

St. Nicholas of Serbia, Bishop of Zhicha

(†1956)

Commemoration Days: March 15, May 3



Blessed Nicholas, the “Serbian *Chrysostom*,” was a writer, scholar, diplomat and missionary who inspired the faithful in times of peace and stood by their side in times of great trouble.

Nikolaj was the first child of Serbian peasants, Dragomir and Katarina Velimirovich, who lived in the small village of Lelich. Born on December 23, 1880, the baby was named after the family’s patron saint, Nicholas of Myrna. Later, eight more children followed, all of whom would perish during World War II. Both parents were very *pious*. All his life Nikolaj considered

his mother the most important influence in his spiritual development.

Nikolaj’s formal education began in a monastery. In addition to reading, writing and mathematics, he studied the Scriptures, teachings of the early Church fathers and Serbian history. As a young man, he demonstrated great *zeal* for learning and spent hours with a book high up in the bell tower.

Small and weak from childhood, Nikolaj was not strong as an adult. He tried to enter a Military academy but couldn’t pass the physical exam. His scholastic ability allowed him to go first to Belgrade Seminary, then to the Universities of Bern and Oxford, and to Saint Petersburg Theological Academy. Nikolaj had an excellent knowledge of world literature and was *fluent* in French, Russian, German and English. His doctoral dissertation he wrote in French.

In 1909 Nikolaj was *tonsured* as a monk under the name Nicholas. He became a professor at Belgrade Theological Academy, where he taught philosophy, logic, history and foreign languages. Fr. Nicholas traveled *extensively*, and visited Britain and the United States several times – giving lectures, sermons, and working for unity among the Serbs and other Slavic peoples. He served as an ambassador for his Church. At the start of World War I, Fr. Nicholas was sent on a diplomatic mission to England to ask for help in the Serbs’ struggle against Austria. He became the first Orthodox Christian to preach in St. Paul’s Cathedral in London, and made a strong impression on his listeners.

The war *devastated* his Motherland and left many children without parents. In 1919, when Fr. Nicholas was *consecrated* as Bishop of Zhicha, he used his new position to establish *orphanages*, help the poor and reopen monasteries. As a missionary bishop, he traveled to the United States, where he gave more than a hundred lectures and raised a large amount of money for Serbian orphans.

When the Germans occupied Yugoslavia in World War II, Vladyka Nicholas was arrested and sent to the concentration camp in Dachau. He witnessed the most cruel torture and suffering the world has ever known. In the camp St. Nicholas composed a Canon to the Most Holy Mother of God and prayers titled “In the Shadow of the German *Bayonets*.” After prisoners of the camp were liberated by the 36th American Division of the Allied Forces, holy confessor Nicholas went to England and, later, the United States – where he spent the rest of his life. He couldn’t return to his native Serbia because the country had been taken over by the communists.

In the United States the exiled Bishop taught at various academic institutions. In all, Bishop Nicholas was awarded five doctorates. In 1946 he received his final Doctorate of Theology from Columbia University. To the very end, he continued to be “the voice of the Serbs.”

On March 16th, 1956, Father Nicholas fell asleep in the Lord while in prayer in his *cell* at St. Tikhon Russian Orthodox Seminary in Pennsylvania.

Vocabulary

Chrysostom	['kri sə stəm]	Златоуст
scholar	['skɔ: lər]	учёный
pious	['pai əs]	благочестивый
zeal	[zi:l]	усердие, большое старание
fluent	['flu ənt]	свободный, беглый
tonsure	['tɒn fər]	постриг
extensively	[ik 'sten siv li]	обширно, много
devastate	['de və ,steit]	разрушить, опустошить
consecrate	['kɒn sɪ kreɪt]	посвящать в
orphanage	['ɔ:r fən ɪdʒ]	приют для сирот
bayonet	['bei ə nət]	штык

cell

[sel]

келья

in all

всего, в общей сложности

Примечание. Университет Колумбия находится в Нью-Йорке. Это один из старейших и самых престижных университетов США.

From the Writings of Vladyka Nicholas

You wrote me about a miracle that happened to you during the war. Before the start of a battle, someone had distributed the Gospel to the soldiers. Small, beautifully decorated books. You also took one. And you commented bitterly, “Here we need steel and lead, not books. If steel doesn’t save us, then books even less so!” That was the remark you made then, for until that day you didn’t think that faith in God counts for anything. You looked upon it as if it were some old rags, which mankind has been uselessly dragging along from time immemorial.

But still, you took the little book and put it in your left inner pocket. And what happened? You are telling me: “That was God’s miracle,” and I concur. Around you wounded soldiers were falling and next, you were hit. A steel seed of death found you. You clutched your heart, expecting blood to pour out. Later, when you removed your clothes, you discovered the bullet, aimed directly at your heart, stuck in the firm binding of the book. You started trembling, as if in a fever. The finger of God! The Holy Book saved your life from death-bearing lead. That day you consider to be the day of your spiritual birth. And since then, you’ve been in awe of God, thoroughly exploring His teaching. So, you see, faith in Christ is not a decrepit cloth, and mankind bears it not in vain.

(Letter to John N.)