



A JOURNAL OF ORTHODOX FAITH AND CULTURE

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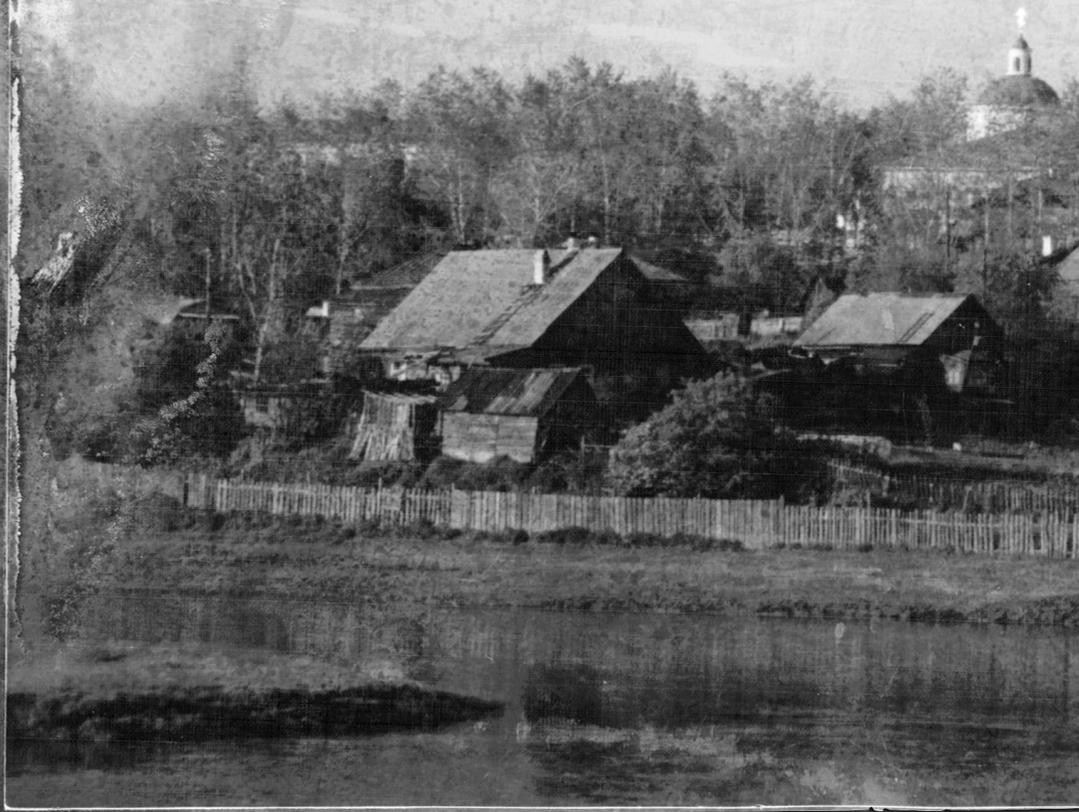
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ORTHODOXY

Remembering

by Mother

A pilgrimage account of the town of Verkhoturys on the Tura River high in Russia's majestic forests, has been a pilgrimage destination for centuries, with the third

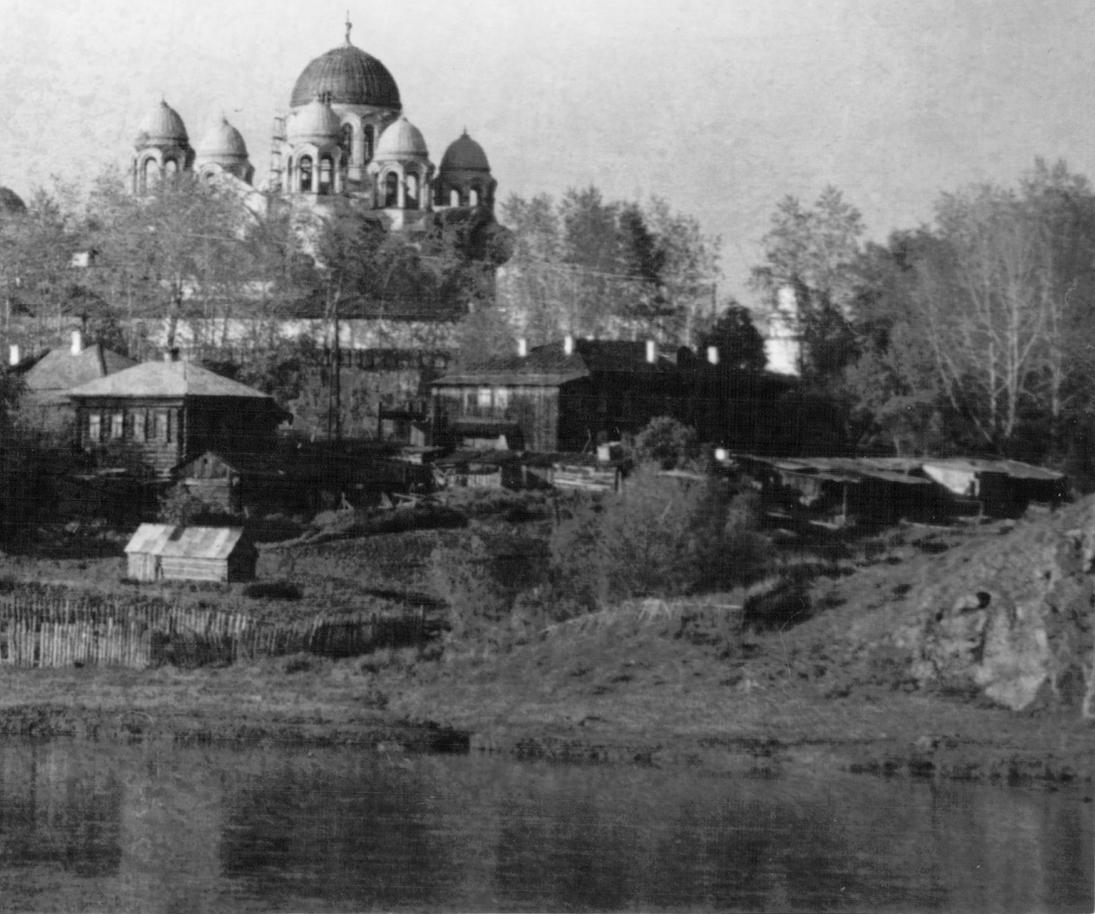


IN THE URALS

Verkhoturys

Nectaria McLees

Ural Mountains, shortly after the fall of Communism. The pristine town, surrounded by largest church in Russia and the relics of St. Simeon, Siberia's most beloved saint.



On a 1994 summer pilgrimage through Siberia, Natasha Kareva, an artist friend, and I took a midnight train from Ekaterinburg to Verkhoturye, an eight-hour ride to the far north. Leaving the sweltering, noisy city, we quickly fell asleep and awoke the next morning in the midst of a cool fog-shrouded pine forest high in the Urals. After weeks of birch-covered plains and intense summer heat, this seemed like a dream, especially when we climbed down from the train and found a local bus at the station ready to take passengers the twenty kilometers to Verkhoturye – a welcome connection in an area so vast that one can wait for remote train and bus connections for days. After a long ride over a badly rutted dirt road, we were let off across the street from St. Nicholas Monastery, where the relics of St. Simeon of Verkhoturye rest.

Saint Nicholas Monastery was founded in 1598 by a Hieromonk Jonah, two years after the Russians expanded eastward into Siberia to found military outposts in Verkhoturye, Tiumen, and Tobolsk. The original church was dedicated to St. Nicholas the Wonder-worker, and in 1907, with the help of private funds from Tsar Nicholas II, the monastery built a second church dedicated to the Elevation of the Holy Cross, in memory of 300 years of rule by the Romanov Dynasty. It was the third largest church in Russia after Christ the Saviour Cathedral in Moscow¹ and St. Isaac's Cathedral in St. Petersburg, and the presence of St. Simeon's relics made the monastery the most popular pre-revolutionary pilgrimage site in Siberia.

Natasha and I had a letter of introduction to the abbot of the monastery, Fr. Tikhon, but we arrived to find the abbot in Greece, and were welcomed instead by Hieromonk Benjamin, who greeted us warmly, offered us hospitality in the monastery guest house, and spent hours with us pouring through the monastery's turn-of-the-century archives and photo albums. Before the Russian Revolution there were fifteen fully professed monks in *mantia*, while the entire brotherhood, including novices, riassaphore monks, and lay workers, numbered two hundred. The number of pre-revolutionary Siberian pilgrims was even greater: one September feastday of the translation of St. Simeon's relics brought 25,000 pilgrims to the monastery, a testimony to the love that early twentieth-century Christians of this immense but sparsely populated territory had for their saint.

¹ Christ the Saviour Cathedral was blown up in the 1930s by the Soviet regime. The consecrated ground was turned into a municipal swimming pool, and the church's desecrated marble hauled away to decorate underground subway stations. After the fall of Communism, the church was rebuilt and reconsecrated on the Feast of the Transfiguration, 2000.

One old woman we met near Ekaterinburg had told us she remembered walking the 350 km (200 miles) from the village of Borovaya to Verkhoturys to venerate St. Simeon's relics in the 1920s. She was eight years old and she and her mother slept along the way in farmers' houses and open fields. This was not uncommon, and Siberian pilgrims would arrive at Verkhoturys after weeks or even months on the road.

Saint Simeon of Verkhoturys

Saint Simeon, whose relics lie today in St. Nicholas Church, is thought to have been from a well-to-do Moscow family, who came to Siberia with the Russian army. Settling in the nearby village of Merkushina, Simeon spent summers as a fisherman on the Tura river, while during the long Siberian winters he worked as a tailor. He was loved and respected by his neighbors, many of whom were first-generation converts to Christianity. Little else is known about his life except that he died at age 35 in 1642. Unlike many saints who were widely venerated in their lifetime and quickly canonized after their deaths, St. Simeon was buried as a pious Orthodox believer and was soon forgotten. On Dec. 18, 1694 (OS), however, his coffin seemingly rose up out of the ground. Whether this was an unexplained geological shift or through the providence of God, the uncovering of his relics started an avalanche of miracles that have continued to our own time. In 1704, St. Simeon's relics were translated from Merkushina to St. Nicholas Monastery, and the Russian Orthodox Church celebrates two feast days for him: Dec. 18/31 and Sept. 12/25, the translation of his relics.

One of the most striking things to an American or European convert to Orthodoxy, who may have few opportunities to venerate Orthodox saints



Icon of St. Simeon of Verkhoturys.



Interior of St. Nicholas Church, with pilgrims venerating relics of St. Simeon of Verkhotur'ye.



in his homeland, is the living presence of a saint when you stand before his relics. Each has his or her own personality, but all are illumined by the same heavenly grace. Converts without the opportunity to go on pilgrimage can still read the *Lives* of these saints, and in authentic accounts, as in a well-painted icon, one can sense the holiness that makes the saint, not part of a vast anonymous heavenly choir, but a distinct soul, illumined and glorified in a way impossible on earth.

Venerating St. Simeon is such an experience. While the relics of monastic saints breathe the fine, clear air of asceticism, martyrs share in the passion of Christ, holy hierarchs embody the dignity and majesty of the Church, and spiritual elders seem to overflow with compassion and understanding, St. Simeon is none of these. The gift of his presence is that he radiates joy, the joy of a simple man who gave himself to God with a loving heart, an offering magnified a hundred-fold in heaven. As you kneel at his reliquary, there is no temptation to conjure up pious images about his life, for the sense of being with a favorite brother or uncle is so immediate that it reveals both the closeness of heaven and one's own soul. It is this quality that sometimes leads pilgrims to return home changed; the heavenly grace that flows through relics allows us to both love and venerate the saints and to see ourselves with unusual clarity.

One well-known story about St. Simeon's intercession occurred at the beginning of the twentieth century, when an alcoholic priest who had vowed many times to quit drinking, came on pilgrimage to the monastery. After the evening services, he threw himself on his knees, begging the saint's help. As he prayed, St. Simeon appeared before him and asked what kind of surety he could give that he would reform if he prayed for him. The priest looked about frantically and, seeing a large icon crucifix of the Lord, said, "His Cross is my surety, He will cover me." St. Simeon, seeing his faith, nodded and disappeared. The priest never drank again.

Also present in the St. Nicholas Church are the relics of Blessed Kosmas, a crippled Fool-for-Christ, who, when St. Simeon's relics were transferred to Verkhoturye in 1704, followed the entire distance behind the procession on his hands and knees. Other heavenly protectors include: Schemamonk Ilia, an elder from Valaam who came to the Verkhoturye monastery at the end of the 19th-century, and then disappeared deep into the surrounding forest to live as a hermit; Archimandrite Arefa, an unknown saint recently found on

a list in an old Siberian *menaion* of saints; Blessed John, a Fool-for-Christ, who lived at about the same time as Blessed Kosmas, and was influenced by him; and Hieroschemamonk Ioann, the only Verkhoturysk monk who survived the Soviet gulag, dying in 1961.

Also included in this number is Archimandrite Xenophant, the last abbot before St. Nicholas Monastery was closed in 1925. His heroic attempts to save the monastery resulted in repeated arrests, and though he worked for a few years in Perm's diocesan consistory, in 1931 he was sent to an infamous death camp on the White Sea, where he perished along with thousands of other prisoners building the White Sea Canal.

Archimandrite Xenophant himself was close to the faithful family of Royal New-Martyrs who lovingly patronized the monastery: Tsar Nicholas II, Tsaritsa Alexandra Feodorovna, and their children. The royal family was perhaps first introduced to the veneration of St. Simeon of Verkhoturysk by Grigory Rasputin, who in 1892 had been a lay pilgrim and worker at the monastery, and was healed by the saint of torturous insomnia. Subsequently, Tsar Nicholas financed much of the construction of the new Elevation of the Holy Cross Cathedral with his private funds and gave money for a silver canopy over St. Simeon's relics, which was embedded with enameled icons of the royal family's patron saints. Empress Alexandra and her daughters, Grand-Duchesses Olga, Tatiana, Maria, and Anastasia, sewed an ornate *plashonitsa*, a cloth shroud embroidered with exquisitely detailed icons, to cover the relics of St. Simeon.

In the monastery's archives are numerous telegrams sent by the royal family to Archimandrite Xenophant on the monastery feast-days. The majority are from Tsar Nicholas II, Grand-Duchess Tatiana, Grand-Duchess Marie, and Grand-Duchess Anastasia (who wrote over and over of her longing to visit). It is obvious from the telegrams that the family was devoted to St. Simeon, and in one message they relate the dedication of a new chapel to him at their summer palace in the Crimea. It is likely that their love for the saint was bound up with the prayers they poured out on behalf of Tsarevich Alexis during his near-fatal episodes of hemophilia.

In an extant note, now in the Moscow State Archives and dated February 28, 1916, nineteen-year-old Grand Duchess Tatiana mentions St. Simeon to her ill mother, who was afflicted with painful facial neuralgia:



Cathedral of the Elevation of the Holy Cross, before renovation, 1994.



Mama darling,

Don't you want to try and put this bit of wadding on the little place on your cheek? Olga got it from our friend and gave to me when I had such headaches. It lay on the grave of St. Simeon Verkhoutures. Try if it will help you. If not, give it back to me tomorrow. I hope God will help you and that you will stay well.

God bless you. 1000 kisses from your own child,

Tatiana

When St. Nicholas Monastery was closed in 1925, the monks and novices were arrested and sent to labor camps; only one returned. The monastery reopened just three years ago in 1991 and the brotherhood now numbers twenty-seven, with five men tonsured into the mantia. Many of the lay-workers are aspiring monks, fulfilling a trial period as *poslushniki* before they are clothed as novices.

While St. Nicholas Church has been beautifully restored, and the brothers' quarters, trapeza and pilgrim's guest house are modestly livable, the large Cathedral of the Elevation of the Holy Cross stands in the midst of the monastery as an immense, empty shell. Vandalized by local Soviets, the altar was ripped out and frescos torn from the walls. For several decades the church was used as a movie theater. The only sign that this was once a magnificent temple is a half-fresco of the crucifixion in an apse high above the altar that was inaccessible to vandals because of its immense height. The monks tell us that when they first arrived, even walking into the ruins was overwhelming; the destruction is so complete that it is difficult to contemplate what it might take to restore it.

Across from the faded fresco of the crucifixion are two large arches, upon which one can make out the faint outline of painted ornamental crosses, intertwined with flowers. Even if the funds are found for the restoration, the immensely high arches and frescoes are so inaccessible that they can only be reached by constructing a mammoth framework of scaffolding. They are inaccessible, that is, to everything except God's grace, for over the past year the faint halo over the Lord's bowed head on the crucifix high up in the apse has become steadily brighter. As we gaze at it, it looks as if it has been newly

gold-leafed. The ornamental crosses on the gray ruined arches, which are even higher, have also renewed themselves, each one brighter and brighter until they now appear as little beacons of hope in the midst of the cavernous desolation.

The dormitory for women who work on the monastery grounds looks directly onto the ruined cathedral and some of the women who live here tell Natasha and me that, several times late at night over the past year, they have seen a ball of light hovering over the roof where the altar once stood. One night, several of the women ran quickly to the church with flashlights, but inside, there was nothing.

One of these women, Tatiana, takes care of the women's guest house for the monastery. Tatiana is in her forties and lives here with her teenage daughter and nine year-old-son. Several years ago she became ill with a dangerous and painful sinus infection which doctors could not cure. They decided that she needed emergency surgery to relieve the infection and she was admitted to the hospital. Terribly frightened, Tatiana begged St. Simeon to pray to God to heal her and promised that if healed, she would live the rest of her life like a nun. The next morning she awoke perfectly healthy, with no sign of infection, and left the hospital with the doctors baffled. A few weeks later, she moved into the monastery at Verkhoturys with her children, where she lives as a lay-worker to fulfill her promise.

It is not uncommon to find such women living and working in the larger men's and women's monasteries in Russia. Many times they are devout single mothers who have no other way to provide for their families, or elderly women who simply want to live for God. They often care for the church, garden, do laundry, cook, sew, paint icons, care for the farm animals, work in the fields, or act as hostesses for the women pilgrims in exchange for room and board. Some of the old monasteries such as Optina, Valaam, and Verkhoturys are as large as small villages. Built to hold hundreds of monks and lay-workers, the present monks are simply not enough to handle the immense reconstruction, nor the hundreds of pilgrims that arrive every week. Lay-workers, both men and women, are essential to keep such huge places running even minimally, and since capital is in short supply, the monasteries raise as much of their own food as they can. The larger women's convents, such as St. Seraphim's Diveyevo, likewise employ male lay-workers who reside nearby.

Andre, a young lay iconographer at St. Nicholas monastery, attests to the recent intercession of St. Simeon. A few weeks before our arrival he had



*Renovated Church of the Elevation of the Cross, St. Nicholas Monastery,
Verkhoturys, 2015.*



fasted, read the prescribed prayers and had been given a blessing by the abbot to paint his first large icon of St. Simeon. A few days after beginning the icon, he went one afternoon to help reroof one of the monastery buildings. As he stood alone on the roof, he felt distinctly that he was pushed, and fell head-long off the two-story building. Badly bruised, but otherwise miraculously unharmed, Andre is convinced that the fall was a result of the malice of demons who do not want an icon of such a powerful saint, and that he was rescued through the intercession of St. Simeon. A few days later, a fourteen-foot tower of ceramic tile that was donated to the monastery earlier in the year and had stood solidly in place for months, suddenly toppled over on him without warning. Buried under the immense weight, again he should have been badly injured, but except for a few more bruises, he was unharmed.

After Andre told us his story, Natasha mentioned that I was writing about the monastery and the life of St. Simeon. He begged me to be careful, and I assured him that I would, thinking that he was perhaps a little imaginative. The next day, however, as I sat making notes on St. Simeon's life, Tatiana, the guest-house keeper, called me to have tea with her in the trapeza dining room. As I walked through the kitchen, a huge iron tea kettle sitting quite solidly on a hot plate well back on the counter, unaccountably tipped off the plate and drenched me with boiling water from my waist to my feet. Because I had on only a thin cotton dress, everyone in the kitchen cried out in horror, certain that I was horribly burnt. When the water hit me, however, it was the temperature of tepid bath water, although the water that splashed to the floor was still bubbling and steaming! Except for a small patch of slightly reddened skin, I was completely unharmed. The consensus of the women there was that it was impossible for the kettle to have fallen or for me to be unburnt, and that I'd been saved by a miracle.

Protection of the Mother of God Women's Monastery (Verkhoturye)

St. Nicholas is not the only monastery in Verkhoturye. There is also a second unrestored men's monastery and two associated convents: the "Old" Protection of the Mother of God Women's Monastery and, a few hundred meters away, the "New". Before the 1917 revolution, the "new" convent was famous throughout Siberia for the nuns' beautiful singing and their exquisite needlework.

On the third morning after our arrival we walked up the road to the recently reestablished “New” Protection Convent. The road from St. Nicholas leads to the monastery at the town center near a bend in the Tura river, whose lush green banks are spanned by a daunting log-and-cable suspension bridge. Along the way, we pass the ruins of the old Verkhoturys Kremlin, the original military outpost, rebuilt in 1896, and a beautiful but unrestored church dedicated to the Holy Trinity. At the time of the revolution, Verkhoturys had fourteen churches, all of which were desecrated or simply closed and left to fall to ruin.

When I remarked to a Verkhoturys resident that I was surprised that the beautiful brass crosses had been left on the cupolas of the Holy Trinity Church, he smiled and said that this had not been the intent of the anti-religious Soviet authority. Workers had been ordered to mount the cupolas and tear the crosses off of the church, but the largest one was too solidly affixed to remove, even with a block and tackle. One of the men then climbed down to a smaller cupola and began to beat at the base of a cross with his ax until it loosened. He wrenched at the cross with such great energy that when it finally broke free it struck him and he fell to his death. No one tried again.

Twenty minutes from St. Nicholas Monastery, we arrive at the convent on foot over a road lined with tall shady trees and winding streets of small wood-framed houses with lace curtains and beautiful pots of red geraniums. Our first glimpse is one of desolation – a small gutted Byzantine-style church that is nothing but a shell. Behind the church is a larger building where the nuns live, which is intact but in need of major restoration. As Natasha and I arrive, there is a group of villagers on the porch, and a nun distributing milk buckets, dishes, pots, and other household goods. The convent is coordinating a relief effort to help some two hundred families from a neighboring village whose homes were destroyed by fire a few days before.

Local village children, who have a great love for the sisters, congregate on the front porch along with the fire victims waiting for their supplies. One of the sisters tells us that when the fire broke out, people worked frantically to remove their possessions before the flames reached them. One old woman, however, when told she had to evacuate, asked, “But why? I don’t understand why everyone is running around. They don’t have to leave.” Taking an icon of the Mother of God, she circled her house three times, singing, and then went back indoors. The fire burnt everything within a kilometer’s radius except for her home, which now sits intact, surrounded by rubble.



Abbess Elizabeth, Holy Protection Convent, 1994.



Holy Protection Convent, beginning renovation, 1994.

Natasha and I wait awkwardly in the hall while one of the sisters goes off to find the abbess, until we are rescued by a young monastic in her early-thirties, who introduces herself simply as Elizabeth. Her modest friendliness marks her as a new novice and she offers to show us the sisters' temporary chapel on the second floor. As we follow her upstairs, I wonder, a little nervously, what the abbess will say when she finds us wandering about her monastery unannounced. However, Sister Elizabeth tells us about the church and convent with such warm-heartedness that neither Natasha nor I feel overly anxious about the impending abbatial encounter, which can be a formal, and even formidable, occasion. Elizabeth also seems to be in charge of the construction crew. As we stand talking, one of the sisters approaches to ask about remodeling. A few moments later, a workman appears in the doorway, addressing our novice as "Matushka Igumena" and Natasha and I engage in a spell of sign-language behind her back to register our mutual amazement at this warm, natural young woman being the abbess.

The little house church, the trapeza/kitchen and single guest-room are the only rooms in the convent that have been renovated. Tucked into a space in the back of the second floor, the church is a homey and endearing sight. We have arrived in time for the Pentecost vigil and the floor is strewn with fresh-cut grass and blossoms, the icons covered with pine branches and more flowers.

The great treasure of the monastery is an icon of the *Umilenie Mother of God of Tender Feeling*, a copy of the icon that St. Seraphim of Sarov cherished. It is about three feet high, and although the face and hands of the Mother of God are painted, her gown, rather than the usual silver riza, is hand-sewn in velvet and silk and decorated with hundreds of tiny seed pearls. Painted at the turn of the century, the icon was buried underground at the time of the monastery's forced closing in the early 1930s. When it was unearthed after thirty years of harsh Siberian winters, protected only by its glass frame, it was found to be in almost perfect condition, while the blanket covering it had almost completely decomposed. A few months ago, the grave belonging to the sister who had sewn the pearl-studded gown of the Theotokos needed to be moved when renovation began. Until they can prepare the new graveyard, Matushka Elizabeth has had the coffin brought into church where the sister rests near the icon she laboured over with such love.

The New Protection Convent was founded around 1900; the original, located a few blocks away, in 1800. The "new" convent was reopened three

years ago and the first abbess, Matushka Vasilisa arrived on St. Simeon's Day in September of 1991, but exactly two years later, again on St. Simeon's Day, she unexpectedly reposed. Sister Elizabeth, meanwhile, not knowing of the abbess's repose, was on her way from her monastery in Kazakhstan, also named for the Protection of the Mother of God², sent by her superiors to see if she would like to transfer to Verkhoturye.

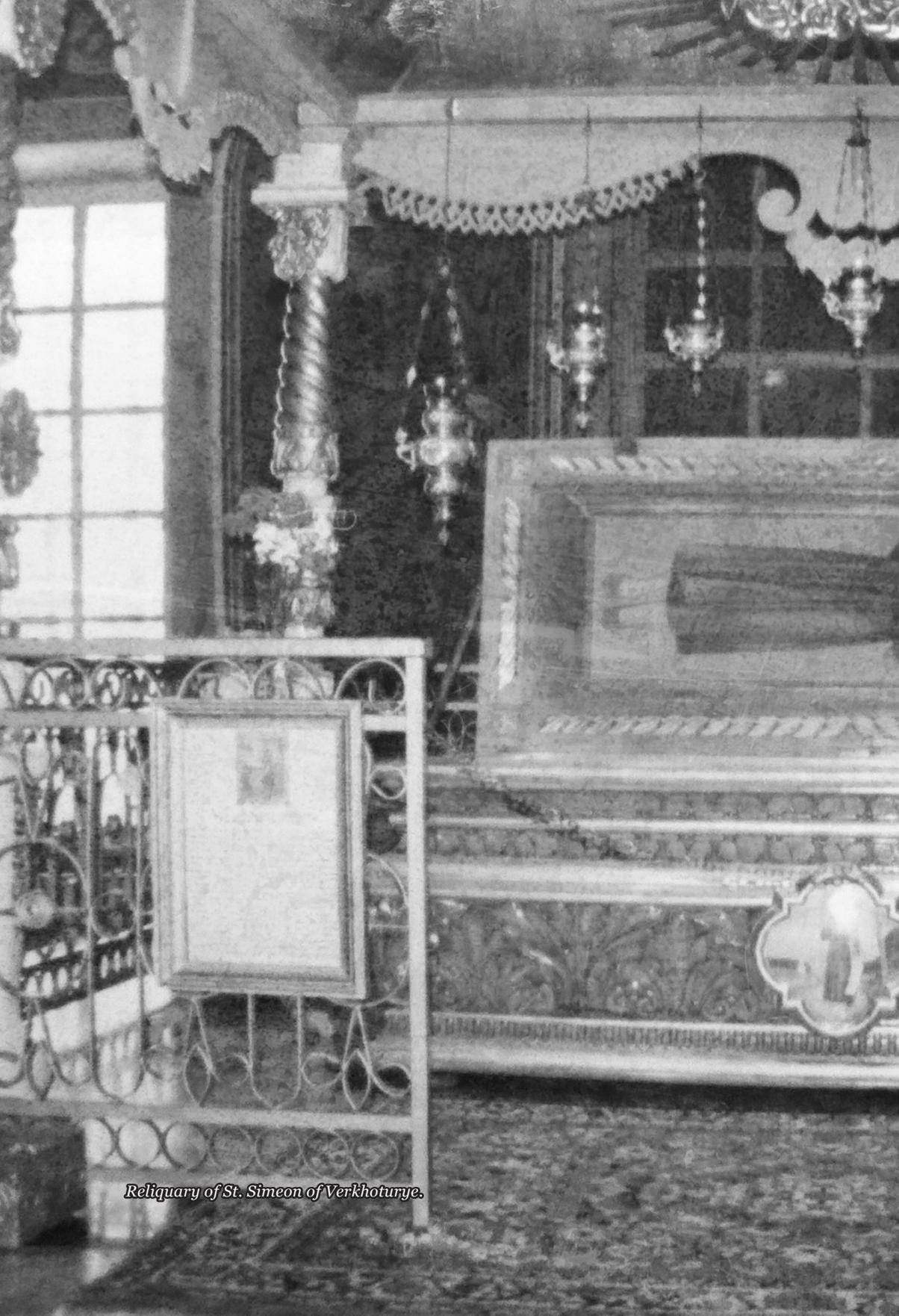
The Kazakhstan convent had already provided several sisters as a support for the newly reopened Verkhoturye monastery, and at the time of her arrival, Sister Elizabeth had already been a novice for seventeen years. She spent a few days at the convent, but was oppressed by the immense desolation and felt strongly that she did not want to stay. On her last day in Verkhoturye, she went to St. Nicholas Monastery to venerate the relics of St. Simeon, where she met Abbot Tikhon, who with his monks and Archbishop Melchisedek of Ekaterinburg, had been praying fervently to the Mother of God to reveal the new abbess. Watching her closely, Abbot Tikhon spoke to her for a while and then turned to Fr. Benjamin saying: "We've found our abbess." Sister Elizabeth, much surprised, told him that she was only a novice and was leaving for Kazakhstan that evening.

That night on the train, Sister Elizabeth had a dream in which she saw the Mother of God dressed as in the convent's *Umilenie* icon, but all in white, beckoning to her. Elizabeth kissed her hand and she awoke with an overwhelming sense of her presence. When she arrived in Kazakhstan, her abbess, who had been called by both the archbishop and Fr. Tikhon, told her that the choice was no longer hers, she was under obedience to return to Verkhoturye and become abbess.

Sister Elizabeth was stunned and dismayed by the news. That night as she prepared to leave again, she went to church one last time to pray before the monastery's icon of St. Simeon and to beg his help. As she stood up (and she says herself, "I am by nature very careful, and never knock things over,") the lampada hanging by a chain in front of the icon high above her head suddenly overturned and drenched her with oil from head to foot, as if she had been anointed.

She returned to Verkhoturye and spent her first night at the convent praying before the *Umilenie* icon. She finally cried herself to sleep on the floor,

² An interesting note about Sister Elizabeth's monastery of the Protection of the Mother of God in Kazakhstan is that in the 1960s the nuns' spiritual father was Elder Sebastian of Optina, a disciple of Elder Nektary of Optina. Elder Sebastian's spiritual son is Matushka Elizabeth's spiritual father.



Reliquary of St. Simeon of Verkhoturye.



but awoke in the morning with a strong impression that the Mother of God had lifted her sorrow and would support her in her formidable task. A few days later she was tonsured into the mantia with the name Elizabeth, after New Martyr Elizabeth Feodorovna, and anointed abbess, having been given a warm commendation by Patriarch Alexis, whom she had never met.

After the service, she went to her cell where Abbot Tikhon and Father Benjamin, the spiritual father for the convent, were waiting for her. As she entered, they were standing in the corner holding one of her personal icons; an unusual depiction of the Mother of God as an abbess, holding her hands out in blessing over a small white monastery. They asked Matushka Elizabeth where the icon had come from, and she replied that she didn't remember – probably it had been left behind in one of the first cells she had been given in Kazakhstan. They asked her if she knew what monastery the Mother of God was blessing, and when she said no, they told her that it was a very famous old monastery in Ekaterinburg, the seat of Matushka's new diocese.

When the "New" Protection Monastery was closed in the 1930s the nuns were scattered or exiled. Seven of them who stayed in the Verkhoturys area worked hard, and each managed to buy a house which they bequeathed to the monastery in their wills, hoping that someday their labors would be of benefit. Although limited now to the small yard that surrounds the house and the church, the monastery formerly owned all of the land down to the Tura River, and farmland further outside of town. When the church was desecrated, it was turned into a village *banya*, a bathhouse, the walls and ceiling eventually blackened from decades of smoke. When the nuns came to reclaim the church, which had been legally returned to the convent in 1991, some of the villagers refused to give up the banya and continued to use it for bathing. One night the nuns stood out in the road, physically blocking the entrance. They were cursed and a volley of stones was thrown at them, a few hitting their mark, but the nuns regained their church.

Matushka Elizabeth has told us several stories about the reconstruction of the church. Within a few weeks of being made abbess, she had an appointment with an architect to go over the plans for reconstruction. As they stood in the midst of the rubble, the architect explained the renovation that was needed and Matushka felt her heart sink at the enormity of the task. Finally, as they turned to consider the altar area, a pure white dove flew through the open door, circled slowly three times around the altar and out a window. They ran to the window, but the dove was gone.

When work on the church finally began, the first major job was to knock down the heavily cemented stone walls that had been put up inside to partition off the banya. One Orthodox workman told us that he came upon a particularly thick wall and in despair sighed, "Oh Lord, how?" He crossed himself and, as he leaned over to pick up his sledge hammer, he heard a cracking, rumbling sound. He looked up, and before his eyes the untouched wall tumbled down to the last stone.

One old neighbor, who lived next door as a child, has told Mother Elizabeth that before the monastery was closed there was a large frescoed icon of the Protection of the Mother of God on the outside wall of the church enclosing the altar. When the Bolsheviks turned the nuns out, they painted over the fresco, but within a few days it reappeared as fresh as before. They painted it again, and again it reappeared. They were not able to obliterate the fresco until they chipped it out of the wall, inch by inch.

There are now twenty-three tonsured nuns, novices, and pious lay-workers who live at the monastery and work for room and board. Under Matushka Elizabeth's guidance, the convent has a delightful family feeling that is not so common in Russian convents, which can be quite disciplined and institutional. There is one old nun left from the monastery from before its closing, who stayed in Verkhoturys all of her adult life, and in deep old age has now returned to the convent, where she is cared for by the sisters. ✦

Since 1994, the Verkhoturys monasteries have been steadily renovated, and are once again drawing monastics and pilgrims.