



New Martyrs of Optina Pustyn

In the year 1993 the Orthodox world was shocked by a tragic event, which had happened in Optina Hermitage: three inhabitants of the monastery were brutally murdered on Easter night. They were Hieromonk Basil (Roslyakov), Monk Therapont (Pushkaryov) and Monk Trophim (Tatarinov). According to the investigator, the murderer Nikolay Averin inflicted the injuries with unusual professionalism, "deliberately—they were not too deep—to make the victim bleed to death over a long time." The knife was double-edged, five centimeters wide, and resembled a sword. It was engraved on its blade with "666" and "satan."

This is a narrative about three martyrs from the Optina Pustyn monastery in Central Russia. All three monks were killed by a satanist on Easter night in 1993. 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.

Hieromonk Basil (Igor Roslyakov)

The first person we'd like to tell you about is Muscovite Igor Roslyakov, one of those who began the process of this revival.

Three months prior to his arrival at the monastery, Igor wrote in his diary: "March 12th, 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...'"

A few words at this point about the hand of the Lord in Igor Roslyakov's destiny.

When in 1984, upon embracing the Faith, he started going to church regularly, one pilgrim, casting a glance in his direction, said: "A monk is praying." At the time, Igor never even dreamt of monkhood. He could always be seen in one and 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 here—the home place of Moscow's great saint—St. Basil the Blessed.



Hieromonk Basil (Roslyakov)

When inside the church, Igor invariably stood near the icon of St. Basil the Blessed. If you stand in exactly this spot, then you will find yourself facing, in the iconostasis, the large icon of Archangel Michael and above it—the icon of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin. Years later, Igor shall take the habit and receive the name of Vasily, or Basil, in honor of Basil the Blessed. Later, on the day in memory of Archangel Michael, Basil was ordained at the monastery church, consecrated in honor of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin.

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

On June 21, 1988, Igor Roslyakov became an inhabitant of the Optina Pustyn, which then lay in ruins. Together with the then far from numerous brethren, he faced the daunting task of rebuilding 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 No. 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 about another'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 Champions' Cup. That's when they learned that at the University he'd been Captain of the Water polo team, and later, sports instructor.

The first to suspect that Igor Roslyakov was a former athlete were youngsters 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 latter restored some wall or another, than these fellows would be there, writing rude words on it, with no respect for the work that had gone into it. First, they were reasoned with and patiently admonished, yet 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 the scruffs of their necks, 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 admiration and respect 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 one Irina, and lay-brother Igor Roslyakov was helping him:



Future Hieromonk Basil (Roslyakov)

"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 actually see it.

He generally possessed a keen sensibility for and perception of grace. This became particularly evident at Easter. He felt the spirit of Easter 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 Easter benevolence and grace, pervading the very atmosphere. Easter 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 diary: "April 10, 1988. Easter. My third Easter... 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. Easter. 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 happening around us. This feeling is characteristic of people, who are endowed with a force of sacrificial, elevated love.

Here are more entries from Father Basil's diary:

"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 Easter, 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 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 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 olden times had the audacity to accept sins of others and avert them by prayer. Father Basil did not see himself as an ascetic. It really came down to forced means: Russian monkhood was led to heroic deeds in unexampled conditions, when Monasteries were only just rising from the rubble. His was a period when there was a shortage of clergymen, and the young hieromonks were suffering undue stress and overwork, resulting in early graying hair.

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

"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 of the war years, had to experience 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 led me to his cell. Father Basil had been washing his robes, and was wearing faded patched jeans and a threadbare old 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, here 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, 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 some time before his death.

He was destined to experience the rank of clergyman but for two and a half years. To begin with only visitors went to confess to the beginning clergyman. And these were few, for as it transpired, his monumental, imposing figure was seen as fearsome by many. Youths called him "the monument" behind his back. Indeed, there was some truth in this simile, for he could stand for hours immobile at the lectern. When accepting people's confessions, he never seated himself, but preferred to stand. During Lent, he could stand his way 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 diaries that not only did Father Basil hear every word, spoken in the confessional, but 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 all the names of those, who came to confession to him, or whom he christened. Afterwards, back in the privacy of his cell, he bowed low, praying for all of them to the Lord.

A nun by the name of Varvara, who used to confess to him, said that Father Basil said not 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.

Martyrdom

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 the 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 the Calvary, and sanctified at the Lord's Tomb, had so special a 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 — icon-painters 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 private 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!

Monk Trofim (Alexei Tatarnikov)

Another monk, who died tragically on Easter night in 1993 at the age of 39, Trofim, came to Optina Pustyn in August of 1990. Outside the monastery walls his name had been Alexei Tatarnikov. He was born on February 4, 1954.

This young man came to the monastery with the 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, the simile was not without grounds: he was blue-eyed and blond, with powerful arms and legs, which carried him with firm, steady tread. His was the 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.



Monk Trofim

Trofim had mastered many a trade. After finishing secondary school studies in his native village, he 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 sailors' custom, they'd make a beeline for the restaurant. Trofim 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, yet light-hearted. For this remarkable ability to ignite revelry without undue intoxication, Trofim was heartily invited to diverse sailors' company and weddings. Everyone could be certain of a grand old time, without drunken debauchery. Trofim was a quick hand at carpentry, a tractor-driver, baker, and many other trades. This is why other people were constantly approaching him for help and guidance. He, in turn, never turned anyone down. His help was always gratis and sincere.

For Trofim, 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 quite handy later at the monastery.

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 ploughed, and only afterwards those of other civilians, from the locals, who approached the monastery for help. Thus, when Trofim would be instructed to carry out the ploughing, 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 with him to plough up her bit of land, or do some other chores. Some of these were lonely old souls, others had but 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? 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 grannies, simple white cotton kerchiefs, edged with color. The old ladies, in turn, treasured these "trophies" 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.

Once, Trofim was busy loading wood for the monastery. 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 were 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. Trofim set his tractor straight off the road, and he drove recklessly across the terrain, nose-diving and stumbling. Sitting in the cabin with Trofim was icon-artist Olga, who was quite terrified: not of the breakneck speed or the rugged terrain, but of the look on Trofim's face. As a rule he wore an easy smile, but was now quite 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, 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 as often reprimanded. 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 meted out punishment. Here is one example:

They say that when the Monastery turned out its first bread, Trofim was the baker! What 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 there and then. The baker was accordingly punished for this misdemeanor. Trofim had to pray to God with genuflection at length. Yet, Trofim accepted this, as 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 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.' "



Future Monk Trofim Tatarnikov

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 rush 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 animals, bird voices, had a way with horses. Prior to entering the monastery, he had 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 was a jolly 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 of the pilgrims recalls:

"Trofim was the quintessential monk—keeping everything to himself; Outwardly, he didn't manifest any assumed, hypocritical God-fearing attitudes. 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 allotted him prayers, taking up quite a lot of time, then lit the fire to hang up the other brothers' wet clothes and boots for drying for the next day's work. After this, he mended those boots of his brothers', 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 rosary! Can't find it anywhere... I shall be in trouble if anyone notices its absence!" So, Trofim made him a new rosary 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 Psalm book. 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 recollections of him, other people's impressions, 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."

It is said that there were no pests in the village plots that Trofim had ploughed with his tractor, though the neighboring ones were invaded by them. Village folk would even come to Optina Pustyn to ask monk Trofim what prayer he'd said to ward off the bugs. While he would reply: "I read only one prayer: 'O Lord, Jesus Christ, have mercy on thy sinner.' "

After monk Trofim's death, some of the locals took earth from his grave, diluted it with water, and then sprinkled their vegetable plots with it, firm in the belief the new martyr Trofim would help them fight the pests, plaguing their crops. There are testimonies that this, indeed, served its purpose.

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."

Martyrdom

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 three-year-long monkhood of Trofim.

Monk Therapont (Vladimir Pushkariov)

Monk Therapont was the third victim of the horrendous act by a satanist on Easter night in 1993. He lived to be but 35 years, 7 months old. In secular life his name was Vladimir Pushkariov.

Hierdeacon Seraphim, who personally knew Monk Therapont, recalled: "Therapont 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 Therapont, 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."



Monk Therapont

When details were required for the newspaper obituary, it transpired there were but two papers in Monk Therapont's personal file: an autobiography, written by him upon entering the Monastery, and his death certificate. His autobiography, dated September 13, 1990, reads as follows:

"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 'til 1980—joined service on re-engagement. Until 1982 I worked as carpenter at the Building office No. 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."

Vladimir Pushkariov was enrolled in the brotherhood of the monastery a year after he had joined it, on March 22, 1991. This was the day of memory of forty Orthodox martyrs. That day, Father Vasily, one of the new martyrs we have already told you about, read the following sermon during service:

"The blood of martyrs is still being spilt 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 had been the future new martyr Therapont, who later was known to say: "True, our sins can be cleansed only with blood..."

Gathering material about the life of monk Therapont, those who tackled the task visited his native places in Siberia, met with his relatives, living in a distant, back-of-the-beyond woodland settlement. Here is what they gleaned from his sister Natalia:

"... 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 workers' bus. He was never prone to drink, 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."

It turned out that Vladimir first felt summoned by God when he was working in the Buryat Forestry on Lake Baikal. Those gathering details of his biography came across a curious incident, recounted by pilgrims from the region of Lake Baikal. The story relates that Vladimir once had an encounter with an old magician, there in the taiga woods, who offered him books on magic. The old fellow told him to study the magic books carefully and to come and meet him at the same spot in a year's time. Vladimir did not like magicians, and he did not show up for the meeting. However, he had apparently read the books. Since he did not treat magic seriously, he made use of what he had learned to amuse the local village girls. He would send them off to a neighboring cottage, instructing them to write notes, which he then proceeded to mind-read. Gifted from birth, yet knowing nothing of God, Vladimir had no notion of the dangerous forces he was playing games with.



Future Monk Therapont

The game almost ended in tragedy. According to his friend Sergey, Vladimir experienced his own death. His soul had separated from his body and found itself in the kingdom of terror. He was dying. Then the Lord's angel came to him and said he would return him to earth if he would go to church after that. Immediately after this, Vladimir left the forestry office and moved to Rostov-on-the-Don, where he was christened and took on the job of sweeper at the cathedral there. Why did he not stay on in his native places? Simply

because one could reach the nearest church only by plane, flying a distance of hundreds of kilometers, though sects and magicians there were in abundance! 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.

It also came to be known that in the army Vladimir studied the martial arts of the Orient for five years, discovering later that they were all linked with the occult evils. One hieromonk recollects how, soon after entering the monastery, Vladimir, then a lay-brother, said with bitterness: "I was

wielding a sword in my thoughts again," 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 working at what they were doing. Vladimir, already monk Therapont, listened to his brethren in silence, then told them 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.

Monk Therapont responded to the Lord's love with all-consuming love for God in return. He gave himself to God without reserve. Immediately upon addressing God, he chose for himself the path of asceticism, rejecting all worldly cares. From now on he lived with God and had but one desire: to be with God. Throughout his brief monkhood, he prayed to the Lord for redemption of sins. The exploit of his life is the exploit of repentance.

Hieromonk Phillip recalls:

Once, monk Therapont 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 Therapont: "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 Therapont went to confession daily. At times he would even confess twice a day. All of his monkhood 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 Therapont, 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! Therapont 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 behold you..."

Monk Therapont himself had not a whit of pretense in him, nor pharisaism. His devotion to God was sincere and complete.

One of the women, a pilgrim 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 laws, and in our day—this is martyrdom."

Monk Therapont 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 Nisso:

"Perfection lies in removing oneself from wanton life not out of fear of punishment, or doing good in anticipation of rewards, thus trading ones' 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 Therapont, 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 Father Isaac the Syrian: "Silence is the secret of life of the future century."

The world inevitably cultivates a pre-conceived notion of monastic life, and can have an oppressive influence on the monastery. In newspaper publications one is immediately confronted with their groundwork thesis: the monks are useful to society since they take care of the needy and sick and take gifts to foster homes. Of course, all this is a part of the routine at Optina Pustyn. Still, to assess the value of monkhood by deeds of charity is akin to assessing the merits of a microscope for cracking nuts. This is a debate that goes way back when—on the social merits and Christian love. The archives of great Russian writer Fyodor Dostoevsky contain a letter by violinist of the Imperial theatre, who censured Christ for not having turned stones into bread. The violinist wrote with indignation that one should first feed humanity and only then talk of Love and Christ. In a reply letter Fyodor Dostoevsky roughly outlined a picture of sated humankind, without any belief in God, and asked if we would not then be in danger of turning into overfed swine, unable to raise our heads to the heavens? And then prophesied: "bread shall then be turned to stone."

As for monk Therapont, he 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 Therapont would still be there in front of the relics, praying.

At one time, one of the visitors approached the person on duty in the church, and told him he had found himself there 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 Therapont, who was just leaving the church.

One of the monastery brethren witnessed something similar. Monk Therapont was praying at the relics in the empty church, convinced nobody could see him. The brother quietly came out from behind the altar and chanced to throw a glance at the glowing, angel-like face of monk Therapont. He was so shaken, he hurried away.

"Prayer should be the principal deed of a monk," wrote Holy Ignatius (Brianchaninov). Monk Therapont had such a thirst for prayer, even the lengthy church services could not alleviate it. 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, so it was incredibly hard for the monk Therapont to cease prayer.

Martrydom

Now, looking back, one can see that monk Therapont saw the approach of his own death. Not long before he died, he started to give away his warm clothes with the words: "I shall not be needing this any more." Right on the eve of Easter, he distributed his carpentry tools among the brethren.

On the eve of Easter, monk Therapont 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 Therapont had told him his future.

On Easter night, before the murder, monk Therapont was standing in church, not in his usual place, but near the table, where services for the repose of the souls are usually conducted. He stood, as if immobile, head bowed in prayer and sorrow. There were a great many people in the church. He was being shoved and crowded, yet he seemed to notice nothing. Then, he set off for the last confession of his life. A satanist struck him with a ritual knife when, together with monk Trofim, he was chiming the bells.

Source

- Tatyana Shvetsova. *New Martyrs of the Optina Pustyn, Voice of Russia, 05-04-2007.*

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The Inner World of Hieromonk Vasily of Optina

On April 18, 1993, amidst the abundant joy of the bright Resurrection of Christ in the newly resurrecting Orthodox Russia, the shocking news of a triple murder at Optina monastery spread throughout the world—a deranged satanist's only claim to fame. The three Optina brothers, Hieromonk Vasily (Roslyakov), monk Ferapont (Pushkarev), and monk Trophim (Tatarinov) died fulfilling their monastic obediences: Fr. Ferapont and Fr. Trophim were ringing the Paschal bells after the night services, and Fr. Vasily was walking to the Skete of St. John the Baptist to confess the brothers before the morning Liturgy, when a man carrying a knife with the inscription 666 walked into the famous Russian monastery to fatally wound the three monks. As the disturbed man, Nikolai Averin, said later in a televised interview, "Sure, I feel sorry for the fellows, but I had to do it." He was following the orders of the ancient man-killer.

Compare this pitiful self-justification for a deeply despicable deed to the depth of repentance of one of the righteous sufferers, Hieromonk Vasily. Fr. Vasily was educated as a journalist, and showed great talent as a writer and poet. While the inner world of the other two martyrs remains to some degree a mystery, Fr. Vasily left us his journal entries and other notes, which provide an insight as to how the Lord proved his heart, and found him worthy of a martyr's death. For while satan is capable only of destruction and hate, our Lord Jesus Christ as God brings love and resurrection to fallen man.

The following is an excerpt from the book, Thou Hast Proved Me, O God and Knowest. The Life of Hieromonk Vasily.

* * *

On Repentance

What do I resemble when desiring to overcome my pride? I resemble a man trying to move a mountain with his own hands. I use all my knowledge and apply all my strength. I can see that my desire is unattainable—the mountain remains unmovable, but I do not give up my labors. I can see the futility of my efforts. I cry over my helplessness, lament over the impossibility of fulfilling my intention. Despondency clouds the mind, sloth binds the body, and hopelessness wounds the heart. "What is it all for?" these passions ask me, "No one needs your labor." And I reply, "It is needed for God Himself is helping me in it!"

Why do the same words, which yesterday I did not even notice, today astound me by their magnitude and wisdom, so much so that I want to hold them forever in my heart? It is because of the inconstancy of my heart. Yesterday it was like ice, and therefore everything sophisticated and austere made it ecstatic, while today it is like melting snow that rejoices in



light and warmth. What takes place in the depth of my heart where neither my sight nor my mind penetrates? There, like the sun rising and setting, repentance is born and dies.

It is frightening to see in yourself a readiness to commit any of the most onerous sins. This is a bottomless abyss, a hellish precipice; it is eternal torment and death. Seeing this in yourself, you must unceasingly call out for help and mercy. I live, and I uphold faithfulness only outwardly, by God's mercy, but the Lord sees my infirmity and does not allow circumstances and burdens beyond my strength. While washing yourself in the bathhouse, think: "I am preparing my body for burial, washing and anointing it," and, "as I wash the dirt from my body, so do Thou also, O Lord, create in me a clean heart and renew a right spirit within me" (Ps. 50:10). In this way, you will always conquer the indulgence of your body.

When you judge someone else, you must pray thus: after all, Lord, it is I who have sinned. Forgive me and have mercy on me!

By the waters of Babylon, there have we sat down and we wept (Ps. 136:1) The rivers of Babylon flow from my heart—the rivers of judgment of my brothers, ambition; the rivers of faintheartedness, fear and dread before various obediences; rivers of self-pleasing and self-pity; rivers of love of glory and anger, despondency, laziness, sadness; the rivers of all impurity, blasphemy, faithlessness, cunning, and uncleanness. I sit by my heart and weep over the endless flow of these rivers. Underground abysses feed these rivers, and the rivers of my passions feed the bottomless gulf of my sinful heart.

Lord! It is an abyss, the abyss of hell. In it there is no support, no comfort. All is clamor, all is wickedness, all is emptiness. God, in Thy name save me and give me Thy hand, as Thou didst to Peter.

Don't you see how daily you add sin to sin? Why do you return every day to the slimy excrement of your passions and vices? Don't you see how everything you do reproaches you, your ignorance, impurity of mind and heart, your imperfection? Everything you have—your deeds, thoughts and feelings—are detrimental, flawed, mixed with vice and impurity; all is impoverished and orphaned.

Don't you see how the passions surround you and play with you, handing you around to each other? Don't you see how they leave you alone for a time and, standing a little distance away, watch how you, a weak person give yourself over to vainglory, forgetfulness, carelessness? They laugh, because one touch from them is enough to destroy all your peace and quiet and make it disappear; they laugh, because you are their inheritance, their slave, even a slave who thinks himself free. The sight of a slave with such high self-opinion, considering himself to be a master, gives them particular pleasure. Do you see your sin-flowing heart? How it slanders your brothers, all people, the entire world, night and day?

Heal me, Lord! Seal the flow of impurity, sin and vice. Create a clean heart in me, O God, and renew a right spirit within me (Ps. 50:10). Because of my deeds I deserve eternal torments, but the Lord secretly nourishes a hope in my soul for His mercy. Otherwise, it would be beyond my strength for me to live.

St Poemen the Great said, "Believe me, children, wherever Satan is, there will I be". He did not only think this way, he felt it.

The Lord allows you to see your heart as it slanders the brothers—the Lord, and the whole world, day and night. Then you see all the impossibility of correcting yourself, the endlessness of your fall, the abyss of hell. Then you quite admit that wherever Satan is, there will you be. This is an awareness, a thought. But for St Poemen the Great, it was a feeling. The difference is like night and day. Therefore you only lament over your sinfulness, while St Poemen the Great pours forth endless tears. His soul felt the reality of the torments of hell and knew them.

On Love

We need to love everyone as we love ourselves, and be ready for death at any hour.

But another thing is possible: to love your neighbour as yourself, to pray for him as for yourself; thus, seeing that the sins of your neighbour are your sins, you descend into hell with these sins for the sake of your neighbour's salvation.

"Lord, Thou gavest me love and changed everything for me, and now I cannot act in any other way; I can only go to torments for the salvation of my neighbour. I moan, I weep, I am terrified, but I cannot do anything else, for it is Thy love which leads me, and I do not want to part with it; in it I gain hope of salvation, and seeing it within me, I do not despair utterly."

*From: Thou Hast Proved Me, O God and Knowest.
The Life of Hieromonk Vasily*

Optyna martyrs



In the year 1993 the whole Orthodox world was shocked by a tragic event, which had happened in Optina Hermitage: three inhabitants of the monastery were brutally murdered on Easter night. They were hieromonk Vasily (Roslyakov), monk Ferapont (Pushkarev) and monk Trophim (Tatarinov).

The Easter service in Optina began as usual. According to the existing tradition, the religious procession to the skete of St. John the Baptist, which is situated to the east of the Monastery, and back was coming to an end. The festive Easter peal was heard coming from monastery and skete belfries. The number of people was enormous—up to 10 thousand people (as the militia later reported, which were guarding the Monastery during the festive service,). After the Liturgy the monks went to the refectory to break the fast. After completing the meal, two of the bell-ringers, monk Ferapont and monk Trophim, returned to the belfry to continue the Easter peal. By then it was ten past six. Suddenly the bell ringing became uneven and then stopped completely. A terrible crime was committed on the belfry—the monks were villainously killed with stabs from a knife.

Monk Ferapont expired at once. After the stabbing Monk Trophim uttered a loud shriek: “God, have mercy upon us!” and “Help!; having risen a bit, he rang the bell—and fell down.

The murderer ran away to the skete, where hieromonk Vasily was also going in order to hear confessions. The criminal stabbed him in the back with the same knife.

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

The murderer Nikolay Averin inflicted knife wounds to the back. 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”. In fact, hieromonk Vasily suffered for several hours, though monks Trophim and Ferapont died immediately.

Averin killed monks Ferapont and Trophim while they were announcing to the world on the belfry

the Resurrection of Christ. And hieromonk Vasily was killed when he was going to the skete to hear confessions. Having committed the murder, Averin slipped the edge of the monks' robes to their heads and pulled their klobuks over their faces.

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 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 soon passed away.

It was also surprising that the monks began to give away their possessions before their murder, including their personal tools, saying they would not need them any more (which was all the more unusual at the time when there was such a lack of tools in the monastery that one had to bring them from home or get them somehow through friends, otherwise one could not do his work). Everyone in Optina monastery was surprised by this occurrence, but after the murder it became clear: the monks had foreseen the glory of martyrdom prepared for them.

To understand why the monks were ready to die, it is necessary to know what kind of life they lived.

For more than ten years people in Optina monastery have been collecting information about monks Trofim, Ferapont and Vasily.

A Joyful Ascetic



Monk Trophim

Leonid Tatarnikov, the future monk Trofim, was born in the village of Dagon, Irkutsk region, on the 4th of February, 1957. When he was a baby he cried day and night incessantly for almost two years, so that some people thought he was unlikely to survive. But he became quiet as soon as he was baptised, and since then became a smiling healthy boy.

Leonid grew into a tall beautiful young man, and girls liked him. Besides being handsome, he was erudite (he would read all night

long, and was even nicknamed Bookworm), hard-working and never touched alcohol. Girls tried hard to marry him, 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 a girl: "sister". He was a born monk, but he understood it much later.

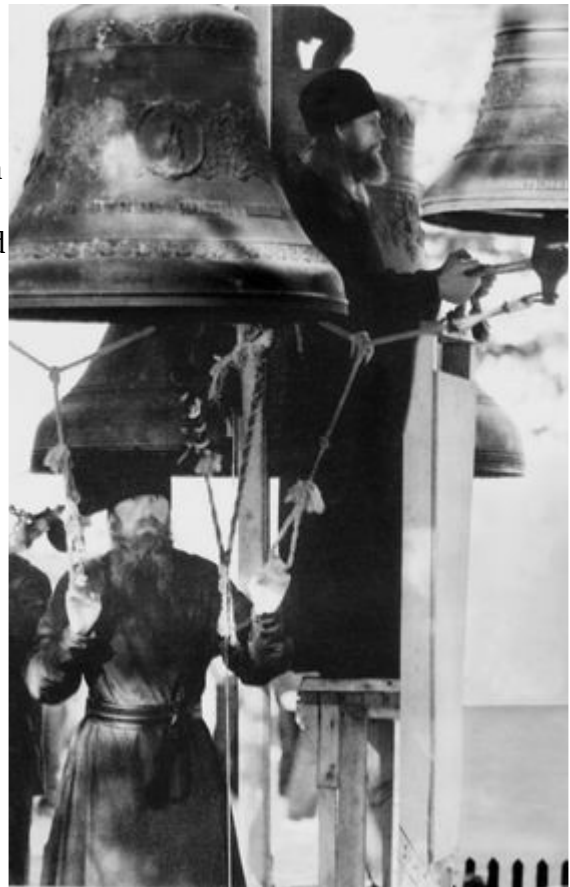
Having finished secondary school, Leonid studied in a railway services college. After completing his service in the army he worked as a sailor on a trawler.

When Leonid was getting a foreign passport, for some reason he changed his name and became Alexey. Alexey tried quite a number of occupations: photography, horse-breeding for a local horse farm, and shoe-making (the shoes he made were such that everyone in the town queued 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 dance schools. He was 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 to enter into a contract and become a professional dancer, but he refused.

The future monk was looking for the meaning of life and still could not understand what was lacking. He took up "well-being" and even gave up eating meat. In his room there hung a time-table according to which Alexei went without food for ten days twice a month in the vain hope to give up smoking (he took to smoking 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.

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 wing 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 was able to deliver a shattering blow. Monk Ferapont was very good at martial art (aikido, karate).



Monks Ferapont and Trophim

The committee of inquiry affirms that the whole point is the stabs were delivered to the back. But the belfry 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 person even without any investigation that the monks could not requite violence using the same violence. It was their last temptation. A real monk mustn't bloody his hands.

Evidently, by then monks Trophim, Vasily and Ferapont were ready for death. According to the witness' recollections, the martyrs had foreseen their death. 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.

On Pentecost day, 1990, Alexei had a vision. He immediately decided to become a monk and bought a ticket to Optina 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. His spiritual search lasted a long time until at the age of thirty-six he stayed in Optina monastery and took monastic vows, becoming monk Trofim.

Having settled in the monastery, he found this holy place rather neglected. 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 asked for them. Now the land bears fruit again. The monks have managed to cultivate this poor soil, and the hard-working monk Trofim took part in that, too.

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 neighbouring gardens. Some people even came to the monastery to ask what kind of prayer the monk was saying. 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 learnt how to ring the bells. God made him able to do all that for his prayers.

When they decided to bake their own bread in the Optina monastery (in the beginning of the nineties bread supplies in Russia were limited), the task was appointed to monk Trofim. Nobody knew how to bake bread in the monastery. The monk had to run around to find a receipt. But as a result his loafs were spongy, light and tasty. His bread was called "healing" in the neighborhood. When leaving the monastery, one businessman even asked to have the special receipt of monastery bread. The man explained that his sick stomach did not digest bread at all, excluding the monastery "healing" bread. They gave him the receipt but he did not know the most important thing: how thoroughly monk Trofim prayed on each baking and how many bows he made in front of Icon of the Mother of God "The Grower of Crops" ["Sporitel'nitsa hlebov"].

Trofim was a real monk—secret, focused inward, and there was no external, ostentatious devotion 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 would receive it. It was to monk Trofim that everybody went asking for repairs for a watch, photo camera or even 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 got used to his perseverance. It was difficult to imagine this strong monk, always happy and lively, to be an ascetic one and to have a custom to eat nothing during the first and the last week of the Great Fast.

However during the last (for Trofim) Fast 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. But one could always recognize monk Trofim even from a long distance because of his flying long gait. He was hurrying to church overtaking many others on his way. But during his final days it became hard to recognize him. Sasha the Prosphora-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.

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 to turn to God her other children. 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.

He lived without touching the earth.



Monk Ferapont

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”, 1955. He was born in a remote desolate town of the *Taiga*, where lumber cutting paid only pennies, and many suffered poverty or drank. All of the workers were unbaptised since the nearest church could only be reached by plane, and no one had the money for that.

Everything in Vladimir’s life was normal. He attended school, then the army (compulsory, and then additional voluntary service), where he learned the Eastern art of warfare, which he later discovered was mixed with occultism. Having finished the army, he studied agriculture. After that he worked as a technical-forester in a lumber range in Baikal. He never drank, never smoked, and everyone respected him. But his life in the world was made difficult because certain people considered him a

sorcerer.

It is well known that Vladimir’s conversion occurred during his time working as a lumber jack. They say that once an old man appeared to Vladimir in the *Taiga*, who gave him a book about magic and arranged another meeting on the same spot in a year. Vladimir did not like the sorcerers and they did not appear for their second meeting. But he performed magical tricks for fun for the local girls. He would send them into some local brush and told them to write a note, which he would then read from a distance. He was mystically gifted by nature. His games almost ended in tragedy. According to the words of his own 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 earth only if he agreed after that to go to church.

After all that 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 Lent he would take several proshpora, crackers and a bottle of holy water. After the service he would only eat this in the Church behind a column.

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 can 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.

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 scarfs and work gowns. It turned out that he did not notice the women and even didn’t realize 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 that 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: a talent to study something new. He was doing everything very carefully. In the monastery he became an excellent woodcarver. Half of the Optina bretheren are wearing his paraman crosses.

Artist Sergey Lavrov called Ferapont "Titian" for his shaped cheekbones, bright-blue eyes and "golden curls on the shoulders ". Lavrov recollected the day when Ferapont showed him his first work, 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 it, as an independent picture. But the details hide the main subject, and the skill of the artist and his pride come to the fore. In Ferapont's work there was modesty, severity and laconicalness—the eye at once seized the figure of the Savior.

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!

Once a person came up to church's warden saying that he had come to the monastery by accident, doubting the existence of the God, and at last he believed. " I saw here how one monk was praying," he said, "I saw the face of an angel talking with Lord. Do you know that there are angels among you? " " What angels? " said the warden in surprise. The visitor then pointed to Ferapont, who was coming out of the Church at that moment.



The monks also tell that, when monk Ferapont completed the monastic prayers with a "five hundred" (500 repetitions of the Jesus prayer), not an obligatory one for an inok, he then would still pray for a long time at night. One of his fellow brothers had decided to count how many bows 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 analoy. His cellmate was counting and counting the bows, and while counting has fallen 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 found rest while bending over a chair. Moreover during all of Passion Week he did not eat a bite.

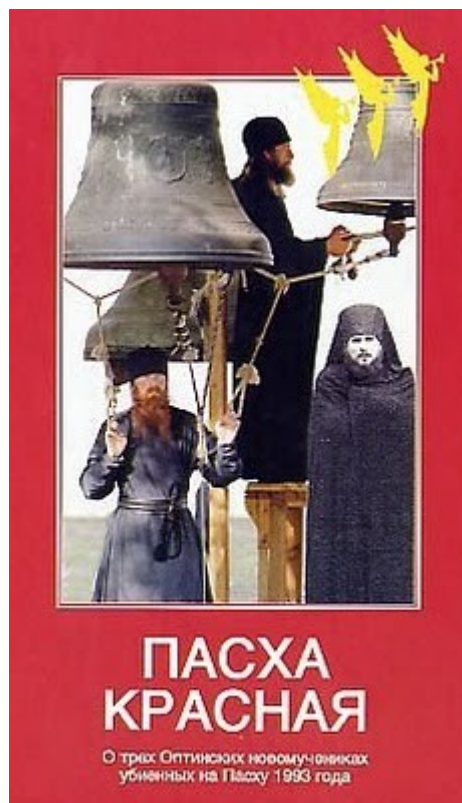
After he was murdered a letter was found in his pocket. It said that "if help is needed, I shall be glad to give a hand". It is not known yet to whom this letter was addressed.



But many believers are sure—the addressee are all those who pray for the martyr Ferapont of Optina.

Translation: A.Ljubimova, A.Martchuk, N.Volkova, L.Zholudeva, edited by fr. Savvatij (Lewis)

http://www.pravmir.com/article_127.html





**Show me, O Lord, the end of my life,
And the number of my days reveal to me.**

**May be then shall I fear the material strife,
And no one will extinguish the fear of Thee.**

**Tell me this and abandon me thence,
So my soul may mature in misfortunes on Earth
So the way of the cross brings me the strength
Before it is time to head off.**

New Martyr Hieromonk Basil Roslyakov

A poem written by Fr. Basil, who died on Pascha of 1993 from the sword of a satanist in Optina monastery.



***Open, O doors and bolts of my heart
that Christ the King of Glory may enter!***

Enter, O my Light and enlighten my darkness;

enter, O my Life, and resurrect my deadness;

enter, O my Physician and heal my wounds;

enter, O Divine Fire, and burn up the thorns of my sins;

ignite my inward parts and my heart with the flame of Thy love;

enter, O my King, and destroy in me the kingdom of sin;

***sit on the throne of my heart and [You] alone reign in me,
O Thou, my King and Lord.***

A Prayer Before Communion
by St Dimitry of Rostov