tackled the task visited his native places in Siberia, and met with his relatives, living in a distant, back-of-the-beyond woodland settlement. His sister Natalia said this:

“...I recollect how, after serving altogether some five years in the army in Vladivostok, Volodya, then worked with a team of builders in our own village, besides driving the worker’s bus. He was never prone to drink, he didn’t smoke, and generally enjoyed respect. To this day everyone says in our native village: “Why did he join the Monastery? He was a saint anyway!”

Volodya’s friend Sergey narrated the following incident:

“At the time Volodya was living in Rostov-on-the-Don and working at the church. Well, Sergey suddenly saw him right here in our village: apparently this was a vision of Volodya, come to warn Sergey of the danger threatening his child. Sergey did not heed

his warning, alas, and the child was hit by a car and died.”

Already from Rostov-on-the-Don, he wrote to his relatives in Siberia: “Where there is no Church, there is no life”, and called on them to come and join him in Rostov. His sister Natalia was to grieve afterwards, and lament this decision of theirs against the move.”

Hiermonk Phillip recalls:

Once, monk Ferapont and I were busy doing building work at the farm yard. To begin with, due to lack of building materials, we weren't making much progress, but towards evening things started to go so well, it seemed like a pity to break off. However, at that point the bell for evening service chimed. Since it was a week day, I suggested to Ferapont: “Why don't we get some more done?” While he said to me: “What, you've repented all your sins already?” And straight away set off for church”.

Witnesses say the monk Ferapont went to confession daily. At times he would even confess twice a day. All of his vocation passed in this tireless work of repentance.

Pilgrim Alexander Gerasimenko, who would work at Optina Pustyn for long spells, and who was acquainted with monk Ferapont, recalls:

“At one time I was overly serious and portentous. I remember, when at Optina Pustyn, coming out of the hermitage, I loved to turn to its gates and cross myself self-consciously and then genuflect, hopefully before a group of tourists, thinking: let them marvel at how pious our youth are! Ferapont would sigh upon witnessing my show of piety, and later said to me: “Sasha, why do you pray like a Pharisee? You should pray unseen, so that nobody beholds you.”

There was no pretense in the monk Ferapont.

One of the women pilgrims by the name of Lidya, said of him:

“He was not a man of this world, so pure — like crystal. He lived by the Bible's laws, and in our day — this is martyrdom.”

Monk Ferapont had notes in his cell, where he put down excerpts from the works by the Holy Fathers of Orthodoxy. He would write out that, of which he later said with conviction: “This has to be lived out in deed.” The walls of his cell were covered with pages featuring quotations from the Holy Fathers, and he would often reread them, trying to implement all their commandments.

As an example, here is a quotation from the Holy Gregory of Nyssa:

“Perfection lies in removing oneself from wanton life not out of fear of punishment, or doing good in anticipation of rewards, thus trading one's virtuous life and arguing the conditions, but rather in seeing only one terror — that of losing God's friendship, and coveting only one priceless gift — that of becoming God's friend. Therein, I believe, lies the perfection to aspire to in life.”

Another quote, copied out by monk Ferapont, from the teachings of the Blessed Diadochius:

“Rather like the doors of a steam bath which, if often opened, let out the steam and warmth, thus the spirit, if it is consumed by a desire to speak often, albeit to speak good, loses warmth through the 'door' of the tongue.”

Another quotation from St Isaac the Syrian:

“Silence is the secret of life of the future century.”



In Optina, Ferapont is described as a person who lived without touching the earth. Imperceptible, silent, he was praying day and night. He had a very strong prayer indeed!

The monks also say that when monk Ferapont completed the monastic prayers with a “five hundred” (500 repetitions of the Jesus prayer), he then would still pray for a long time at night. One of his fellow brothers had decided to count how many prostrations he made during one night. The cell was divided by a curtain, and monk Ferapont was praying in the corner, having thrown a sheepskin coat on a floor in front of the analog. His cellmate was counting and counting the bows, and while counting he fell asleep.

The Hierodeacon who lived with Ferapont in the cell related that before the death of Ferapont, he did not sleep at all, praying all the night and he would only find rest while bending over a chair. Moreover during all of Passion Week he did not eat a bite of food.

Monk Ferapont, strove for the principal monastic deed: prayer for oneself and all of mankind. He particularly liked to pray in solitude, in one of the small chambers of the church, where the relics of one of the Optina Elders were kept. Church service would be over, yet monk Ferapont would still be there in front of the relics, praying.

There was one incident. One of the visitors approached the person on duty in the church, and told him he had found himself here quite by accident, that he had always had serious doubts about God’s existence. “Now I know, God exists!” he said in great agitation to the one on duty, “I saw one monk praying here. I saw what could only have been the face of an angel, talking to God! Do you know you have angels here amongst you? “What angels?” the confused person queried. The visitor pointed to monk Ferapont, who was just leaving the church.

One of the Monastery brethren witnessed something similar. Monk Ferapont was praying at the relics in the empty church, convinced nobody could see him. The brother we are speaking of at that moment quietly came out from behind the altar and chanced to throw a glance at the glowing, angelic countenance of monk Ferapont. He was so shaken, he hurried away.

“Prayer should be the principal deed of a monk” wrote Holy Ignatius Bryanchaninov. Monk Ferapont had such a thirst for prayer, the lengthy church services fed him. His cell mates recollect how he would pray and genuflect at night, too. Just as it is so difficult for us sometimes to go and pray, it was incredibly hard for the monk Ferapont to cease prayer.

Now, looking back, it seems apparent that monk Ferapont felt the approach of his own death. Not long before he died, he began to give away his warm clothes with the words: “I shall not be needing this any more.” And on the eve of Pascha, he distributed his carpentry tools among the brethren...

On the night of that fateful Easter, monk Ferapont was in a state of radiant joy, obviously having received from the Lord the gift of enlightenment and foresight. In any case, some of the monks testified that he could read their minds, while one young lay-brother admitted that Ferapont had told him his future.

The Lord loves us all. Yet we all respond differently to His love. Monk Ferapont responded with an all-consuming love for God. He gave himself to God without reserve. Immediately upon addressing God, he chose for himself the path of asceticism, rejecting all worldly cares. From that point on he lived with God and had but one desire — to be with Him. Throughout his brief vocation, he prayed to the Lord for the redemption of sins. The exploit of his life is the undertaking of repentance. On Easter night, before the murder, monk Ferapont was standing in church, not in his usual place, but near the table, where services for the repose of the souls were usually conducted. He stood, as if immobile, head bowed in prayer. There were a great many people in the church. He was being shoved and crowded, and he didn’t seem to notice anything. Then, he set off for the last confession of his life and from there to take his turn ringing the bells. As he was chiming the bells to announce the glorious Resurrection of Christ, with his brother – monk Trofim, a satanist struck him with a ritual knife. He was killed instantly.

On his body, a letter was found in his pocket. Upon it was written: “if help is needed, I shall be glad to give a hand”. It is not known to whom this letter was addressed.

Though believers are sure—the addressee is all those who pray for the New Martyr Ferapont of Optina Pustyn Monastery.



## The Martyrdom

On Easter in 1993 the Divine Services at Optina Pustyn Monastery began and progressed as usual. According to existing Monastery tradition, the religious procession to and from the Skete of St. John the Baptist, which is situated to the east of the Monastery, was coming to an end. The festive Easter peal was heard coming from Monastery and Skete belfries. The number of people attending was enormous—up to 10 thousand people (the militia later reported, hired to guard the Monastery during the festive service). After the Divine Liturgy, the monks went to the refectory to break the fast. Upon completing the meal, two of the bell-ringers, monk Ferapont and monk Trophim, returned to the belfry to continue the ringing the peal, by then it was ten past six in the morning. Suddenly, the bell ringing became uneven and then ended completely. A terrible crime had been committed in the belfry—two monks Ferapont and Trofim were viciously murdered by blows from an assailant with a knife.

Monk Ferapont died instantly. After the stabbing attack, Monk Trophim uttered a loud cry: “God, have mercy upon us!” and called “Help!”; having attempted to rise, he rang the bell—and then collapsed.

The murderer, Nikolay Averin ran away to the Skete, where Hieromonk Vasily was on his way in order to hear confessions. Seeing him, the criminal stabbed him in the back with the same knife.

Then he climbed over the monastery wall and threw away a blood-stained homemade weapon. The knife was double-edged, five centimeters wide, and resembled a sword. It had “666” and “satan” engraved on its blade. The same inscription was found on another knife in the pocket of a greatcoat that was abandoned by the killer.

Having committed the atrocious murders, Averin slipped the edge of the monk’s robes to their heads and pulled their klobuks over their faces.

Nikolay Averin inflicted knife wounds to the back of his victims. According to the investigator, the injuries were inflicted with unusual professionalism “and deliberately—they were not too deep—to make the victim bleed to death over a long time”. (*ed. note – how this could be when Monk Ferapont died instantly and monk Trophim almost so needs some investigation.*)

In fact, Hieromonk Vasily suffered for several hours, monk Ferapont died immediately and monk Trophim very soon after .

It seemed that there was still life in monk Trophim. He was brought to Vvedensky Cathedral, but a few minutes later he passed away.

In spite of a terrible wound, Hieromonk Vasily, the one known as “The Monument” due to his physical strength, lived longer than the others. He looked at the people surrounding him and even tried to rise. He was also brought to the Cathedral and was put next to the relics of St. Elder Ambrose, and then he was taken by ambulance to the local hospital in Kozelsk. There he also soon passed away.

How on earth could this cruel man of an unknown build overpower three monks?! And what monks! Monk Trophim could tie a poker into a knot (there was an episode when some drivers tried to straighten out a dent in a truck with a sledge-hammer, and all their attempts fell flat until

Trophim did it with bare hands). Two-meter-high Hieromonk Vasily, in his previous life, was known to be one of the best water-polo players in the country. He used to be a member of a combined team of the USSR. His reaction time was stunning and he was famous for an amazing mighty throw. Even while dying he could have delivered a shattering blow. Monk Ferapont was very good at martial arts – aikido, karate, etc.

The inquest confirmed that the wounds were all delivered to the back. The belfry area where monks Trophim and Ferapont were killed is rather small, and a stranger can't get there unnoticed. However, it's clear to an Orthodox Christian, even without any investigation, that the monks would not requite violence using the same violence. It was their last temptation. Thou shalt not murder, even your own killer, one must love and forgive.

According to the witness recollections, the martyrs had foreseen their deaths. Monk Trophim had often spoken that he had little time left – half a year, a year. While Ferapont, once a silent monk, began asking everybody to pray for him. Hieromonk Vasily prayed to die at Easter.



### **Post Scripts:**

The mother of monk Trofim did not manage to be in time for her son's burial. When the news of his death had come, she was being treated in a hospital after a stroke. The doctors prohibited her from flying by airplane, so she had to travel by train from Siberia. She came to the monastery and spent some time there. She even wanted to stay there for good but they blessed her to go back home and help turn her other children to God. Thus through the death of a beloved brother and because of a mother's efforts, her children had come to God. Once Lena, a younger sister of the monk, saw Trofim in a dream. He looked so worn out in that dream and had such a sorrow in his eyes that the girl shivered hearing his voice as for real: "I'm so tired. I have worked my tail off praying for you all but you are still not going to church." And at one time 14 of Trofim's relatives had been baptized together.

S Prazdnikom,

I have just returned from Optina and I can answer the questions above about the murderer. He was indeed a satanist. He was apprehended and jailed for the murders. While in prison he tried to kill himself several times, but he failed, as surgeons saved him from his self-inflicted wounds. After the last attempt, he expressed the desire to repent and asked to see a priest. Optina Monastery sent Fr. Tikhon, the skete superior, who heard his confession. The murderer has several more years of incarceration for the crime. He continues to live in repentance.

It is known that a group of satanists exists near the Holy Monastery, and in fact several of them murdered a lay worker outside the monastery walls on the one year anniversary of the first martyrdoms. The Monastery now has a small police station immediately outside the gates, and extra

care is taken to prevent further intrusions.

This information was given to me by Hieromonk Hilarion of Optina Pustyn.

Currently a chapel is being built over the Martyrs' graves, with the blessing of Patriarch Alexis II.

Sinful Monk Panteleimon

**Holy New Martyrs Vasily, Trofim, & Ferapont pray to God for us!**

Source: <http://thehandmaid.wordpress.com/new-martyrs-of-the-optina-pustyn-monastery/>