



Mission Society of the Mother of God of Boronyavo

Advent 2011

SISTER EUPHEMIA NORA NOVAKOVA

*In the obituary of this humble but happy Sister, we see a devout life reflecting the history of our Byzantine Catholic Church in Eastern Europe. [Edited from the Archeparchy of Presov (original in Slovak) and information from *Glory to You, O God* (jubilee book of the Sisters Servants of Mary Immaculate).]*

At the age of 88 years, strengthened by the sacrament of anointing of the sick, Sister Euphemia Nora Novakova died on October 17, 2011 in Prešov, Slovakia. She was a member of the Congregation of the Sisters Servants of the Immaculate Virgin Mary (SSMI). Funeral services were held by Archbishop Jan Babjak, SJ, on October 20, with burial in the Prešov cemetery.

Sister Euphemia was born in Jaroslawove in 1923, which at that time was in eastern Poland. On October 18, 1942, she entered the Sisters Servants as a candidate at the mother house of the SSMI Sisters in Krystynopol. There, after two years of formation, she took the first religious vows. It was there that she was caught in the Second World War, during which the novitiate house was burned. There, Blessed Sister Tarsykia Matsko was shot by a Russian soldier on July 18, 1944, in his words, "because she was a nun." In 1945, Krystynopol was inside the new boundaries of the Soviet Union.

A decision was made to send Sisters out of the country. On May 14, 1946, Sister Euphemia, and with four other sisters fled to Poland. The Basilian Fathers in Warsaw sent them to Czechoslovakia. They settled in Prešov. Here, Sister Euphemia lived until 1948 in the community of an orphanage, which was built Blessed Bishop Paul Peter Gojdič OSBM. From October 1948 to August 1950, when the peak action of the abolition of monasteries took place in Slovakia, she worked in Trebisov. The authorities offered to spare the Sisters if they would renounce their vows and live as laity. All refused. The sisters were imprisoned in concentration camps in the Czech lands, far from the Greek Catholic territories.

In 1955 Sister Euphemia returned to Slovakia and was granted amnesty on December 2, 1957. Many Sisters were sent to take care of 160 disabled adults in Kolesovce and this became the unofficial headquarters of the Order. During this period, Sister Euphemia took her final vows, on March 23, 1958.

Throughout her life she did domestic work for the convents, sewed liturgical vestments, and worked in the sacristy. She also did paintings for the churches.

In 1974 she witnessed miraculous cures through the intercession of Blessed Bishop Paul Peter Gojdič. She also attended Blessed Bishop Vasil Hopko and accompanied him in the last minutes of his life. There he murmured those poignant words, "I am going home."

Bishops, priests and faithful who often came to her demonstrated a deep respect for Sister Euphemia, asking her to pray for them or to give them spiritual advice. She was characterized by her openness, simplicity, and joyful heart. She did laugh and rejoice, but also had time of silence and prayer. Despite her great age and health problems, she participated in the holy liturgy in the Cathedral daily and sewed liturgical vestments.



Blessed Tarsykia Matsko, SSMI

All support of the Mission Society's work is in addition to members' and donors' existing support of their local parish, their eparchy, and the Metropolia of Pittsburgh. Renewal of our Mother Church in Central Europe cannot mean a diminishment of our financial and spiritual dedication to the church in America.

**MISSION SOCIETY OF
THE MOTHER OF
GOD OF
BORONYAVO, INC.**

The Mission Society is an independent organization dedicated to the renewal and strengthening of the Byzantine Catholic Church in America and Central Europe.

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CHANGES IN ALBUQUERQUE

As many of our donors already know due to thank you letters sent out this year, the Mission Society office lost two treasured workers this year. Phyllis Snider, who worked behind the scenes doing all of the bookkeeping and file work, and helping Father Christopher Zugger with sending out individual thank you notes and mailing of this Newsletter, suffered a major stroke this summer. Then Bishop Gerald announced that Deacon Brian Escobedo, the other main helper, was being sent to Pittsburgh for advanced theological studies. In years past, Father Chris had never been able to find more helpers, and he wrote to the clergy and Sisters in Slovakia and Ukraine that he would probably close the mission as it is impossible with his health problems to carry on the work. E-mails came back quickly, begging that the work continue as it is the only Byzantine-Ruthenian outreach which they have.

Our Lady of Boronyavo answered their prayers: new people stepped forward from the parish of Our Lady of Perpetual Help to assist Father in this work, and to keep the Society's work going forward. Luba Kmetyk, Christine Paul, Rafael Plut, Susannah Rodee are now helping with the banking, bookkeeping, files and letters. Zlata Nourie, a native of Irshava in Transcarpathia, is handling Ukrainian-language correspondence. Cassandra Epstein travels up from El Paso to assist at the monthly meetings. Angelo Artuso came forward as our new legal counsel, pro bono, helping with the new IRS laws on non-profit organizations. So the work continues!

ON TO THE WORK: TENTH ANNIVERSARY OF BEATIFICATIONS OBSERVED IN SLOVAKIA

The Greek Catholic Metropolia of Slovakia celebrated the tenth anniversary of the beatifications of Bishop Paul Peter Gojdič and Father Dominik Methodius Trcka on November 4 – 5, 2011. The Auxiliary Bishop of the Prague Exarchate, Jan Eugene Kocis, who was secretly ordained a priest in prison in 1951, gave the sermon. He related that Bishop Gojdič, who was imprisoned elsewhere, sent permission for Bishop Robert Pobožny, an imprisoned Roman Catholic bishop, to ordain him on January 1, 1951, using the New Year celebrations as a cover to conceal the event from the guards. He quoted the words of Bishop Gojdič's last sermon, before the confiscation of the Prešov cathedral in 1950. Rebuking the communists' claim to be the only source of human progress, our Blessed Bishop said to the faithful: "the Church is the bearer of progress, because to believe in God the greatest progress. They can take everything from us, but they cannot take the faith! What would we say if Saints Peter Paul preached to us now? Again, they would have invited us to faith." Bishop Jan concluded his sermon with: "Let us take seriously the words of our Blessed."

Both of our Blesseds died in the Leopoldov prison. Special ceremonies were held on November 27, 2011 to remember them and those who were murdered or died of maltreatment. Survivors from the communist era attended. A large marker commemorates our martyrs at the prison gate.



Icon of our two Blesseds, from the Parish of the Blessed Martyrs, in Kosice- Tahanovce

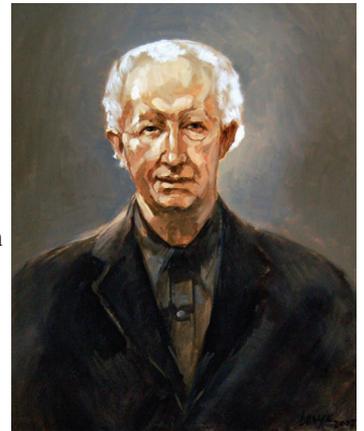


Bishop Milan Chatur, CSSR, preaching at Saint George church, in Slovinky, Kosice Eparchy. This parish is the designated pilgrimage site commemorating all of the beatified Ruthenian Greek Catholic martyrs: Bishops Romzha, Gojdic, and Hopko, and Father Dominik Methodius Trcka. Blessed Trcka founded the Byzantine Catholic Redemptorists, and Bishop Chatur belongs to the Congregation.

Special services were held at the Michalovec Monastery to remember the anniversary of the beatification of Blessed Dominik Methodius Trcka. Born into a Czech Roman Catholic family, Father Dominik Trcka fell in love with the Byzantine Church while ministering to Greek Catholic refugees during World War I. Studying with the newly formed Greek Catholic Redemptorists in Ukraine, he was given the new name “Methodius,” appropriate since he became a great missionary like his new patron. His work bore rich fruit with the creation of a Ruthenian vice-province and many new monks. They were doubly persecuted by the communists because they were a Catholic Order, and a Greek Catholic one at that. Father Trcka was tortured because he was overheard softly singing a Christmas carol. For this he was put into an unheated punishment cell with an open window, in order to kill him from the cold. Wracked with pneumonia, he was given a simple blanket to use only at night, not during the day. He was eventually taken to the prison hospital, where he suffered greatly, dying only on March 23, 1959. He told those around him that it was essential that

they know he forgave all those who had tortured him. Every year Molebens and Divine Liturgies are held at the four Greek Catholic Redemptorist monasteries, with anointing of the sick and veneration of the relics.

The Redemptorists have opened a Cause for a second priest, Father Jan Mastiliak, born in 1911. He was ordained a priest in Holy Cross Cathedral in Uzhhorod in 1934 and served as the protohegumen (superior) at the Michalovec monastery. He suffered at the Leopoldov prison from 1950 until an amnesty in 1965, but was put under house arrest in Prešov. In 1968 he was released due to the Prague Spring and became the protohegumen again at Michalovec after it was returned by the Orthodox Church. He taught 30 future priests and served as a popular confessor until his death in 1989.



Fr. Jan Matsiliak, CSSR

VATICAN CHRISTMAS TREE IS COMING FROM TRANSCARPATHIAN OBLAST OF UKRAINE!

The opening ceremonies will be attended by both Greek Catholic and Ukrainian Orthodox clergy in Saint Peter’s Square. The tree must be 30 meters/ 98.4 feet in height and come decorated with items from its homeland. This year’s tree will be accompanied by dozens more which will be used in Saint Peter’s basilica and around the Vatican City-state.

NEWS FROM THE EPARCHY OF MUKACHEVO

The Eparchy of Mukachevo has been subdivided into three arch-deaneries, to provide for better regional coordination among the parishes. The deaneries are at Uzhhorod, Mukachevo, and Khust. Khust is the eastern capital of the oblast, and the parishes there are isolated due to the rugged terrain of mountains and valleys, and poor roads. Blessed Theodore Romzha was born in Maramoros, the easternmost county, and this is also the homeland of the famous Hutsul mountaineers, as well as the Romanian ethnic minority. Father Taras Lovska, longtime rector of the Theodore Romzha Theological Academy, is the first Archdean for Khust. During Soviet rule, Father Lovska’s family participated in Roman Catholic services in the town of Vinohradiv, at the cemetery chapel. The main Catholic church had been confiscated for storage of farm chemicals, and the cemetery chapel barely held the priest and server, while the worshippers knelt outside.

They were also connected with the Greek Catholic underground, as described in Father Chris' book, *Finding a Hidden Church*. He went to Soviet Latvia after his service in the Red Army and was admitted to the Roman Catholic Seminary in 1987. The goal was to ordain him as a Latin priest and be sent home as a bi-ritual priest so that he could assist the Greek Catholics who came to the Latin parishes. Conditions changed rapidly after 1989, however, and he was instead ordained for the Eparchy of Mukachevo and sent to Rome for studies in canon law as part of the formation of a new generation of theologians for the Mukachevo eparchy. Since 2002, he has been the protosyncellus of the eparchy, rector of the seminary, and pastor of two villages.

A Special Church Blessing

Bishop Milan Sasik, CM, blessed the 120th new church, Saint Elias in Volosyanka (Polyanka before 1945), Velyky Berezny raion (county), which also serves Verkhovna Bystra. The land for this church was donated by Ihor Chepesh, the grandson of the last Greek Catholic priest who served there, Father Ivan Chepesh. When Father Ivan was arrested in 1949, his wife and four small children were thrown into the street. But in a situation that is perhaps unique in that era, the entire population rallied around them and protected them, despite the threats of the NKVD and local militia. Father Ivan never returned home; he was shot as a martyr in 1953.

On June 11, 2011, nine priests joined Bishop Milan at the altar for the dedication Liturgy. The church could not hold the sea of believers, including Sisters of Saint Basil who work in the village. But the most important guests were the four children of Father Ivan, who came with their children and grandchildren, back to the village which saved them and their mother from a life of poverty and exile. *Blagovystnyk* magazine reports the words of eldest child Nadia to the congregation: "I remember how they were taking my father away—two soldiers in blue hats with guns. I was looking after my younger brother who was one year old... I remember how he [our father] blessed us, what he was wearing, how he was praying for the last time on his knees.... Then we saw him for the last time." With the tears in their eyes, the children of Father Ivan thanked all the people in the village and those who are already in eternity for giving their mother-widow and her small four children shelter.



(Above) Sisters of St Joseph at Korolevo Orphanage. They are standing under the images of two Blessed from their Congregation: Sisters Olympia and Lavrentia, SSJ, who died in exile in Siberia.

The Work Goes On

The Mission Society sends your donations to the Metropolia of Slovakia and the Eparchy of Mukachevo (Ukraine) for these purposes:

- Divine Liturgy intentions: the income from these benefits young married priests or elderly priests with limited income;
- Construction of churches, especially in Ukraine;
- The work of the Sisters of Saint Basil, in both countries;
- The orphanage at Korolevo, Ukraine, staffed by the Sisters of Saint Joseph;
- Tuition assistance for seminarians, especially in Ukraine.

The only expenses in Albuquerque are for printing, mailing, and computer supplies. Space is donated by Our Lady of Perpetual Help Church. All of the work is donated by volunteers. The Mission Society of the Mother of God of Boronyavo is a non-profit corporation with the Internal Revenue Service.

(Photo to the right) Minister of Justice placing flowers under the memorial to our two martyrs, at Leopoldov prison, 2011. Ceremonies are held annually in remembrance of all of the victims of communist tyranny who died here. Prisoners were called by number, not by name, as part of the dehumanization process which took place, and even in death only the number was written on a cheap wooden marker. The bodies of our martyrs were retrieved because guards were bribed to write down the locations of the burials.

