

## **“EVER ANCIENT, ALWAYS NEW”**

Commencement Address

*At the conclusion of the 75<sup>th</sup> Academic Year*

*Holy Trinity Orthodox Seminary*

75 years ago, a remarkable man, a true monk, a spiritual leader, a man with a vision and incredible humility, Archbishop Vitaly (Maximenko), founded Holy Trinity Seminary. He bore in his heart not only the Gospel of Christ, but the spiritual heritage passed on to him by his predecessors, his spiritual guides, specifically – St. Job of Pochaev and the Blessed Metropolitan Anthony (Khrapovitsky). He was, on the one hand, the carrier of the past, of the old, the unchanging, and on the other – the source of vision and purpose for clergy and people in conditions of church life in a new country, preparing them with a solid foundation to face unique conditions, previously unknown challenges, and to pass on Christ’s unchanging faith and the unchanging principles of spiritual life and spiritual guidance in a changing world.

For Archbishop Vitaly such primitive desires as popularity, career advancement in the Church, personal influence, power and gain, were absolutely foreign. He was a man with an unshakable consciousness of duty, with disregard to his personal needs; he was direct, extremely accessible, had courage and firmness, a real concern for the needs of the Church, – not only spiritual, but worldly material ones as well. He conquered hearts not with the spirit of authority and high rank, but by personal example, love and humility.

Protopresbyter Michael Pomazansky remembers: “Holy Trinity Monastery, it is completely dark. The small bell rings and the first to trod the snowy path to the Midnight Office in church is Archbishop Vitaly. In the evening, it will usually be he, who leaves last after completion of Compline. When you walk by his cell, the door is open, and you see him working at his desk in a barren, almost empty room. Mail is delivered, Vladika Vitaly receives a book as a gift – he immediately has them passed on to the monastery library. He then makes the rounds to all the monastery obediences. He greets each brother with kind words, gives a bit of guidance, and words of inspiration and support; in the early fall he goes out into the fields to collect potatoes with everyone else. Every weekend he takes the train to NYC to take part in services there, and to take care of diocesan matters. The brothers load him up with food products to take to the workers of the diocesan administration. And he lugs a heavy suitcase on his own onto the train, and then through the tunnels at Grand Central Station. When leaving for NYC he will often say: if there are visitors in need of a room, mine is available, I will be away...”

This is the great Archbishop Vitaly, this is his theology: the theology of love, of practice, of the heart, of dedication, of service, of zeal, of quiet asceticism and self-denial... This is the person who planted the formative seeds at our Holy Trinity Seminary.

The Holy Trinity Seminary was initially established in order for the St. Job monastic brotherhood that arrived from war-torn Europe, to get a systematic theological education. To this day seminarians here wear the monastic belt, as did the first monk-students. This is not simply a remnant of the past, but a symbol of a spiritual succession and of the obedience to go and teach all nations, to nourish, to support, to minister, to build up the Body of Christ, to be faithful. Archbishop

Vitaly was able to, – through his faith, example, and prayers, to form a real brotherhood, a real spiritual family, a continuity of the best he knew, the best he learned, and the best he saw, both in his homeland, and in the world of Orthodoxy in exile. And each member of this monastic and seminary family did not have their personalities dissolve, but their personalities, their life experiences, especially suffering, added to the richness and depth of the monastic family bond, similar to how a mosaic is made up of different colored and sized pieces, making together a beautiful image. The seminary became not so much an official academic institution, but a school of pastoral preparation, a school of prayer and worship, a real life experience, with out of class “courses” in subjects as Humility 101, Patience 202, Work Ethics 303...

It is on this foundation, on these principles, in this direction, that Holy Trinity Seminary began to grow and develop, forming new generations of clergy and church workers for the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad. Each of the “old” monastics, and each “old” seminary teacher, – let us call them the founding fathers, – brought with them seeds-links, legacies and successions, very diverse at times, as modest as they may seem, from the old Orthodox world, and created in Jordanville what Archimandrite Konstantin (Zaitseff) called an “Island of Historical Russia” here: historical Russia, not Soviet, the Russia that at its best was truly Orthodox Holy Rus, uniting and attracting by its beauty, spiritual nobility and large-heartedness (*великодушие*), all who encountered and came into contact with it. Archbishop Vitaly – brought the missionary zeal of Pochaev; Igumen Filimon (Nikitin) – the prayerful spirit and strength of Old Valaam; Archimandrite Konstantin (Zaitseff) – the intellectual depth of the Universities of Petersburg and Heidleberg; Professor Ivan Konzevitch – the aura of eldership from Optina; Archimandrite Kiprian (Pizhoff)– a sense of true beauty, harmony and culture from

St. Petersburg; Archbishop Averky (Tausheff) – the patristic phronema received by him through St. Seraphim of Boguchar and Archbishop Theophan of Poltava; Professor Ivan Andreev – the faithfulness of the New Martyrs and Confessors from Solovki; Protopresbyter Michael Pomazansky – the lineage of centuries of clergy service, and the classical academic traditions of the historical Kievan Theological Academy... Hieromonk Ioanniky, an American convert to Orthodoxy remembers his first days at Jordanville: “I joined a very friendly and united family... It was necessary to ‘graft’ me, a convert, onto a powerful spiritual organism, of which this island was a part. I was surrounded by heartfelt kindness and care of people who themselves went through great suffering and endured unbelievable difficulties.”

One can easily write many volumes narrating the stories of “Everyday Saints” of the Russian Church Abroad, and specifically – of the Monastery and Seminary of Jordanville. Time limitations do not allow me to elaborate today. Suffice it to say, that when our Ever-memorable Metropolitan Laurus (Shkurla), who received his monastic formation through Archbishop Vitaly, and his theological education at Holy Trinity Seminary, met the holy Elder Porphyrios the Kapsokalyvite in Greece in the mid-eighties, the latter knew everything about Jordanville!

What is an important message on this Holy Trinity Seminary graduation day to all clergy and faithful of the Russian Church Abroad, including today’s graduates and seminary students? What is so necessary for our identity as members of our century old Church? A few years ago, an old retired Orthodox bishop in France shared the following words with me: “One of the signs of the Church is that is ever ancient, and, at the same time, always new.” If the Church is only ancient, it becomes a formal monument of the past, a relic. And if it is only new – it becomes

a Church of renovationism and modernism, with no roots and real identity. As members of the Church, we are called to build on the past, but at the same time to move forward, to get answers, find necessary words and solutions, to use new resources and new approaches, at the same time preserving the spirit and dignity of our founding fathers. Let us remember our spiritual heritage, our founding fathers and our spiritual heroes. To remember one needs to know. There are two ways to do that, especially for a new generation of converts and people in the Church. First, to seek out and read as much as possible the biographies and writings of these founding fathers, memoirs of them. At present most of the materials are in Russian, and thus need to be translated and published. There is a great amount of work to be done. Secondly: to be attentive and mindful to the older generation of clergy, especially to those who we may call living links to the past, to those who personally knew and were formed by the founding fathers and their successors: we are blessed to still have such a generation in our midst. Our sights should not be on the loud and all-knowing YouTube bloggers and the new phenomenon of so-called Orthodox “influencers,” neither should we follow the fad of “how they do things in Moscow.” We have our own quiet, deep, cultured, thoughtful, classic, devout and articulate school of serving, of interaction, of community. Ask questions, notice small things, do not rush to make changes, preserve what we have – it is a spiritual and liturgical treasure. We have had many clergy visitors from Russia at our cathedral in San Francisco. And what impresses and warms them the most are not the voices of our deacons, concert choral pieces or fancy vestments – in Russia they have plenty of that. They are impressed and moved by the accessibility of our bishops, by the fraternal interaction of our clergy, by what and how we have preserved the 1,000 year old liturgical and spiritual legacy of Russian Orthodoxy in the course of over 100 years in a non-Orthodox setting. And they are moved to tears by our converts to the faith.

Let us uphold the traditional spirit of the Russian Church Abroad, our liturgical practices, our pastoral approach to church matters and to every individual, even how our external appearance should be – with traditional beards and long hair, so we look like St. John of Kronstadt, Fr. Michael Pomazansky, and Fr. Vasily Boschanovsky did, rather than the everchanging look of fitness trainers, GQ cover models and golf playing businessmen. For us and future generations, our founding fathers were not simply great men who have reposed, but are our constant companions and guides. Their dear names are not so much remembered out of gratitude, as in order to be reminded of the instructions, examples and even admonitions they bequeathed. Whenever we have questions, decisions, are at crossroads, we can simply ask ourselves: “How would Metropolitan Laurus or Metropolitan Hilarion resolve this pastoral situation? How would Fr. Michael Pomazansky (based on the articles of his we know) phrase a paragraph of a polemical article? How do they serve such a service at Jordanville, at our Synod and the cathedral in San Francisco? In the altar, what is the prayerful demeanor of our present First Hierarch, Metropolitan Nicholas? How would Archimandrite Kiprian remodel an area of the church, based on the churches he painted? And we will always get an answer.

In 1882 the Russian historian, Professor Vasily Kluchevsky, in a speech dedicated to the 500th anniversary of the repose St. Sergius of Radonezh, noted that although the saint reposed, his spirit is alive five centuries later – “This is similar to when a fire goes out, but the heat that it produced continues to provide warmth”. Or to a great river which powers turbines to provide power for new technologies. In conclusion I would like to paraphrase this great historian: Let us know, love and

honor our founding fathers, and our founding fathers will love and continue to guide us.

Archpriest Peter Perekrestov

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Holy Trinity Orthodox Seminary

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