

Fr. Panteleimon's Eulogy at Fr. Seraphim's Funeral

December 15, 2009

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

We have gathered together to say farewell to our beloved Father Seraphim. Two things are the foundation of our holy Faith, of Christianity. Without these two things we cannot claim to be Christians. One of these is the belief in the divinity of our Saviour—that He was born of a Virgin, was not mere man, but was God become man, perfect God become perfect man. This we confess in the Creed—very light of very light, very God of very God, begotten of the Father, not created. We are created; all of creation is created. But He is the Creator.

And the second teaching is the Resurrection in the flesh of our Saviour and the common resurrection of the dead at the end of time. The Resurrection of our Saviour was not a fantasy. Come touch Me, handle Me, said He to the disciples, and see that I am your Teacher as I was before the Crucifixion and the burial. Spirits don't have flesh and bone as you see in Me. Search Me out and see, and see that I am He.

I remember that when I was a teenager, there was a lecture organized by the Federation of Russian Orthodox Youth, and they brought Fr. George Florovsky to speak. I was a student at the university, so I went. That was the first time I had met Fr. George. His whole talk was on the Creed, and he came to that article of the Creed that says *I look for the resurrection of the dead* and life everlasting—life without end. He made a comment which made an impression on me, and I remember it now, and I'm 74 years old. He said that in some manuscripts there is a little change. In Greek it says *προσδοκῶ ἀνάστασιν νεκρῶν*—I look for the resurrection of the dead. But in some



manuscripts there is a variant, which says *προσδοκῶ ἀνάστασιν σαρκός*. Instead of *νεκρῶν*, *σαρκός*—I look for the resurrection of the flesh and life everlasting. And he made the point that when we say *I look for the resurrection of the dead*, we mean in the flesh, in the body.

I remember an astute observation that our Fr. Seraphim made to me. He said, "Father, most

of the denominations in the West don't believe in the resurrection—the real resurrection of the body, of the flesh. And he said that you can tell this from many different things, but have you ever observed and thought about the cartoons, that when they show people in heaven, they're always in the clouds with wings? No, he said, in the resurrection we are not going to be living on clouds. There's going to be a new heaven and a new earth. We will have new bodies, not like creatures that have wings and fly around. And I had never thought of that.

I remember that Father came to our monastery when we were on Orchard Street when our community was first founded. He was a student at Brown University in Rhode Island. And he visited us. We were very poor. Our chapel was very simple. The iconostasis wasn't carved, but we had good icons, icons by Fotus Kontoglou, icons we still have on our iconostasis. We had long conversations with Father. Father was a person who never rushed into anything. He had to think things out. As they say in Greek, he had to measure and re-measure things—to appraise things. He was a not person to make a rash judgment or to jump into anything. So it took him a few years [8 years in fact] before he finally made the decision to be baptized an Orthodox Christian and join the Church, the Church of our Saviour. We belonged to the Russian Church Abroad when we met Father. And of course he majored in Russian studies, the Russian language. We had holy hierarchs—unbelievable confessors and holy bishops: the holy confessor St. Philaret, St. John Maximovitch, Archbishop Andrew, Archbishop Averky, Vladyka Nikon, who was Father's bishop and who ordained him a deacon, Bishop of Washington.

So by the time Father finished his studies, he had met Matushka at the university; they were married, and they were baptized at the same time. We had a large barrel to fit Father in. Father was tall—I think he was our tallest clergyman. And we had another little barrel to fit Matushka. So we had two barrels in our front room, which we used as a narthex since we didn't have a church proper, and we baptized the couple together.

Father was amazing. He found the Truth, and he held on fast to the Truth. He didn't have a superiority complex, but he didn't have an inferiority complex either. He didn't look for big churches and big edifices to find the Truth. Our Saviour was not born in a palace; He was born in a stable with the dumb animals and laid in a manger. After Father was ordained, how many years were you people in that office building? Fifteen? Oh, twenty-three years—over half a generation. And when Father met a person, he wasn't embarrassed to invite him to come to what was an office building. Our Fr. Isaac used to say that it was our catacomb church. No one would

believe that there was a church in that building—on the second floor. We couldn't have a funeral there because the casket couldn't go up the stairs. There was enough room in the chapel, but we became more and more crowded—people had to be out in the hall. Fortunately on weekends the other offices were all closed, so on Sunday we had the whole floor to ourselves.

Father was slow. First he didn't want to be ordained a deacon. He used to go to St. John the Baptist Orthodox Church in Washington—under the Russian Church Abroad. Fr. Nicholas Pekatoros was the priest, and Father was very devoted to Fr. Nicholas. Fr. Nicholas was a good spiritual father. He was Greek-Russian from Odessa—born in Russia, but of Greek background. He spoke Greek well, but Russian was his first language.

And Father was getting older and older. So we said, "Father, why don't you become a deacon?" "Oh, no," he said, "I can't become a deacon. I'm not priest material." "We don't say you have to become a priest. The Russians have a perpetual diaconate. You can become a deacon, and you can be a deacon, and when you're 80-90 years old, you can still be a deacon." It took a little convincing and a little time. Father never rushed. Of course later we told him, "Now you have to become a priest." "You promised me," he said. "You said I'd be a deacon." "Fine, close the church, close the parish, so we don't have a priest, and we can all call it a good night and retire." So slowly, slowly we got him used to the idea.

Father was a person who was a pessimist. I used to tell him that. He'd say, "I'm not a pessimist; I'm a realist. One bright side of being a pessimist is that when things don't turn out so bad, you can smile. You can be surprised. Things aren't as bad as you predicted." That was Father.

So, 23 years in that office building. A small parish, but how many monastics came out of that small parish? Six? Fr. Spyridon, Mother Anna, Mother Hilda, Mother Pelagia, Mother Stephania, Brother Justin. So you see, if other parishes brought forth as many monastics as this little parish has brought forth. . . . This is all due to the teaching of Father. It is all due to the presence of Father. He was an amazing person. Whenever we appealed to him to write on any subject, be it on confession or some other subject, he wrote very intelligently.



(Break in recording.)

When Father went to confession, he was like a child. He would always confess to me that "I want people to like me." I said, "That's supposed to be a sin? That's only natural. We all want other people to like us." And he would say, "When I'm driving I get angry at the other drivers. And I want to say bad things to them." I told him, "You're a priest. You shouldn't say bad things." "Well," he said, "I don't say them, but I think them. I have thoughts." "And you're such a careful driver?" "I'm a very good driver. I'm not like those horrible drivers."

He was an Episcopalian, and he became an Orthodox Christian. He loved the Church. He loved Christianity. It was not a philetic situation. He could appreciate Russian literature because he knew Russian so well. He could appreciate Russian culture. He was a linguist. So many languages he could pick up and read! But he was not a philetist. He was an Anglo-American, who became an Orthodox Christian and appreciated the culture of the Orthodox people wherever they were and adopted what customs were proper for the Faith and the Church. He would say to me, for he was deep—that he had foreseen in his youth that the Anglican Communion one day would be dissolved, as it has dissolved itself today. And he didn't wait for that to happen. It's forty years later now. Father was baptized in 1970. He said to me, "Whenever you see or hear, Father, that the so-called Orthodox jurisdictions decide to ordain women deacons, know that that will be the end, the unraveling totally. They are already unraveled through their ecumenism and betraying the Truth. He said that this is the pattern that they followed in the Episcopal Church. They pushed to have women deacons. Finally they had women deacons. Ten years passed so people could get used to having women deacons. Then, after ten years, they wondered, well, if they can be deacons, why can't they be priests? Some people didn't like it, some people complained, but they passed it. So, another ten years—well, they had women priests, and people got used to that. Well, why can't we have women bishops? And finally they had women bishops. And not only women bishops, but same-sex marriages, lesbians, gays—everything under the sun. And there is now a real movement among the so-called Orthodox to ordain women as deacons. And I remember what Father said. I won't be around in another 20-30 years, but if they do it, it will take the same path as in the Anglican Church—after ten years they will make women priests, and after that why can't we have women bishops and why not patriarchs, etc.

(Break in recording.)

Our Father had vision; he had depth. And he understood things. He would catch birds in the air, as they say in Greek. He was very intelligent—

spiritually intelligent. And we appreciated that intelligence of his. We have been blessed—all of us, parishioners, clergy and laity—to have had Father as a brother, as a priest, as a father among us for all these years. He was not old—65? I am older. It's sad for bishops and spiritual fathers to bury younger clergy, but as it pleases the Lord, so be it. We don't ever examine the wisdom of God, the ways of God, the judgments of God. We had hoped that Father would be with us a few more years.

Look how God has rewarded Father's steadfastness and his years in the office building with this beautiful church! Every time a property was found, Father would telephone, and I would take the plane or the train, and I would come; and it didn't work out, or the zoning wasn't right, or this or that, until finally this beautiful property, which was a garden, came up with a little house and a stipulation by the person who left the property that his relatives could not subdivide it into lots—it had to remain one lot.

(Break in recording.)

We have come from all over for the funeral. From the West Coast Nina Seco came to represent the parish there. And our Bishops came, and Fr. Isaac. Fr. Isaac was in the air when Father reposed. He didn't find out until he was at the airport. And we were just starting Liturgy. Father reposed on the day of the holy and great confessor Stephen the New, who struggled for the holy icons—a very great Saint of the Church. Read his life; it's awesome. And Father is buried on the day of St. Philaret the Almsgiver, which was the feast day of our St. Philaret the Confessor.

So when we give the last kiss, we ask Father's blessing also. And may we have a Christian ending to our life, blameless and peaceful. Father went peacefully. It could have been prolonged and very painful, but God was merciful. I wanted to be there. I couldn't believe it when Matushka said he wouldn't live through the day, but before Liturgy was over, we heard that he had reposed. So we thank our Saviour for everything. Amen.