



**New Martyr Metropolitan Joseph of Petrograd
Whom the Holy Church celebrates on November 7**

Metropolitan Joseph was born on December 15, 1872 in Novgorod province in the area of Tikhvin, famous for its wonderworking Icon of the Mother of God, for which the future hierarch had great veneration.

His name in the world was John Semenovich Petrovykh; he was from a large family, the son of a confectioner of the town of Ustiuzhna. He later wrote, "My parents brought me into the world and called me J[ohn], in honor of the Baptist of the Lord, 'the greatest born of women' (see Matt. 11:11). But the holy Church, making me her own, gave me rebirth [in the tonsure], renaming me J[oseph] in honor of that most mighty one in the virtues of chastity and humility [that is, St. Joseph the Patriarch, the All-comely]. What a mercy of God, what a benefaction of the holy Church, to me the unworthy one!"

From his youth the future hierarch loved and revered the monastic life, although years intervened before this inclination ripened into a longing to leave the world. He was educated at the Novgorod Seminary and then the Moscow Ecclesiastical Academy, and for some time considered becoming a married priest. In 1899, upon completing the Academy, he was appointed assistant professor of Biblical history. Also in 1899, he went on a pilgrimage to the Holy Land.

Many trials, however, befell the young man in the world, as well as a fearful temptation concerning which he says only, "This was a situation in which people who have little faith and who despair, choose suicide as the only way out of the difficulty. But I saw in it a new, stern admonition from the Lord, a new means of drawing me into His Fatherly embrace, to which I had so foolishly and sinfully delayed to hasten." Seeking spiritual peace, he at last decided to enter the monastic life. He was tonsured by Bishop Arsenius, the rector of the Academy, on August 26, 1901, the feast of the Vladimir icon of the Mother of God. This was a day on which he truly experienced the return of the Prodigal Son, and he remembered it with compunction for the rest of his life. During the following month he was ordained hierodeacon and then hieromonk, and at this time he also began making daily entries in a remarkable spiritual diary. Until 1909 he continued to teach and held several administrative positions.

On March 15, 1909, Archimandrite Joseph was consecrated bishop of Uglich. He undertook his archpastoral responsibilities with joy and yet with fear and trembling, as he explained in his address, fully aware of the rising movement of anarchy and unbelief which would soon give birth to the hideous Revolution, and fully aware that the grace of God alone could strengthen him to finish his course worthily. Bishop Joseph's ruling bishop was the future Patriarch Tikhon, at that time Archbishop of Yaroslavl and Rostov.

As Bishop of Uglich, St. Joseph was also the superior of the Yakovlevsky Monastery in Rostov, named for St. James of Rostov, its founder, and containing also the church and shrine with the relics of St. Dimitry of Rostov. Bishop Joseph labored energetically for the building, restoration and adornment of the many churches of the monastery, both new and old. The entirely underground Church of the Resurrection, entered from the porch of the Church of St. James and containing the tomb of St. James of Rostov, was constructed on his initiative with funds from a private donor. It was designed to reproduce as far as possible the shrines at Bethlehem, Golgotha, and the Holy Sepulchre. Here an akathist was read on Saturdays to the Lifegiving Tomb of the Lord, and on Holy Saturday the

epitaphios was placed here after the procession, the pilgrims to the Monastery descending to venerate it with special compunction.

In 1913, Bishop Joseph warmly welcomed the Royal Family and later Grand Duchess Elizabeth to the Yakovlevsky Monastery. The Royal Family visited historic Rostov, including this ancient monastery with the relics of St. Dimitry, in May of that year, the Tricentenary of the House of Romanov. Grand Duchess Elizabeth visited with a sister from her convent in December, in order to attend the monastic services and venerate the holy places of Rostov.

After the Revolution, Bishop Joseph led a procession in 1920 to protest the opening and investigation of holy relics by the secular authorities. He was arrested but freed after thousands of signatures were collected in his behalf. To this day there survives a loving memory of Metropolitan Joseph in Rostov. In 1923 he was raised to the rank of Archbishop.

During this turbulent period, St. Joseph was Archbishop of Rostov and temporarily governed the diocese of Novgorod as well. In 1926 he was chosen by popular election and officially confirmed as Metropolitan of Petrograd, which had had no metropolitan since the martyrdom of his predecessor, St. Benjamin, in 1922.

Upon his arrival in Petrograd, Metropolitan Joseph served the vigil and Liturgy for the feast of St. Alexander Nevsky at the St. Alexander Nevsky Lavra, on August 29/30, 1926, with an enormous crowd of the faithful attending. "I shall never forget," writes a witness, "that vigil service on August 29 in the Cathedral Church of the St. Alexander Nevsky Lavra, when seven vicar bishops served with Metropolitan Joseph. The akathist was sung by all the bishops and the people with a single heart and soul before an icon of St. Alexander which contained a small part of his relics. We had not had such a solemn service in Petrograd since 1917. But soon great trials were to engulf us, caused by the Declaration of Metropolitan Sergius."

This was to be Metropolitan Joseph's only service in Petrograd. When he left the city to set some affairs in order, he was arbitrarily forbidden by the GPU to reenter it. He was to return only to stand trial in 1930.

From 1925 to 1927 no candidate was able to take the place of Metropolitan Peter, as Locum Tenens of the Patriarchal Throne, for more than a few months without being imprisoned. One of these hierarchs was Metropolitan Joseph himself.

During his brief tenure he confirmed (as other hierarchs had also) Patriarch Tikhon's provision which allowed bishops to govern independently without a central authority in the exceptional circumstances of that time. Metropolitan Joseph was quickly banished for awhile to the Modensk Monastery of St. Nicholas near Ustiuzhna. It became evident that the Soviet government would not rest until it had found or forced a hierarch to sign a document pleasing to the regime.

This hierarch was found in the person of Metropolitan Sergius, who on July 16/29, 1927, after being released from several months in prison, issued the infamous "Declaration" that made him and his followers in effect the agents of the Soviet State. In publishing the "Declaration" on August 19, the official Soviet newspaper Izvestia noted that "the far-sighted part of the clergy had already entered upon this path in 1922" — referring to the "Living Church." Thus did the atheist regime succeed in introducing "Renovationism" into the Patriarchal Church itself, and the result was the decisive protest of the leading hierarchs of the Russian Church, who, when they saw that Metropolitan Sergius was clearly determined to force his will upon the whole Church, soon began to break off communion with him.

It thus became immediately clear that the "Declaration" was in flagrant defiance of the 34th Apostolic Canon, having been proclaimed "without the consent of all" bishops, being indeed the work of Sergius alone at the dictation of the atheist regime; and therefore the only ecclesiastical course open for Sergius was to retract the "Declaration" in the face of such overwhelming disapproval of his fellow hierarchs. Instead of this, however, as if to prove that he no longer considered or needed the opinion of the Church, but had become the obedient tool of the regime, he began, together with his uncanonical "Synod" — the formation of which far exceeded his powers as Substitute of the Locum Tenens — an unparalleled transference of bishops from see to see and placed under interdict all who did not agree with him, founding thus a submissive "Soviet" Church.

Metropolitan Joseph, banished from Petrograd by the secular authorities a year before, was now officially "transferred" from Petrograd by Metropolitan Sergius and his "Synod".

In his Resolution on the Report of the Petrograd Vicars of December 23, 1927, Metropolitan Joseph wrote,

In order to condemn and counteract the latest actions of Metropolitan Sergius, which are contrary to the spirit and the good of the Holy Church of Christ, under present conditions we have no other means apart from a decisive departure from him and an ignoring of his orders. Let these orders be accepted henceforth only by the paper they are written on, which tolerates anything, and by the unfeeling air which contains everything—but not by the living souls of the faithful children of Christ's Church.

In separating from Metropolitan Sergius and his acts, we do not separate from our lawful Chief Hierarch, Metropolitan Peter [in banishment at that time], nor from the Council, which will meet at some time in the future, of those Orthodox hierarchs who have remained faithful. May this Council, our sole competent judge, not then hold us guilty for our boldness. May it judge us, not as despisers of the sacred canons of the Fathers, but only as fearful to violate them. Even if we have erred, we have erred honestly, out of zeal for the purity of Orthodoxy in the present evil age. And if we turn out to be guilty, then may we be even especially deserving of condescension, and not of deposition.

And so, even if all pastors should leave us, may the Heavenly Pastor not leave us, according to His unfailing promise to remain in His Church to the end of the age.

On September 9, 1930 (n.s.), Metropolitan Joseph was arrested to stand trial as the “administrative head” of the so-called “national counter-revolutionary monarchist organization of the members of the True Orthodox Church” also called the “Josephites.” He was interrogated first in Leningrad and then in Moscow. Although the process lasted almost a year, the trial was little more than a formality, and it is clear from his testimony that Metropolitan Joseph understood this. He expressed little hope that the court would abide by the Soviet laws, so beautiful on paper, guaranteeing freedom of conscience and separation of church and state. He made the point that it would be more logical to accuse of counter-revolutionary activity those who did not keep these laws but persecuted believers for their convictions. By the time of Metropolitan Joseph's trial, an intense persecution of the “Josephites” was well underway, leaving them no recourse but to begin a catacomb existence.

In his defense of the movement which had quickly come to bear his name, Metropolitan Joseph said that it was unjust that a lot of innocent people should be in danger because of their adherence to it, since it in no way involved a crime against the state. The true originator of the movement, he explained, was Metropolitan Sergius, and it should more correctly be called anti-Sergianism. Since Metropolitan Sergius' servility with respect to the government authorities

was an incontrovertible fact, and since the entire Soviet press was engaged in mocking it in prose, poetry, and caricatures—why, then, Metropolitan Joseph asked, was it counter-revolutionary for the faithful to protest Sergius' actions? We do not know whether anyone replied to this question, but the answer was painfully obvious. To mock Sergius as the most prominent hierarch of the official church served the true, although not always clearly expressed, aim of the Soviet state: the abolition of religion. But to protest his abuses with the aim of correcting them, and worse yet, to proclaim the Church separate from him—this undid all the carefully-laid plans of the atheists to control and discredit the Church at the same time.

As regards his personal role in the anti-Sergianist movement, Metropolitan Joseph explained that although he was indeed an “anti-Sergianist,” he neither began the movement, nor was he in control of it. It did not need a “head,” since each bishop was free to govern himself and his flock independently of a central authority in the current circumstances, as provided for by Patriarch Tikhon and confirmed by Metropolitans Peter and Agathangelus and others. Joseph or no Joseph, he said, anti-Sergianism would go forward anyway and could not be stopped by the government. Its force lay not in one man's leadership but in the principle of steadfastness in the purity of Orthodoxy. To emphasize the deep roots put down by anti-Sergianism, he cited Metropolitan Sergius' lie that churches were being closed at the wish of the faithful, a lie obvious even to the most illiterate peasant. The joys of the Soviet authorities, Metropolitan Joseph openly stated, cannot be our own. They rejoice when churches are closed; we can only grieve. They fight against religion as the “opium of the people”; we grieve over the persecution of the clergy and the faithful.

Concerning his own person, Metropolitan Joseph mentioned that according to the analysis of a prominent anti-Sergianist layman, M. A. Novoselov, Metropolitan Joseph was not well qualified to lead the movement, being too inclined to a contemplative life. Indeed, Metropolitan Joseph said, he preferred to retire to his own little corner rather than seek to play a leadership role in current affairs. However, he could not forbid others to follow him. On the one hand, he would not allow any counter-revolutionary activity in his name. But on the other hand, he had no intention of compromising in matters of conscience or of allowing outside interference in matters which concerned the Church exclusively. “I follow only Christ,” he emphasized. “Here is my final word: Freedom is dear to me, but if it would only serve to harm me or someone else, then I would not object to captivity either. I accept either one as from the hand of God...”

On September 3, 1931 (n.s.), Metropolitan Joseph was sentenced to a five-year exile in desert Kazakhstan of Central Asia. The following is a first-hand account of a member of the Catacomb Church who met Metropolitan Joseph in Kazakhstan, Natalia V. Urusova, who was able to escape from the Soviet Union during the Second World War, and died in 1968 in New York.

“In August of 1936 there was living in Alma Ata (Central Asia) the comparatively young Archimandrite Arsenius. From him I found out for the first time that there exists a secret, catacomb Church, headed by Metropolitan Joseph of Petrograd and organized by him with the blessing of Metropolitan Peter of Krutitsk, with whom he, while being in banishment in Chemkent, 100 miles from Alma Ata, had secret contact all the time. Archimandrite Arsenius was ordained by the Metropolitan and had the good fortune to support him materially, earning his living by the manufacture of various kinds of manikins and small articles for museums. He had a church deep down underground and he and Metropolitan Joseph served in it. The Metropolitan had also consecrated it, secretly, on one of his rare trips to Alma Ata. Fr. Arsenius had dug out this church by great and long labors.

“We had great respect for Archimandrite Arsenius, all the more because he was loved by Metropolitan Joseph and through him we could have contact with the latter. The Metropolitan at that time was living in Chemkent. Before that, from the very beginning of his banishment, he had lived in the small town of Aulieta, where he had not been allowed to live in a room, but had been placed in a shed with farm animals, his bed separated from them by a fence of stakes.

“The church dug out of the earth was in the apartment of Archimandrite Arsenius. The entrance was a trap-door, covered by a carpet. The top was taken off, and under it was a ladder to the cellar. In one corner of the cellar there was an opening in the earth, which was covered with rocks. The rocks were moved aside and, bending down completely, one had to crawl three steps forward, and there was the entrance to the tiny church. There were many icons, and lamps were burning. Metropolitan Joseph was very tall, and nonetheless twice in my presence he travelled here secretly and penetrated to this church.

“A remarkable state of mind and soul was created by this church, but I do not hide the fact that the fear of being discovered during the services, especially at night, was difficult to conquer. When the big chained dog began to bark in the yard—even though it was muffled, still it was audible underground—then everyone expected the cry and the knock of the GPU. For the whole of 1936 and until September in 1937 everything was all right. My son sang here together with

one nun. On August 26 Metropolitan Joseph came and honored us with a visit on my namesday.

“What a marvellous, humble, unshakable man of prayer! This was reflected in his face and eyes as in a mirror. Very tall, with a large white beard and an extraordinarily kind face, he could not help but attract one to him, and one only wished never to part from him. His monastic garb was covered up, as was his hair; otherwise he would have been arrested immediately right on the street, since he was watched and did not have the right to travel. He himself said that Patriarch Tikhon had offered, right after his election, to designate him as his first Substitute. For some reason this has not been noted anywhere yet in the history of the institution of Locum Tenens. He recognized Metropolitan Peter of Krutitsk as the lawful head of the Church, and right up to the latter’s arrest in September, 1937, he had secret contacts with him, even while rumors were circulating everywhere that Metropolitan Peter was dead.

“Metropolitan Joseph stayed at tea with us for over an hour. Concerning his banishment of almost ten years, he related that it had been extremely difficult. He had lived in a sty with pigs in a platted shed, slept on boards separated from the pigs by a few stakes. In these conditions he had borne cold and heat, every kind of weather and the stifling air. Once a snake, clinging to a stake on his roof, crawled down right over his head. These conditions were also apparently the cause of his illness. At times he suffered terribly from an intestinal ulcer, or perhaps he had some kind of internal tumor, perhaps cancerous, and he was on a diet which Archimandrite Arsenius helped him to keep. He suffered everything like the righteous, and if he related his difficult persecutions, it was only because we all were recalling the cruelties of the GPU.

“Fr. Arsenius told here of one form of torture and mockery. ‘When they were taking us through Siberia, there was a severe frost. In the train there was a bath-car. They chased us, completely naked, through the cars to the bath. With joy we drenched ourselves with the hot water and got a little warm, since the cars themselves were almost unheated. Without giving us anything to dry ourselves with, with wet heads, they chased us back. On the metal platform between cars they deliberately stopped us, and our wet feet immediately froze to the metal. At the command to advance, we tore away with blood the frozen bottoms of our feet...’

“On the next day, after staying overnight with Fr. Arsenius, the Metropolitan returned to his own place. Now he was living in different circumstances. After many years it was permitted to find an apartment for him in Chemkent. Archimandrite Arsenius arranged an apartment for him to live quietly in, saw to his food, not only as to its sufficiency but also to keep his diet. First a zither, and

then a harmonium was obtained for him, which were a joy for the Metropolitan, who was a good musician. He put psalms to music and sang them.

“On September 23, 1937, everywhere in the neighborhood of Alma Ata, throughout Kazakhstan, all the clergy of the underground Josephite churches were arrested, after having served their terms of banishment for refusing to recognize the Soviet churches. All of them were sentenced to ten years more without right of correspondence and, as I discovered later, Metropolitan Joseph also was among them. Archimandrite Arsenius was also arrested. After the arrest of my son, being beside myself, I was running to Fr. Arsenius right at dawn, and coming up to his house I saw an automobile and the GPU going in to him. Fortunately they did not see me. The underground church of Fr. Arsenius was discovered. Through lack of caution he once revealed its secret to an elderly man, respectable in appearance, who turned out to be an agent of the GPU.

“On returning to Moscow after my three-year voluntary banishment together with my son, I very soon found out about the existence here also of secret Josephite churches—that is to say, not churches, but services in secret rooms, where sometimes twenty to twenty-five people would gather. The service would be conducted in a whisper, with strict control by the faithful in view of the possibility of betrayal. People came usually at dawn according to an agreed signal. For the most part they would carefully tap at the drainpipe by a window, where someone would be standing and listening.

“Until the arrival of the Germans in Mozhaisk in 1941, I lived peacefully in this city and went to catacomb services in Moscow.”

Here ends the account of Natalia Urusova. She did not know, however, that after his arrest Metropolitan Joseph lived under guard for a brief time with Metropolitan Cyril of Kazan, who prior to this had endured many exiles in the remote arctic and elsewhere, beginning in the early 1920s. The paths of the two holy confessors thus met after many years and many thousands of miles of separation. Every day they were permitted to take a walk outside, and they would walk together, always in deep conversation, since at that time they could not be overheard outdoors. From a nearby hill a group of catacomb nuns would follow their movements, and the Metropolitans would bless in their direction. The little house where the Metropolitans lived under arrest was later demolished when the authorities noticed the special veneration which the faithful had for this spot.

On the night of November 7/20, 1937, many of the faithful were martyred in mass executions at a number of locations. Among them was a large group of catacomb clergy, about 150, who were marched out to a deserted area near

Chemkent. Archimandrite Arsenius, mentioned above, was among them. Metropolitan Joseph and Cyril were then brought by car. All asked one another's forgiveness, and as many as had time exchanged a final kiss. The Metropolitans blessed everyone. Despite the strict security, there was a witness of the execution—a local shepherd, evidently a Moslem, who saw the martyrs falling as the bullets hit them. Among them, he said, was a "great mullah." Undoubtedly this was Metropolitan Joseph, whose enormous height made him conspicuous. Metropolitan Cyril was 74 years of age, and Metropolitan Joseph, 65.

Many years before, Metropolitan Joseph had written in his diary,

"Love your enemies (St. Luke 6:35). To say this is easy, but—how difficult to do it. This is much higher than simply love of neighbor. It is the supreme triumph of love, its true essence and most superb expression... In order that one's heart might be inflamed with love toward one's enemy, there must be a special, grace-given state of soul, a special heavenly attunement of the heart—there must be that inexpressible and indescribable quality that abundantly filled the soul of the First Martyr Stephen when he, being stoned, his face shining like an angel, prayed for his murderers: Lord, lay not this sin to their charge (Acts 7:60). Oh, in this great moment for him what a small place did everything earthly around him find in him! What were the executioners to him? Before him were the opened heavens, the Son of God at the right hand of the Father; heavenly glory poured into his soul and seized it entirely with an incomprehensible ecstasy, and the executioners with all their pitiful malice not only could not prevent this, but even assisted it; at this moment they were even, as it were, his benefactors, hastening his departure from the body and the utter immersion of his soul in these oceans of heavenly ecstasy and blessedness... In this blissful moment, could the tortured sufferer cry out in any other way than with the voice of the supreme triumph of love for one's enemies?!"

The example of this fearless confessor and champion of Christ's Church has not been in vain. After the name of Patriarch Tikhon himself, the name of Metropolitan Joseph stands out as a symbol of integrity and faithfulness to Holy Orthodoxy during the Communist yoke in Russia.



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Compiled by Holy Nativity Convent from the following sources:

Russia's Catacomb Saints

In the Father's Embrace (in Russian)

Yakovlevsky Monastery booklet (in Russian)

Pravoslavnaia Zhizn, Oct. 2002 (in Russian)

Metropolitan Joseph's testimony (www.portal-credo.ru — in Russian)