

# SOBORNOST

## St. Thomas the Apostle Orthodox Church

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*American Carpatho-Russian Orthodox Diocese*

ECUMENICAL PATRIARCHATE  
OF CONSTANTINOPLE

## SERVICES

Wed: Moleben to the Theotokos 6:00 AM

Friday: Moleben to the Cross 6:00 AM

Saturday: Great Vespers 5:00 PM

Sunday: Matins (Orthros) 8:45 AM

Divine Liturgy 10:00 AM

**\*Please note that attendance is currently limited by restrictions dictated by local response to the COVID-19 pandemic; if you are currently not**

**assigned to an attendance group, please contact [outreach@apostlethomas.org](mailto:outreach@apostlethomas.org) for information on when you may attend.**

## August 9, 2020 | 9<sup>th</sup> Sunday After Pentecost | After-feast of the Transfiguration | St. Herman of Alaska

A spiritual mission was organized in 1793, made up of monks of the Valaam Monastery. They were sent to preach the Word of God to the native inhabitants of northwestern America, who only ten years before had come under the sovereignty of Russia. St Herman was among the members of this Mission.

St Herman came from a family of merchants of Serpukhov, a city of the Moscow Diocese. His name before he was tonsured, and his family name are not known. He had a great zeal for piety from youth, and at sixteen he entered monastic life. First he entered the Trinity-Sergius Hermitage which was located near the Gulf of Finland on the Peterhof Road, about 10 miles from St Petersburg.

At the St Sergius Hermitage there occurred the following incident to Father Herman. On the right side of his throat under his chin there appeared an abscess.



The swelling grew rapidly, disfiguring his face. It became difficult for him to swallow, and the odor was unbearable. In this critical condition Father Herman awaited death. He did not appeal to a physician of this world, but locking his cell he fell before an icon of the Queen of Heaven. With fervent tears he prayed, asking of Her that he might be healed. He prayed the whole night. Then he took a wet towel and with it wiped the face of the Most Holy Mother, and with this towel he covered the swelling. He continued to pray with tears until he fell asleep from sheer exhaustion on the floor. In a dream he saw the Virgin Mary healing him.

When Herman awoke in the morning, he found to his great surprise that he was fully healed. The swelling had disappeared, even though the abscess had not broken through, leaving behind but a small mark as though a reminder of the miracle. Physicians to whom this healing was described did not believe it, arguing that it was necessary for the abscess to have either broken through of its own accord or to have been cut open. But the words of the physicians were the words of human experience, for where the grace of God operates there the order of nature is overcome. Such occurrences humble human reason under the strong hand of God's Mercy.

For five or six years Father Herman continued to live in the St Sergius Hermitage, and then he transferred to the Valaam Monastery, which was widely scattered on the large islands in the waters of the great Lake Ladoga. He came to love the Valaam haven with all his soul, as he came to love its unforgettable Superior, the pious Elder Nazarius, and all the brethren.

In the second half of the 18th century the borders of Holy Russia expanded to the north. In those years Russian merchants discovered the Aleutian Islands which formed in the Pacific Ocean a chain from the eastern shores of Kamchatka to the western shores of North America. With the opening of these islands there was revealed the sacred necessity to illumine with the light of the Gospel the native inhabitants. With the blessing of the Holy Synod, Metropolitan Gabriel gave to the Elder Nazarius the task of selecting capable persons from the brethren of Valaam for this holy endeavor. Ten men were selected, and among them was Father Herman. The chosen men left Valaam for the place of their great appointment in 1793.

In America Father Herman chose as his place of habitation Spruce Island, which he called New Valaam. This island is separated by a strait about a mile and a quarter wide from Kodiak Island on which had been built a wooden monastery for the residence of the members of the mission, and a wooden church dedicated to the Resurrection of the Savior.

Father Herman himself spaded the garden, planted potatoes and cabbage and various vegetables in it. For winter, he preserved mushrooms, salting or drying them. The salt was obtained by him from ocean water. It is said that a wicker basket in which the Elder carried seaweed from the shore, was so large that it was difficult for one person to carry. The seaweed was used for fertilizing the soil. But to the astonishment of all, Father Herman carried a basket filled with seaweed for a long distance without any help at all. By chance his disciple, Gerasim, saw him one winter night carrying a large log which normally would be carried by four men; and he was bare footed. Thus worked the Elder, and everything that he acquired as a result of his immeasurable labors was used for the feeding and clothing of orphans and also for books for his students.

His clothes were the same for winter as for summer. He did not wear a shirt; instead he wore a smock of deer skin, which he did not take off for several years at a time, nor did he change it, so that the fur in it was completely worn away, and the leather became glossy. Then there were his boots or shoes, cassock (podrasnik), an ancient and faded out cassock (riasa) full of patchwork, and his headdress (klobuk). He went everywhere in these clothes, and at all times; in the rain, in snowstorms, and during the coldest freezing weather. In this, Father Herman followed the example of many Eastern Ascetic Fathers and Monks who showed the greatest concern for the welfare and needs of others. Yet, they themselves wore the oldest possible clothes to show their great humility before God, and their contempt for worldly things.

The way in which Father Herman looked upon the natives of America, how he understood his own relations with them, and how he was concerned for their needs he expressed himself in one of his letters to the former administrator of the colony, Simeon Yanovsky.

He wrote, "Our Creator granted to our beloved homeland this land which like a newly-born babe does not yet have the strength for knowledge or understanding. It requires not only protection, because of its infantile weakness and impotence, but also his sustenance. Even for this it does not yet have the ability to make an appeal on its own behalf. And since the welfare of this nation by the Providence of God, it is not known for how long, is dependent on and has been entrusted into the hands of the Russian government which has now been given into your own power, therefore I, the most humble servant of these people, and their nurse stand before you in their behalf, write this petition with tears of blood. Be our Father and our Protector. Certainly we do not know how to be eloquent, so with an inarticulate infant's tongue we say: Wipe away the tears of the defenseless orphans, cool the hearts melting away in the fire of sorrow. Help us to know what consolation means."The Elder was concerned in particular for the moral growth of the Aleuts.

With this end in mind a school was built for children—the orphans of the Aleuts. He himself taught them the Law of God and church music. For this same purpose he gathered the Aleuts on Sunday and Holy Days for prayer in the chapel near his cell. Here his disciple read the Hours and the various prayers while the Elder himself read the Epistle and Gospel. He also preached to them. His students sang, and they sang very well. The Aleuts loved to hear his sermons, gathering around him in large numbers. The Elder's talks were captivating, and his listeners were moved by their wondrous power. He himself writes of one example of the beneficial results of his words.

“Glory to the holy destinies of the Merciful God! He has shown me now through his unfathomable Providence a new occurrence which I, who have lived here for twenty years had never seen before on Kodiak. Recently after Easter, a young girl about twenty years of age who knows Russian well, came to me. Having heard of the Incarnation of the Son of God and of Eternal Life, she became so inflamed with love for Jesus Christ that she does not wish to leave me. She pleaded eloquently with me. Contrary to my personal inclination and love for solitude, and despite all the hindrances and difficulties which I put forward before accepting her, she has now been living near the school for a month and is not lonesome.”

“I, looking on this with great wonder, remembered the ‘words of the Savior: that which is hidden from the wise and learned is revealed to babes.’” (Matt. 11:25)

This woman lived at the school until the death of the Elder. She watched for the good conduct of the children who studied in his school. Father Herman willed that after his death she was to continue to live on Spruce Island. Her name was Sophia Vlasova.

Yanovsky writes about the character and the eloquence of the talks of the Elder thus:

“When I met Father Herman I was thirty years old. I must say that I was educated in the naval corps school; that I knew many sciences having read extensively. But to my regret, the Science of sciences, that is the Law of God, I barely remembered the externals—and these only theoretically, not applying them to life. I was a Christian in name only, but in my soul and in reality, I was a freethinker. Furthermore, I did not admit the divinity and holiness of our religion, for I had read through many atheistic works. Father Herman recognized this immediately and he desired to reconvert me. To my great surprise he spoke so convincingly, wisely—and he argued with such conviction— that it seemed to me that no learning or worldly wisdom could stand one's ground before his words. We conversed with him daily until midnight, and even later, of God's love, of eternity, of the salvation of souls, and of Christian living. From his lips flowed a ceaseless stream of sweet

words! By these continual talks and by the prayers of the holy Elder the Lord returned me completely to the way of Truth, and I became a real Christian. I am indebted for all this to Father Herman he is my true benefactor.”

“Several years ago,” continues Yanovsky, “Father Herman converted a certain naval captain G. to Orthodoxy from the Lutheran Faith. This captain was well educated. Besides many sciences, he was well versed in languages. He knew Russian, English, German, French, Italian and also some Spanish. But for all this he could not resist the convictions and proofs of Father Herman. He changed his faith and was united to the Orthodox Church through Chrismation. When he was leaving America, the Elder said to him while they were parting, “Be on guard, if the Lord should take your wife from you then do not marry a German woman under any circumstance. If you do marry a German woman, undoubtedly she will damage your Orthodoxy.” The Captain gave his word, but he failed to keep it. The warning of the Elder was prophetic. Indeed, after several years the Captain’s wife did die, and he married a German woman. There is no doubt that his faith weakened or that he left it; for he died suddenly without penance.”

Further on Yanovsky writes, “Once the Elder was invited aboard a frigate which came from St Petersburg. The Captain of the frigate was a highly educated man, who had been sent to America by order of the Emperor to make an inspection of all the colonies. There were more than twenty-five officers with the Captain, and they also were educated men. In the company of this group sat a monk of a hermitage, small in stature and wearing very old clothes. All these educated conversationalists were placed in such a position by his wise talks that they did not know how to answer him. The Captain himself used to say, ‘We were lost for an answer before him.’

“Father Herman gave them all one general question: ‘Gentlemen, What do you love above all, and what will each of you wish for your happiness?’ Various answers were offered ... Some desired wealth, others glory, some a beautiful wife, and still others a beautiful ship he would captain; and so forth in the same vein. ‘It is not true,’ Father Herman said to them concerning this, ‘that all your various wishes can bring us to one conclusion—that each of you desires that which in his own understanding he considers the best, and which is most worthy of his love?’ They all answered, ‘Yes, that is so!’ He then continued, ‘Would you not say, Is not that which is best, above all, and surpassing all, and that which by preference is most worthy of love, the Very Lord, our Jesus Christ, who created us, adorned us with such ideals, gave life to all, sustains everything, nurtures and loves all, who is Himself Love and most beautiful of all men? Should we not then love God above every thing, desire Him more than anything, and search Him out?’ ”

All said, "Why, yes! That's self-evident!" Then the Elder asked, "But do you love God?" They all answered, "Certainly, we love God. How can we not love God?" "And I a sinner have been trying for more than forty years to love God, I cannot say that I love Him completely," Father Herman protested to them. He then began to demonstrate to them the way in which we should love God. "if we love someone," he said, "we always remember them; we try to please them. Day and night our heart is concerned with the subject. Is that the way you gentlemen love God? Do you turn to Him often? Do you always remember Him? Do you always pray to Him and fulfill His holy commandments?" They had to admit that they had not! "For our own good, and for our own fortune," concluded the Elder, "let us at least promise ourselves that from this very minute we will try to love God more than anything and to fulfill His Holy Will!" Without any doubt this conversation was imprinted in the hearts of the listeners for the rest of their lives.

"In general, Father Herman liked to talk of eternity, of salvation of the future life, of our destinies under God. He often talked on the lives of the Saints, on the Prologue, but he never spoke about anything frivolous. It was so pleasant to hear him that those who conversed with him, the Aleuts and their wives, were so captivated by his talks that often they did not leave him until dawn, and then they left him with reluctance;" thus witnesses the creole, Constantine Larionov.

Yanovsky writes a detailed description of Father Herman. "I have a vivid memory," he said, "Of all the features of the Elder's face reflecting goodness; his pleasant smile, his meek and attractive mien, his humble and quiet behavior, and his gracious word. He was short of stature. His face was pale and covered with wrinkles. His eyes were greyish-blue, full of sparkle, and on his head there were a few gray hairs. His voice was not powerful, but it was very pleasant." Yanovsky relates two incidents from his conversations with the Elder. "Once," he writes, "I read to Father Herman the ode, 'God,' by Derzhavin. The Elder was surprised, and entranced. He asked me to read it again. I read it once more, "Is it possible that a simple, educated man wrote this?" he asked. "Yes, a learned poet," I answered. "This has been written under God's inspiration," said the Elder.

Once an inspector came to Spruce Island with the Administrator of the Colony and with company employees to search through Father Herman's cell. This party expected to find property of great value in Father Herman's cell. But when they found nothing of value, an employee, Ponomarkhov, began to tear up the floor with an axe, undoubtedly with the consent of his seniors. Then Father Herman said to him, "My friend, you have lifted the axe in vain; this weapon shall deprive you of your life." Some time later people were needed at Fort Nicholas, and for that reason several Russian employees were sent there from Kodiak; among them was Ponomarkhov; there the natives of Kenai cut off his head while he slept.

Father Herman said to his disciple the Aleut Ignaty Aligyaga, “Thirty years shall pass after my death, and all those living on Spruce Island will have died, but you alone will remain alive. You will be old and poor when I will be remembered.” And indeed after the death of Father Herman thirty years passed when they were reminded of him, and they began to gather information and facts about him; on the basis of which his Life was written. “It is amazing,” exclaims Ignaty, “how a man like us could know all this so long before it happened! However, no, he was no ordinary man! He knew our thoughts, and involuntarily he led us to the point where we revealed them to him, and we received counsel from him.”

“When I die,” the Elder said to his disciple, “you will bury me alongside Father Joasaph. You will bury me by yourself, for you will not wait for the priest. Do not wash my body. Lay it on a board. Clasp my hands over my chest, wrap me in my mantia (the monk’s outer cloak), and with its wings cover my face and place the klobuk (monastic head covering) on my head. If anyone wishes to bid farewell to me, let them kiss the Cross. Do not show my face to anyone....”

The time of the Elder’s passing had come. One day he ordered his disciple Gerasim to light a candle before the Icons, and to read the Acts of the Holy Apostles. After some time his face glowed brightly and he said in a loud voice, “Glory to Thee, O Lord!” He then ordered the reading to be halted, and he announced that the Lord had willed that his life would now be spared for another week. A week later, again by his orders, candles were lit, and the Acts of the Holy Apostles were read. Quietly, the Elder bowed his head on Gerasim’s chest; the cell was filled with a sweet-smelling odor; and his face glowed, and Father Herman was no more! Thus he died in blessedness, he passed away in the sleep of a righteous man in the eighty-first year of his life of great labor the 25th day of December 1837. (It was the 13th of December according to the Julian Calendar, although there are some records which state that he died on November 28th and was buried on December 26th).

Those sent with the sad news to the harbor returned to announce that the administrator of the colony Kashevarov had forbidden the burial of the Elder until his own arrival. He also ordered that a finer coffin be made for Father Herman, and that he would come as soon as possible and would bring a priest with him. But then a great wind came up, a rain fell, and a terrible storm broke. The distance from the harbor to Spruce Island is not great — about a two hour journey — but no one would agree to go to sea in such weather. Thus it continued for a full month, and although the body lay in state for a full month in the warm house of his students, his face did not undergo any change at all, and not the slightest odor emanated from his body. Finally, through the efforts of Kuzma Uchilischev, a coffin was obtained. No one arrived from the harbor, and the inhabitants of Spruce Island

alone buried the remains of the Elder in the ground. Thus the words which Father Herman uttered before his death were fulfilled. After this the wind quieted down, and the surface of the sea became as smooth as a mirror.

The disciples buried their father, and placed a wooden memorial marker above his grave. Father Peter Kashevarov, the priest on Kodiak, says, "I saw it myself, and I can say that today it seems as though it had never been touched by time; as though it had been cut this day."

Having witnessed the life of Father Herman glorified by his zealous labors, having seen his miracles, and the fulfillment of his predictions, finally having observed his blessed falling asleep, "in general, all the local inhabitants," Bishop Peter witnesses, "have the highest esteem for him, as though he was a holy ascetic, and they are fully convinced that he has found favor in the presence of God." (*adapted from oca.org*)

### **Today's Epistle Lesson – St. Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians 3:9-17**

Brethren, we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, *you are* God's building. According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder I have laid the foundation, and another builds on it. But let each one take heed how he builds on it. For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if anyone builds on this foundation *with* gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each one's work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is. If anyone's work which he has built on *it* endures, he will receive a reward. If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire. Do you not know that you are the temple of God and *that* the Spirit of God dwells in you? If anyone defiles the temple of God, God will destroy him. For the temple of God is holy, which *temple* you are.

### **Today's Gospel Lesson – Saint Matthew 14:22-34**

At that time, Jesus made His disciples get into the boat and go before Him to the other side, while He sent the multitudes away. And when He had sent the multitudes away, He went up on the mountain by Himself to pray. Now when evening came, He was alone there. But the boat was now in the middle of the sea, tossed by the waves, for the wind was contrary. Now in the fourth watch of the night Jesus went to them, walking on the sea. And when the disciples saw Him walking on the sea, they were troubled, saying, "It is a ghost!" And they cried out for fear. But immediately Jesus spoke to them, saying, "Be of good cheer! It is I; do not be afraid." And Peter answered Him and said, "Lord, if it is You, command



me to come to You on the water.” So He said, “Come.” And when Peter had come down out of the boat, he walked on the water to go to Jesus. But when he saw that the wind *was* boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink he cried out, saying, “Lord, save me!” And immediately Jesus stretched out *His* hand and caught him, and said to him, “O you of little faith, why did you doubt?” And when they got into the boat, the wind ceased. Then those who were in the boat came and worshiped Him, saying, “Truly You are the Son of God.” When they had crossed over, they came to the land of Gennesaret.

## A Word From the Holy Fathers

I implore and exhort you, my beloved fathers, brethren, and children, in the following: Love the Lord with all your soul and all your heart. Be righteous and just, submissive, with bowed head and your mind turned towards heaven. Have contrition towards God and men. Be a consoler of the sorrowful, patient in trials, and not given to irritation, bountiful, merciful, a feeder of the poor, receiver of strangers, sorrowful for the sake of sins, joyful in God..., meek, patient, not a lover of glory, not a lover of gold, a lover of your neighbor, not hypocritical, not proud, a lover of labor for the sake of God, silent, pleasant in replies, fervent in fasting, in frequent prayers..., sensible. Do not judge any man, but condemn yourself. And for this you will be the child of the Gospel, the son of the Resurrection, the inheritor of life in Christ Jesus our Lord. To Him may there be honor and power and worship, with the Father and the Holy Spirit, now and ever and unto the ages of ages. Amen.

– St. Paisius Velichkovsky

### **Also Commemorated Today: Apostle Matthias of the 70**

He was born in Bethlehem, from the root of Judah. He received his education under the supervision of St. Simeon, the God-receiver. Originally St. Matthias was elected to be among the 70 apostles, and after the Ascension of the Lord he was chosen by lot to be among the 12 apostles, replacing Judas Iscariot (Acts 1:15-26). St. Matthias preached the Gospel in Judea, Ethiopia and Macedonia. With his godly wise words dispersing "the fog of godlessness", enlightening "those sitting in darkness", deposing idolatrous "pride", he converted many to Christ. That is why the Holy Church called him "the hunter of those who strayed" and "the lamp of the Church of Christ". Preaching, he worked many wonders. He healed the blind, the lame, lepers, expelled evil spirits and raised the dead. The persecutor of Christians in Jerusalem, the high priest Ananias, demanded the apostle to appear in court. Ananias in court tried to expose Christ and His disciples as seducers of the people and traitors to fatherland. But Matthias proved that Christ is the promised Messiah

on the basis of prophecies and transformations with evidence. Then they accused him of blasphemy and stoned him, but to please the Romans, as if he were an opponent of Caesar, they beheaded the apostle by the sword . (from the Bulgakov Handbook, trans. Archpriest Eugene D. Tarris)

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