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1991: THE RETURN OF ST. SERAPHIM'S RELICS TO DIVEYEVO

A Radio Talk by Fr. Artemy Vladimirov

The following talk was heard throughout Russia on Radio Radonezh, just a few days after the procession of St. Seraphim's relics from St. Petersburg to Diveyevo Monastery passed through Moscow in the early summer of 1991. The relics had been found stored in the basement of a museum in St. Petersburg, where they were secretly taken by Soviet authorities after the closing of Sarov Monastery in the 1920's.

Just recently a miracle happened before our eyes; one more knot of history has been untangled, signaling a new page in the fortunes of Russia – the finding of the relics of St. Seraphim of Sarov, the first to predict the 1917 Revolution, whose self-proclaimed purpose was the annihilation of the name of God from the face of the earth. St. Seraphim prophesied that Russia would be cleansed of her infidelity in the blood of her people, but after repenting of her monstrous crime she would be reborn, restored to her former beauty, and this period of rebirth would be accompanied by the return of the saint's healing relics to Diveyevo. Now the holy relics have been found and are amongst us, illuminating the darkness of our sins and bringing the light of God's grace, not only to our hearts, but to the very heart of Russia. Lest we grow faint-hearted at the immense task before us – to rebuild Holy Russia – St. Seraphim hides us in the folds of his grace-woven mantle: "My joy, don't be afraid, all of this must be."



Cross procession with St. Seraphim's relics, Diveyevo.

I have heard many accounts of spiritual impressions from the saint's procession. One pious old woman, candle in hand, wept beside the train platform as she awaited the arrival of St. Seraphim, his holy countenance lightening the dreary rail stations of Kazansky, Leningradsky, and Yaroslavsky. The moment she saw the relics of the saint carried on the shoulders of Russian hierarchs, she testified that a marvelous fragrance went straight to her heart. It was not her imagination; no wishful thinking could have made her drop to her knees on the damp earth, to join other believers in singing, "*We glorify, we glorify thee, our Holy Father Seraphim!*"

Another Orthodox believer told me how he stood on a balcony across the square from the station, watching the procession from above. As more than one hundred priests and hierarchs in gold vestments came into view, processing from the train platform to the square, this man clearly saw beams of light stretching from the saint's coffin in all directions, as if covering the Russian land. Caught by one of these beams, the white mitre of Patriarch Alexis II began to glow with light as well. St. Seraphim acquired the spirit of peace and thousands around him were saved,¹ and now rays of grace from

his relics have illumined the procession of God's priests.

I too walk with the relics, and my attention is caught by the names of the streets along which we process. Ulitsa Razin ... the bronze figure of the anathematized Stenka Razin² stands watching in amazement at what is passing before his executioner's block.

Ulitsa Spartacus. The deranged Spartacus trembles at the sight of St. Seraphim. This isn't a long-suffering traditional Russian village; our procession passes through the deformed neighborhoods of modern urban life: crooked industrial smoke-stacks and mounds of refuse. People climb over the rubble towards us. Some cross themselves without knowing why. Others inwardly jeer, unable to comprehend what is taking place, while ten thousand candle-bearing Russian believers follow the priests to the patriarchal cathedral. I walk the pilgrimage route deep in thought, conscious of the incorrupt-

¹ In his famous Conversation with Motovilov, St. Seraphim said, "Acquire the spirit of peace, and thousands around you will be saved." The entire Conversation can be found in the *Little Russian Philokalia: St. Seraphim of Sarov*, published by St. Herman of Alaska Monastery, P.O. Box 90, Platina, CA 96076.

² Stenka Razin: A 17th-century Russian bandit and marauder who came down in Russian folklore as a dark and bloody counterpart of the English Robin Hood. Bolsheviks reinterpreted his story, styling him a precursor of 20th century revolutionaries.



Holy Trinity Church

ible presence of St. Seraphim, his blessed countenance and his heavenly joy.

It is an amazing procession. The proud, God-battling Moscow that killed its prophets and, in turn, was stunned by terrible disasters; who exiled its natives, forcibly resettling the city with foreign peoples and unheard of ethnic groups; Moscow, which destroyed its churches and defiled its altars: no longer *forty times forty*,³ but some kind of strange new city. This same Moscow met St. Seraphim on his royal way.

How many decades repented at this moment, before our very eyes! What a wondrous victory, what a triumph of Orthodoxy! This is a new page in the destiny of Russia. Even television and radio commentators, forgetting for an instant the present turmoil and recalling eternity, reported on the translation of the relics and the life of the saint; so that no one would have an excuse of ignorance at the Last Judgment.

Some have asked if these are truly the relics. There is no doubt; this is St. Seraphim. Our elders of the Pskov Caves Monastery testify to it; our batiushka, the spiritual father of all of Russia, Father Kyril of Holy Trinity-St. Sergius Lavra, proclaimed it with his presence at the opening of the relics. It was confirmed by a thorough investigation by the hierarchy of the Church, who would have never ordered nation-wide glorification if there were any doubt of the relics' authenticity.

The evening after the translation of the relics one simple woman asked, "Batiushka, I heard that they carried somebody, and they say that now it is going to be good for us. Is this true?" I said, "Yes, it's true – if only we will pray to God and repent."

And when summer approaches, with the ringing of the Paschal bells, St. Seraphim will move from the patriarchal cathedral to Nizhni-Novgorod, to the God-saved monastery of Diveyevo. With the return of his relics, the monastery will flourish once again; and this wondrous place will be rebuilt, not as a simple monastery, but as a lavra. This has been foretold by our saints and elders, the servants of God, and we ourselves now witness these remarkable events coming to pass.

One old woman, Evdokia, having just received communion for the first time in seventy years, venerated the cross and began to proclaim loudly, "Soon, there will be a triumph in Diveyevo! Now, it is not years and months, but only days and hours before the opening of the monastery and the appearance of the four righteous ones: holy Father Seraphim; the first

³ Before the 1917 revolution, Moscow was said to have "forty times forty" Orthodox churches.

abbess, Alexandra; Matushka Martha, the sixteen-year old schema-nun raised by St. Seraphim; and Blessed Evdokia, tortured and murdered by the atheists. It is the saint who tells me to say to you that his relics will return and the monastery itself will reopen. He wants you to come to the opening of the church and the relics.”

Then our patriarch, Alexis II, spoke, “The healing relics have arrived from the city on the Neva (St. Petersburg) to the heart of Russia, the patriarchal cathedral....” We priests are allowed to openly venerate the saint’s head, his relics giving forth a wondrous heavenly fragrance. Afterwards paper icons are distributed, printed with the patriarch’s blessing for this new Russian feast. On the back of the icons is written: “The Feast of the Second Translation of the relics of the God-pleaser, St. Seraphim, from the city of St. Peter to the capital of Moscow.” Even our cities’ faith-breaking names are changing, reclaiming their honorable Christian titles.⁴ This is a great miracle, and we can now begin to live, not just lament.

Come to St. Seraphim with the simplicity of heart he asked from his orphans at the mill convent: “Tell me everything, cry to me and I will hear and the Lord will protect you.” We wait for spring, when St. Seraphim will deign to have his relics moved to Diveyevo, from where, as he foretold, he will once again teach universal repentance – that the entire world will know that “Christ is Risen!” Then the host of godly Russian saints, together with us sinners, will glorify God with one mouth and one heart, fearlessly awaiting the coming of our Risen Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. ✚

⁴ After the coup of August 1990, many cities that had been renamed after Bolshevik revolutionaries reverted to their pre-revolutionary names; Leningrad once again became St. Petersburg, and Sverdlovsk, where the royal family was murdered, reverted to Ekaterinburg.



St. Seraphim's reliquary.