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BLESSED MATRONA OF MOSCOW: SAINT AND WONDERWORKER¹

On any bright summer morning or dark midwinter dawn, the gates to the Monastery of the Protection of the Mother of God in the Taganskaya district of Moscow open early to admit a crowd of pilgrims waiting to venerate the relics of one of Russia's newest canonized saints, Blessed Matrona of Moscow (1881-1952). By mid-morning, the numbers have swelled to 200–300, and on weekends and feast days, to three times that number. Standing in line to venerate an icon of St. Matrona hung on the wall outside of the church can take two to three hours; the line to venerate her relics is even longer. Who is this remarkable woman, and how has she captured the hearts of Russians everywhere?

Blessed Matrona (Matrona Dmitrievna Nikonova) was born in 1881 in the village of Sebino in the province of Tula, twenty kilometers from the famous Kulikovo² Field. Her parents, Dmitri and Natalia, were pious, hard-working peasants with four children – Ivan, Michael, Maria, and Matrona.

The Nikonovs lived in such poverty that to feed and clothe a fourth child seemed impossible, and before the baby was born, Natalia decided to send it to an orphanage sponsored by Prince Golitsin in the neighboring village of Buchalki, where underprivileged and illegitimate children were brought up at the prince's expense. Shortly afterwards, however, she had a prophetic

¹ Translated by Thomas and Sonia Hulbert from the Russian editions: *The Life and Miracles of the Righteous St. Matrona of Moscow*, Women's Monastery of the Protection of the Mother of God in Moscow, 2000; *Memoirs of Zenaida V. Zhdanova*; *The Life of Blessed Matrona of Moscow and Her Miracles in the 20th and 21st Centuries*, comp. by A. Khudoshin, Kiev, 2005; and personal testimonies from many Orthodox Christians whose lives have been touched by St. Matrona.

² Kulikovo Field: The battlefield where Dmitri Donskoy defeated the Mongol Tartars with the blessing of St. Sergei of Radonezh in 1324. This was the beginning of the united effort of the Russian princes to expel the Tartars from Russia.

dream. Her unborn daughter appeared to Natalia in the form of a white bird with a human face and closed eyes, alighting on her arm. Accepting the dream as a sign, the God-fearing woman decided to keep the baby, who was indeed born blind.

Holy Scripture testifies that the Lord sometimes chooses His servants even before they are born. As He said to the Holy Prophet Jeremiah, “Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee; and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee....” Matrona also seemed to have been chosen for a special purpose, for from her birth, the Lord gave her both spiritual gifts and a heavy cross that she bore with humility and patience throughout her life.

Pavel Ivanovich Prokhorov, a relative of the family who attended Matrona’s baptism, related that as the priest submerged her in the font, those present saw a column of light smoke above the infant and smelled a wonderful fragrance. Respected as a righteous man by his parishioners, the priest, Fr. Vasili, was amazed: “I’ve baptized many, but this I have never seen before. This child will be holy.” Fr. Vasili told Natalia, “If she asks for anything, you must come to me immediately and tell me what is needed.” He added that Matrona would stand in his place and even predict his death. This later came to pass. One night, Matrona unexpectedly told her mother that Fr. Vasili had died. Her frightened parents ran to his home to find that Fr. Vasili had indeed just reposed.

A friend of Natalia’s later related that when the child was still nursing, her mother complained, “What can I do? The baby doesn’t take my breast on Wednesday and Friday – she just sleeps all day and it is impossible to wake her up.”

On the little girl’s chest was a raised birthmark in the form of a cross, of the size and shape that all Christians wear around their neck. When she was six years old, her mother once reproached her: “Why did you take off your baptismal cross?” “Mama, I have my own cross on my chest,” answered the child. “My dear,” said her mother, “Forgive me! And I was scolding you...”

Matrona was not only blind, she didn’t even have eyes. Her eye sockets were closed, her eyelids shut tightly like the white bird her mother had seen in her dream. But she had spiritual sight, and many times when her parents were asleep, she would feel her way to the icon corner, take the icons from the shelf to the table, and play with them in the quiet of the night.

As she grew, village children often made fun of Matrona, mocking her with cruel games. They would hit her with stinging nettles, knowing that

she couldn’t see, and once they put her into a pit, watching curiously as she felt her way out of it and shuffled home. Because of these “games,” Matrona stopped playing with other children and stayed at home.

The Nikonov home was situated near the beautiful Church of the Dormition of the Mother of God, which served seven or eight surrounding villages. Matrona’s parents were known for their piety and, as they often attended Divine services together, Matrona “grew up” in church. When Natalia didn’t know where the young girl was, she often found her there, standing quietly in her usual place, behind the door near the west wall. She knew the church prayers and hymns and often sang along with the choir.

Feeling sorry for her, Natalia would sometimes say, “You are my little unfortunate one!” and was surprised one day to hear Matrona answer, “Am I unhappy? You have unhappy Vanya and Misha.”

Matrona’s Spiritual Gifts

At seven or eight years old, Matrona’s gifts of foresight and healing began to manifest. One day she said to her mother, “Mama, get ready, I’m going to have a wedding.” Natalia told this to the priest, who came and gave the child Holy Communion. Within a few days, carriages began coming to the Nikonov home; people with sorrows and illnesses, asking for young Matrona. She prayed over them and many were healed. Her mother asked, “My little Matrona, what is all this?” and the girl replied, “I told you that there would be a wedding.”

Her relatives recalled that even as a child she not only perceived human sins and offences, but even thoughts. She felt approaching danger and foresaw natural disasters and social upheavals. Through her prayers, many people received healing from sickness and consolation in sorrow. They came from surrounding villages, and later even from other districts and regions on foot, by cart, and in wagons. Matrona often prayed for bedridden invalids, who would be raised to their feet, healed. Out of gratitude, they left food and gifts for her parents, so instead of being a burden, Matrona soon became the family’s main provider.

One feast day, Natalia called her husband to go with her to church, but he decided not to go that day, and instead read and sang the prayers at home. Throughout the church service she worried over his absence. When liturgy finished and she returned home, Matrona, who had also stayed home, said,

“Mama, you weren’t in church.” “How can that be? I’ve only just come home and I’m changing my clothes.” But her daughter replied, “Father was in church, but you weren’t there.” With her spiritual sight she understood that her mother was only in church bodily, while her father had prayed deeply at home.

One chilly autumn day, Natalia found her daughter sitting outside. “Why are you sitting here? Go indoors.” Matrona answered, “It’s impossible for me to sit inside; they put fire on me, they poke me with their pitchforks.” Her mother was perplexed, “But there’s no one there.” “You don’t understand, Mama, Satan is tempting me.”

Xenia Ivanovna Sifarova, a distant relative, related that once, after visiting their family, Matrona said to Xenia’s mother, “I will leave now and tomorrow there will be a fire – but you won’t get burned.” And so it was, that a fire began in the morning and burned almost the entire village. As the flames approached their home, the wind suddenly changed and their house was saved.

In her youth, Matrona was given a chance to travel. Lydia Yankova, the pious daughter of the local landowner, took Matrona with her on various pilgrimages to the Kiev Caves Lavra, Holy Trinity-St. Sergius Lavra, St. Petersburg, and other Russian holy places. An account has been preserved of the meeting of young Matrona with the righteous St. John of Kronstadt. At the end of the service at the Andreevskiy Cathedral in Kronstadt, he asked the crowd to make way for the fourteen-year-old girl to approach the *solea*. In everyone’s hearing he said, “Little Matrona, come to me. Behold, here is my replacement, the eighth pillar of Russia.” Matrona never explained the meaning of these words to anyone, but those close to her later understood that Fr. John had foreseen how she would serve Russia and the Russian people during the persecution of the Church.

When Matrona was seventeen years old, she suddenly lost her ability to walk, and later spoke of the spiritual reason for this. She had known beforehand that, on that day, after receiving Holy Communion, a woman would come to her in church and take away her ability to walk. “I couldn’t escape this – such was the will of God.”³ So, to the end of her days she remained seated. Her “sitting” in various homes and apartments where she found shelter continued for another fifty years. She never complained about her paralysis, but bore it as the will of God.

³ Some have asked why God allowed this seeming manifestation of witchcraft, but in the view of pious Russians, one only has to look at how the Lord tested his elect in the Old and New Testaments to see that such an event doesn’t contradict either His power or goodness. Not only was Matrona’s spiritual life unhindered by this event, but it served to glorify God through the her patient longsuffering.



Asking for alms at monastery gate.

Around this same time, Matrona, who was already known throughout the region and whose requests were taken as blessings, asked that a certain icon of the Mother of God be painted for the village Church of the Dormition. This came about one day when the blind girl asked her mother to tell the priest that on a certain shelf in his library lay a book with a picture of the icon, "In Search of the Lost." The surprised priest found the picture of the icon just as she had described it. When she heard this, Matrona exclaimed, "Mama, I will have such an icon painted." Her mother was pensive. How could they ever pay for this? Some time later, Matrona again said to her mother, "Mama, I'm dreaming and dreaming about this icon 'In Search of the Lost.' The Mother of God is asking to come to our church." At Matrona's request local village women began collecting money. Among those who contributed was one man who gave a ruble reluctantly and his brother who gave one small kopeck in fun. When they brought the money to Matrona, she spilled it out and, picking out the very same ruble and kopeck, told her mother, "Mama, give it back, it's spoiling all the money for me..."

When the necessary amount had been collected, they ordered the icon from an artist from the village of Epiphania. Matrona asked if he was able to paint such an icon, and he replied that for him it was an ordinary commission. She then asked him to go to confession and receive Holy Communion. Later she asked again, "Do you know for sure that you will paint this icon?" The artist answered affirmatively and began his work.

After some time, he told Matrona that nothing was coming of the painting. She replied: "Repent of your sins." With her spiritual vision, she saw that there was one sin that he had not yet confessed. Astounded that she knew this, he returned to the priest, confessed, communed, and asked Matrona's forgiveness. She replied, "Go. Now you will paint the icon of the Heavenly Queen." The icon was painted about 1915 and, after the revolution, Matrona kept it with her throughout her life. It is now enshrined in Moscow at the Monastery of the Protection of the Mother of God in Taganskaya, near Matrona's relics.

With Matrona's blessing, another collection of money was made in the villages and another icon "In Search of the Lost" was ordered for the village of Bogoroditske. This icon is now in Holy Dormition Monastery in the village of Novo-Moskovsk, in the province of Tula.

When the icon was ready, it was carried in procession with crosses and banners from Bogoroditske to their own church in Sebino. Matrona went

four kilometers out of the village to meet it, others leading her by the hands. (This was before she lost the use of her legs.) Suddenly she announced, "Don't go any further, now very soon they will come, they're already close." Blind from birth, she spoke like one with sight, "They will be here in half an hour with the icon." And indeed, after thirty minutes the procession came in sight. A moleben was served and the procession continued to Sebino, Matrona carrying the icon for much of the way.

This icon of the Mother of God became the main object of local veneration and was glorified with many miracles. When there was a drought, they would bring the icon to a meadow near the village and serve a moleben; rarely were the villagers able to return home before it began to rain.

Although blind, Blessed Matrona was always surrounded with icons. Later in Moscow, in a room in which she lived for a long period, there were icon corners with icons from floor to ceiling, and glowing icon lamps before them. One woman, working in the Church of the Deposition of the Robe in Moscow often came to Matrona and later recalled how Matrona told her, "In your church I know all the icons and where they are."

People were astonished to learn that Matrona had a visual conception of the world, like those with sight. Zenaida Vladimirovna Zhdanova, a close friend, once said sympathetically, "It's a pity, Matushka, that you can't see the beauty of the world," to which Matrona answered, "Once, God opened my eyes and showed me the world and His creation. I saw the sun and the stars in the sky and everything on the earth, the beauty of the earth, mountains, rivers, the green grass, flowers and birds..."

In an even more remarkable example of her clairvoyance, Zenaida recalled, "Matushka was completely unlearned, but at the same time knew everything. In 1946, I was to defend my thesis project on an architectural design for the Ministry of the Navy (I was then studying at an architectural institute in Moscow). I did not understand why, but my thesis advisor had taken a dislike to me and my project. For five months he would not consult with me once, and he had already decided to fail my project. Two weeks before the defense he informed me, "The commission will arrive tomorrow and declare the worthlessness of your work! You won't even defend it." I returned home in tears – father was in prison, there was no one to help, mama depended on me. Our only hope was that I would successfully complete my university education and get a job.



Early morning line to venerate icon of St. Matrona on outside wall of church.

That afternoon Matrona listened to me attentively and said, “Don’t worry, don’t worry, you will pass your exam! Tonight, we’ll have tea and talk about it.” I could hardly wait for evening to come and when I joined her, she said, “I will go with you to Italy, to Florence, to Rome and we will see the works of the great masters.” Then she began to enumerate the streets, the buildings! She paused at one point: “Behold, the Plazzio Pitti... and here’s another palace with archways, similar to the one in your work – a building with three lower levels of massive stonework and two arched entryways.” She spoke in detail about the architectural elements of the building, and I was shocked at her knowledge of the subject. In the morning I ran to the institute, put tracing paper over my project and using brown ink I made corrections based on what she had said. The commission came at ten o’clock. They looked over my project and said, “And so, your project came out well, it looks excellent – go ahead and defend it!”

Once during Bright Week, women from the village of Orlovki came to Matrona, who sat at an open window receiving people. To one woman she gave a prosphora, to another, some water, to a third, a red egg which she said she should eat when she went to the garden behind the barn. The woman put the egg in her blouse and the group departed. Behind the barn, she broke open the egg and found a mouse instead. Frightened, the villagers returned to Matrona, who asked, “So, is it disgusting to eat a mouse?”

– “Matrona – how can one eat it?”

– “And how can you sell such milk to people, orphans, widows and poor people who don’t have a cow? The mouse was in the milk, and you just picked it out and sold the milk.”

The woman who had done this protested, “But Matrona, they didn’t see the mouse – they didn’t know about it, and ...I even threw it out.”

– “But God knows that you sold milk that had had a mouse in it!”

As an intercessor before the Lord, Matrona helped many with sicknesses and sorrows. Four kilometers from Sebino there lived a man who couldn’t walk. Matrona said, “Let him begin to crawl to me in the morning. He will reach us at about three o’clock.” He crawled the four kilometers, and left her on his own legs, healed.

A. F. Vibornova, whose father was baptized at the same time as Matrona, also told of one of these healings. “My mother’s brother lived in the town of Ustyia, where my mother was born. One morning he rose to find that he

couldn't move his hands or his feet. He did not believe that God was healing people through Matrona's prayers, but his daughter came to my mother in Sebino anyhow. 'Godmother, hurry! Father feels very bad. He's become a simpleton – his arms hang at his side, he can't focus his eyes, his tongue hardly moves.' My mother bridled the horse and she and my father went to Ustyia, where they found her brother in such a pitiful state that he could barely say 'sis-ter'. She brought him to our village, then went by herself to Matrona. When she arrived, Matrona (who had not yet met him) said, 'Well, now, your brother says I can't do anything, but he himself has become like a noodle... But bring him to me, I'll help.' She prayed over him and gave him some holy oil. He slept like a dead man and in the morning arose completely healthy. Matrona only said, 'Be thankful to your sister – it's her faith that healed you.'"

The help that Matrona gave to sick people had nothing in common with the witchcraft and whisperings of old women or the so-called 'folk' remedies that invoke spirits, extrasensory powers, or other sorcery, in which the 'healer' is in contact with dark forces. Hers was of a completely Christian nature. Those who knew her well testified that it was for this reason that righteous Matrona so disliked sorcerers and occultists. Above all, Matrona prayed. Richly laden with spiritual gifts, she prayed to God for heavenly aid against infirmity. The history of the Orthodox Church has many such incidents where not only clergy or monastic-ascetics, but also righteous ones living in the world healed those in need through their prayers.

Matrona said prayers over water and gave it to those who came to her. Drinking this water and sprinkling it about protected one from a variety of dangers. The contents of these prayers is unknown, but, of course, at that time it was difficult to obtain holy water sanctified by a priest who had the canonical right to perform this task. It is known, however, that miraculous healing occurs not only through small amounts of holy water blessed in church, but also through springs and wells associated with righteous people who spent their prayerful lives near these springs, as well as springs near places where holy icons appeared.

When she was quite young, Matrona foretold the 1917 Russian Revolution. "There will be pillaging, destruction of churches, and everyone will be persecuted." She graphically described how the land would be divided up and how parcels of land would be grabbed by people intent on getting something for themselves. "Then, they will throw away the land and run off

in every direction. In the end, the land will be useless for anyone." Thus, Matrona saw beforehand the revolutionary "program" of land redistribution, which dispossessed even the poor.

Before the revolution, Matrona advised Yankov, the landowner of their village of Sebino, to sell everything and go abroad. If he had listened to her, he would not have had to witness the plundering of his estate, he would have avoided his own untimely death, and he would have spared his daughter Lydia a life of homeless wandering.

A fellow villager of Matrona, Evgenia Ivanovna Kalashnikova, related that before the revolution a baroness bought a house in Sebino and told Matrona, "I want to build a bell tower." "What you plan to do will not come to pass," Matrona answered. The baroness was surprised: "Why won't it come true, when I have both money and materials?" But it was so – nothing ever came of her plans; the revolution disrupted everything.

The Move to Moscow

In 1925, Matrona moved to Moscow where she remained to the end of her life. In the capital city there were many unhappy, suffering people who had fallen away from the faith and others who were unbalanced through physical and spiritual illnesses. Living there for thirty years, her prayerful service saved many from infirmity and despair, reconciling them with the Church. Matrona loved Moscow, saying, "It's the holy city, the heart of Russia."

After the Revolution, both of Matrona's brothers, Mikhail and Ivan, joined the Communist Party, and Mikhail became a village agitator. Matrona's presence in the family home, receiving people all day long and teaching them how to preserve their faith, was unbearable for her brothers, who were afraid of reprisals from the party. Taking pity on them and her elderly parents, Matrona moved away to Moscow. She lived with relatives and friends, staying for short periods in houses, apartments, and basements with dedicated spiritual daughters who took care of her.

This homeless wandering was a new period in her ascetic life. Occasionally, she was forced to live with people who were hostile towards her, as living-quarters in Moscow were scarce (as they are now) and there were few choices. Zenaida Zhdanova related the kind of deprivation that Matrona endured when she arrived in Moscow. "She lived not even having a corner of her own, without possessions or food. She would live with

anyone who invited her. She lived on what people brought. At one period, she was completely dependent on a wicked woman who ordered everyone about and divided up everything that came to Matushka among her own relatives. Without her knowledge Matushka couldn't even eat or drink."

"Once I went to Sokolniki, where Matushka sometimes lived in a small hut, a summerhouse made of plywood. It was deep autumn. I went to the house, and inside found thick, moist, dank smoke coming from a small stove. I approached Matushka, but she lay on the bed with her face to the wall, unable to turn towards me as her hair had frozen to the wall. I said in horror, "Matushka, how could this happen!?! Surely you know that mother and I live alone, my brother is at the front, father is in prison – what has become of him, no one knows – but we have a warm home with two rooms and a separate entrance. Why haven't you asked us to take you?" Matushka sighed heavily and said, "God has not willed it so that you will not regret it later." (But later she did move in with the Zhdanovs.)

Until the war, Matrona lived on Ulianovskiy Street with Fr. Vasili, the husband of her spiritual daughter, Pelagia, until he was imprisoned. She later lived on Pyatnitskaya Street, in the Sokolniki area (the summer plywood construction), and in Vishnyakovskiy Lane in the basement of a relative. She also lived at Nikitskiy Gates, in Petrovsko-Razumovskaya, and was a guest of relatives in Sergiev Posad and Tsaritsino. Longest of all, she lived from 1942 to 1949 in the Arbat neighborhood, in Starokonyushenskiy Lane. This old wooden manor house had belonged to the wealthy father of Zenaida Zhdanova, but after the revolution the house was confiscated and Zenaida and her mother were left with two small rooms. Three of the corners of Matrona's room were covered with icons from the floor to the ceiling. Before the icons hung old lampadas, and in the windows, rich heavy curtains.

When she lived with the Zhdanovs in Starokonyushenskiy Lane, Matrona confessed and received Holy Communion from Fr. Dmitri at the church on Krasnaya Presnaya Street. Unceasing prayer helped her carry out her *podvig* of service to others. Often she was so tired at the end of the day that she wasn't able to speak, even to her close ones, and could only groan quietly. Blessed Matrona's interior spiritual life remained a mystery to those who were close to her.

In her memoirs, Zenaida Zhdanova writes: "Who was Matrona, exactly? Matushka was an angel incarnate – a warrior, doing battle with evil powers



Pilgrim and son at monastery gate.

as if she held a flaming sword in her hands. She healed by her prayers, with holy water...

“She was small, like a child, and often lay on her side, on her clenched fist. She also slept this way, never really lying down completely. When she received people, she sat cross-legged, her legs beneath her. She would put her hands on the head of the person kneeling in front of her, make the sign of the Cross over them, pray, and then say whatever was needful for their soul.

“It seems that Matushka knew everything that was going to happen ahead of time. Every day of her life was a stream of grief and sorrow from those who came to her. She would hold the head of a weeping person in both hands, suffering with them, warming them with her holiness. The person would leave as if on wings, and many healings occurred as a result of her prayers. Matrona herself was often exhausted; she sighed heavily and prayed all night long. She had a small depression on her forehead from her fingers because she had crossed herself so very often. She crossed herself slowly, carefully, her fingers searching for this place on her forehead.”

One day Zenaida complained to Matushka, “Matushka, my nerves...” “What nerves,” she interjected, “You know, during wartime or in prison, there are no nerves... you have to control yourself and be patient.”

Many times the Soviet authorities wanted to arrest Matrona, and many of those close to her were imprisoned or sent into exile. Zenaida Zhdanova herself was sentenced for being a member of an Orthodox monarchist group. These were difficult times and people were afraid to register Matrona at their address (for which they could also be arrested for harboring an “enemy of the people”), so she lived illegally, without registration, often leaving in a great hurry just before the police came because she foresaw that there was unpleasantness approaching. In this way she saved not only herself from arrest, but those who sheltered her.

Xenia Ivanovna Sifarovna relates that Matrona’s nephew, Ivan, lived in Sergiev Posad (Zagorsk in Soviet times). One day she called him in her thoughts to come to her. He went to his boss and said, “I need to ask permission to leave work early. I can’t stay, I must go to my aunt.” He came, not knowing why. Matrona said, “Quickly, quickly, move me to Zagorsk to your mother-in-law.” They had only just left when the police arrived. It was like this many times; she would leave hours or minutes before the arrest.

Anna Filipovna Vibornova remembers another incident. Once, when a policeman came to arrest Matrona, she had not left her residence,

but waited for him and said, “Go, go quickly, there is misfortune for you at home! A blind woman has no place to hide. I’ll sit here in bed, I won’t go anywhere.” Alarmed, he returned home to find that his wife had been badly burned by the kerosene stove. He managed to get her to the hospital in time to save her life. When he came to work the next day, his chief asked him, “Well, did you get the blind woman?” He replied, “I’m not taking her anywhere. If that blind woman hadn’t told me, I would have lost my wife, but I was able to get her to the hospital in time.”

While living in Moscow, Matrona often went to her native village – someone would call her to come, or she would become homesick and miss her mother. Residents of her village also came to her in Moscow and brought handwritten notes from people from nearby villages. She answered them all. People came from 200 or even 300 kilometers away, and she would know their names. To some she spoke in parables, to others in simple language. Many Moscow priests and monks from the Holy Trinity-St. Sergius Lavra knew about Matrona as well, but through the unknowable providence of God, there were no witnesses to draw back the curtain of her spiritual life and write about it for future generations. They only knew that she prayed through the night.

Sometime in 1939 or 1940, Matrona said to one visitor, “Look how you are fighting with everyone, and you know, war is coming... Many of our people will perish, but the Russian people will win the war.” At the beginning of 1941, Zenaida’s twin sister, Olga Noskova, having received a paid holiday from her state employers, asked Matushka when she should go. Matrona replied, “Take your vacation now; later there won’t be any vacations for a long, long time. There is going to be a war. Victory will be ours; the enemy will not touch Moscow, only it will burn a little. It won’t be necessary to leave Moscow.”

When World War II began, Matushka asked all of those who came to her to bring willow branches. She broke these into sticks of uniform length, peeled off the bark, and prayed. Those close to her remember that her hands were covered with sores from doing this, but no one understood the significance. It also appears that Matrona was able to be spiritually present in various places at the same time. Distance made no difference. She frequently spoke of helping the soldiers, unseen, on the fronts. She told everyone that the Germans wouldn’t enter Tula, and her prophecy was correct. During the war there were many occasions when she had to answer those who came to



Monastery of the Protection of the Mother of God, Moscow.

find out if a friend or relative was alive or not. She would say to some, “Alive – just wait.” To others she would say, “Have a funeral served and commemorate him.”

Matrona received up to forty people almost daily. She didn’t refuse anyone except those who came with bad intentions. Some came to her as a folk healer who had the power to remove curses or the evil eye, but after meeting her they understood that she was a woman of God, and they often began going to church, to confession and Holy Communion.

Matushka always prayed loudly. These were well-known prayers, read both in church and at home: Our Father; Let God arise...; the 90th Psalm; O Lord Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth.... When she prayed she emphasized that she was not the source of healing, but that God Himself helped in response to the prayers. When one suffering woman, Xenia Gavrilovna Potapova, asked her for help, she replied, “Who is little Matrona, is she God? God helps!”

In her prayers for the infirm, Matrona required that people have faith in God and repent. One visitor would be asked if she believed that God had the power to heal her; another, who was sick with epilepsy, would be directed to not miss a single Sunday service, and to go to confession and receive Holy Communion every time. Those living in civil marriage she blessed to marry in the Church. She required everyone to wear a cross.

Matushka also taught that we have to obtain medical help when we are ill. Our body is a house that God has given us and we are responsible for keeping it repaired. God created the world and healing herbs. We shouldn’t resist His gifts.

What did people bring to Matrona? Ordinary sorrows: incurable illness, loss of a job, a husband who had left the family, unhappy love, persecution from the authorities ... questions about life and ordinary needs. Should one marry? Should one move to another place or change jobs? Still others suffered physically, psychologically, or spiritually through an unwise attraction to magic and the occult.

Of sorcerers, Matrona said, “To those who enter willingly into union with the powers of evil, dedicating themselves to witchcraft, there is no escape. It is forbidden to go to these old women for counsel – one heals and the other causes harm.” Folk medicine and pagan spiritual practice continued to be widely practiced in Soviet Russia, particularly in the form of fortune telling and a pagan approach to natural healing. Matrona helped many victims of these practitioners.

Paraskeva Sergeevna Anosova, who regularly visited her brother in a psychiatric institution, remembers, “Once when going to visit him, I traveled with a man and his wife who were going to the hospital to pick up their daughter. On the way back, it happened that we were together again. Suddenly, this eighteen-year-old girl began to bark like a dog. I said to her mother, ‘I’m so sorry for you, but as we are going by Tsaritsino, let’s bring your daughter to Matronushka.’ The father of the girl, a general, wouldn’t hear of such a thing, saying that it was all fantasy, but his wife insisted and we went to Tsaritsino. As we approached, the girl became as stiff as a board, her arms stretched out like branches. She began spitting on Matrona and tried to get away. Matrona said, ‘Let her be, she won’t do anything more.’ They let the girl go, and she fell writhing to the floor, vomiting blood. Then she fell asleep for three days, her family caring for her. When she awoke and saw her mother, she asked, ‘Mama, where are we?’ ‘We are with a clairvoyant person, my dear.’ The girl was told all that had happened, and from that time, she was completely healed.”

Zenaida Zhdanova told how in 1946, when Matrona was living with her, there came a woman in a very high government position. Her only son had lost his mind and was in the Kashenko Psychiatric Hospital in Moscow, her husband had died on the front, and she was alone and an atheist. She had traveled with her son to hospitals in Europe, but even there, doctors weren’t able to help. “I have come to you out of despair,” she said, “I have nowhere else to go.” Matrona asked her, “If the Lord heals your son, will you believe in God?” The woman agreed. Then Matrona asked for water and in the presence of the unhappy mother began to pray loudly over it. Giving her the water, Matrona said, “Go now to Kasthenko and get the people there to hold your son tightly when they bring him out. He will fight, and you must try to splash this water on him, in his eyes and in his mouth.”

Zenaida recalled, “After some days, my brothers and I saw this woman return. She thanked Matrona on her knees, saying that her son was now healthy. She had gone to the hospital and when they brought him into the visiting hall, she quickly went around the barrier, the vial hidden in her hands. Her son drew back crying, ‘Mama, get rid of it! Get rid of what you have in your hands – don’t torture me!’ She was astonished – how could he know? She quickly splashed the water into his eyes and his mouth. He immediately calmed down, his eyes became clear, and he said, ‘How wonderful!’ Within a few days he was released.”

With those tortured by demonic attacks, Matrona often folded her hands on the sufferer’s head and said, “Oh my! Oh, will I clip your wings! Fight now, if you like!” “Who are you, anyway?” and suddenly there would be a buzzing sound in the person. Matushka would again ask, “Who are you?” and the buzzing would become louder. Then she would pray and say, “So, mosquito, did you fight? That’s enough for now!” And the person would leave healed.

Matrona told those close to her that she waged invisible war against sorcerers and other evil powers. Once, a dignified, pious-looking old bearded gentleman came to her, fell on his knees before her and said, “My only son is dying.” Matushka bowed over him and quietly asked, “What was the spell? To death or not?” He answered, “To death.” Matushka said, “Go away, it is useless to come to me.” After his departure she said, “Sorcerers do know God. If you could only pray the way they do when they beg forgiveness of God for their evil deeds!”

The Last Years

Militant atheism, the growth of estrangement and malice, the rejection of traditional faith by millions of people, and life without repentance led to heavy spiritual consequences. Matrona felt and understood this well. On the days when political demonstrations were held, Matrona urged everyone not to go outside, to close their windows and doors. Hordes of demons, she said, occupied the entire area, filling the air and troubling people. Perhaps, here, Blessed Matrona, who often spoke allegorically, wanted to remind those around her of the need to guard the ‘windows of the soul’ – as the Holy Fathers sometimes call the senses, from evil spirits.

Thinking of the years after the revolution, Zenaida Zhdanova once asked Matushka, “How can God allow so many churches to be closed and destroyed?” Matushka replied, “It is the will of God to reduce the number of churches because there will be few believers and no one to serve.” Later, she said, “The people are under hypnosis, they are not themselves, a terrible power has come into being...This power exists in the air and penetrates everything. In earlier times, swamps and impenetrable forests were the habitations of these forces because people were going to churches, they wore crosses and their homes were defended by icons, lampadas and blessings. Before, demons could only fly near these houses, but now they inhabit both houses and people because of unbelief and apostasy from God.

Matrona often repeated, “If people lose faith in God, then miseries will befall them. If they don’t repent, they will perish and vanish from the face of the earth. How many races have disappeared, but Russia will continue to exist. Pray, ask, repent! God won’t abandon you and He will save our homeland!”

Matrona also helped those whose married life wasn’t going well. Once a woman came to her and told her that her parents had married her to a man she didn’t love and that now they didn’t get along. Matrona answered her, “But who is guilty? You are guilty. This is because God is our head, and God carried man’s image and we women have to submit to man and you must preserve your marriage crown to the end of your life. You are guilty that you are not getting along together...” The woman listened and her family life improved.

Matrona said that the use of cosmetics was a sin. In using makeup a person spoils and disfigures their natural human image. Adding something that God didn’t grant creates a false beauty.

Concerning young women who came to faith in God, Matrona said, “To you, virgins, God forgives everything, if you will be faithful to God. Whoever decides not to get married, the same must endure to the end. For this, the Lord will grant a crown.”

“Matushka Matrona fought her whole life for every single soul that came to her,” Zenaida recalled, “and she was victorious. She never complained about the difficulties of her *podvig*. I saw how difficult it was for her, how she felt pain for each one of us. The light from those days warms me even now. There were lamps glowing before the icons in our home; Matushka’s love and silence enveloped the soul. There was holiness, joy, peace and a blessed warmth in the house. The war was going on, but we lived as if in heaven.”

How did those close to Matrona describe her? She had small arms and legs, short like a child’s, and always sat on the bed or the chest, her legs folded under her. She had soft hair, parted down the middle. Her eyelids were tightly shut, but her face was kind and light. She had a gentle voice. She comforted and calmed the sick, caressed their heads and blessed them with the sign of the Cross. Sometimes she would make a joke, sometimes denounce and admonish. She was not strict, she was very patient with human weakness: compassionate, warm, sympathetic, always joyful, never complaining of her own pain and suffering. Matushka didn’t give sermons, she didn’t play the role of a teacher. She gave concrete advice on how to deal with this or that situation, and always prayed and blessed. In general she was not talkative; her answers were brief.



Churches of the Holy Resurrection and Protection of the Mother of God, where St. Matrona’s relics are enshrined.

Matushka taught not to judge one's neighbor. She said, "Why judge other people? Think about yourself a little more often. Each lamb will be hung by its own tail. What are other tails to you?" Matrona taught to give oneself to the will of God, to live with prayer, and that one should often make the sign of the Cross on oneself and on nearby objects, to guard against evil powers. "Protect yourself with the sign of the Cross, prayer, holy water and frequent Holy Communion... keep a lamp burning in front of the icons."

She likewise taught to love and forgive the elderly and poor. "If an old person, someone sick or mentally ill, says something unpleasant or offensive to you, don't listen, but just help them. We have to help those who are sick with all our heart and to forgive them no matter what they say or do."

Matrona didn't permit people to attach importance to dreams. "Don't pay any attention to them, some dreams are from the evil one – they upset a person and entangle the thoughts."

She also cautioned against running after priests in search of 'elders' or 'clairvoyants.' In running about to various priests, she said, one can lose spiritual strength and the right course for one's life: "The world lies in evil and delusion. Delusion is a seductive spirit, so be careful. If you go to an elder or priest for advice, pray that the Lord will grant him wisdom to give you the right answer." She cautioned people not to be overly interested in priests and their personal lives, and advised those desiring Christian perfection to not stand out in their external appearance (black clothing for lay people, etc.). She told Zenaida Zhdanova, "Go to church and don't look at anyone, pray with closed eyes or look at an icon."

Matrona said: "The enemy is approaching – it is absolutely necessary to pray. Sudden death can occur if there is no prayer in your life. The enemy sits on our left shoulder, and on our right, an angel, and everyone has their own book: good deeds. Cross yourself often! It is like a lock on a door!" She entreated Christians not to forget to make the sign of the Cross over one's food. "The power of the honorable and life-giving Cross saves and protects!"

To those close to her, Matushka said, "I feel so sorry for you, you will live to the last times. Life will be worse and worse. It will be very heavy. There will be a time when they will put before you a cross and bread and say: Choose!" Those who were close to her answered, "We will choose the Cross, but how will we be able to live then?" She replied, "We will pray, take earth, make little balls out of it. We will pray to God, we will eat and be satisfied!" But she also said that those in difficult situations should not be afraid of

anything, no matter how terrifying. "They take children in a sled, and there are no worries! The Lord Himself governs everything!"

The last earthly refuge Matrona found was at #23 Kurganaya Street in the small village of Skhodnya, a train stop close to Moscow, where she lived with distant relatives when she had to leave the room in Starokonyoushensky Lane. Here people came to her in droves, with their sorrows. Only at the end, when Matrona was already very weak, did she limit the number of people she received. People came anyway, and she couldn't refuse to help some of them. It is said that the time of her death was revealed to her by God three days beforehand, and she gave all the necessary instructions, asking to have her funeral service in the Church of the Deposition of the Robe on Donskaya Street, where Fr. Nikolai Golubstov served. She also asked that people not bring plastic flowers and wreaths to her funeral.

Until the end, she frequently had confession and Holy Communion. She was very humble and like ordinary sinful people, she was afraid of death and did not hide her fear from those who were close to her. Before she died, Fr. Dmitri, from the church on Krasnaya Presnaya Street, came to her. She was very worried whether or not she folded her hands correctly. Fr. Dmitri asked her, "Is it possible that even you are afraid of death?" "Yes, I am afraid," she replied.

She reposed on April 19/May 2, 1952. On May 3, a pannikhida was served in Holy Trinity-St. Sergius Lavra and the name of newly reposed Matrona was given in. From among the multitude of names, this particular note attracted the attention of the serving hieromonk. "Who gave this note," he asked suddenly, "What, did she die?" An old woman and her daughter who had come from Moscow confirmed that Matrona had reposed the previous day, and that her coffin would be in the church on Donskaya Street that very night. Thus, the monks of the Lavra learned of Matrona's death and were able to come for her funeral. After the funeral, everyone present came up to kiss her hands.

The burial of Blessed Matrona took place on May 4, the Sunday of the Myrrh-Bearing Women, in the presence of many people. As she desired, she was buried in Danilov Cemetery, in order, as she put it, to be able to "hear the service." (This was near one of the few open churches in Moscow.) Matrona's funeral and burial were the beginning of her glorification as a God-pleaser.

"After my death," she predicted, "only a few people will come to my grave, only those who were close to me. When they die, my grave will stand forlorn,

rarely will anyone come, but after many years people will learn about me and crowds will come for help in their sorrow, asking me to pray to Our Lord God, and I will hear and help everyone.”

Before her death, Matrona said, “Everyone, everyone, come and speak to me as someone living about your sorrows, and I will see you and hear you, and help you...Everyone who appeals to me for help, I will meet at their death. Everyone.”

More than thirty years after Matrona’s repose, her grave at Danilov Cemetery became one of the holy places of Orthodox Moscow where people from every corner of Russia and abroad come with their sorrows and sicknesses. On March 8, 1998, her relics were translated to the Monastery of the Protection of the Mother of God at Taganskaya, where they are enshrined today. She was canonized by the Russian Orthodox Church, with Patriarch Alexis II presiding on May 2, 1999. Her feast-day is celebrated on April 19/May 2.

Blessed Matrona was Orthodox in the deep traditional meaning of the word. Her loving compassion for people and her fidelity to the Holy Orthodox Church was the focus of her spiritual life. Her ascetic labor stemmed from the root of centuries of traditional piety, and this is precisely what happens to those who appeal to her for help: they are confirmed in Orthodoxy and a daily life of prayer.

Hundreds of thousands of Orthodox people know of Matrona, or ‘Matronushka’ as many Russians lovingly call her. Everyone who asks for her protection and intercession before God with faith and love feels that she helps now, just as she did in her earthly life.

“Blessed Matrona, you who have great boldness before God, pray for us sinners!” ✦



Monastery of the Protection of the Mother of God.