

Pilgrims Plant Cross on Mt. St. Herman

This year marked the second annual pilgrimage to Spruce Island, Alaska, in connection with the August 9 Feast of St. Herman the Wonder-worker. Services began in Kodiak on August 7 at Holy Resurrection Church. The church was full for the Mollieben and Akathist, which were officiated by the Rt. Rev. Gregory, Bishop of Sitka and Alaska, and the Rt. Rev. Herman, Bishop of Wilkes-Barre, in addition to the following priests: the V. Rev. Joseph Kreta, the V. Rev. Makary Targonsky, the Rev. Nicholas Harris, the Rev. Theodore Fryntzko and the Rev. Ishmael Gromoff. At the conclusion of the service, as the faithful approached the cross, St. John's Octet of Warren, Ohio, sang hymns from the All-Night Vigil Service of St. Herman. Also, the faithful had opportunity to venerate the relics, icon, cross and chains of the Venerable Patron of Orthodoxy in America.

At 7:30 a.m. on August 8, the pilgrims began to gather at Kodiak Dock for the boat ride to Spruce Island and Mt. St. Herman. The local Orthodox fishermen freely donated their time and their boats to this end. An hour later the four boats arrived at Spruce Island, landing on the banks of Monks' Lagoon. Although such warm and sunny weather had been rare this summer, the day was beautiful.

Bishops Gregory and Herman led the pilgrims to the various shrines of St. Herman and his two disciples. All followed the moss-covered path to the grave of the V. Rev. Archimandrite Gerasim (Schmaltz), where a memorial service was held, both bishops officiating. Until 1964 Archimandrite Gerasim had lived on Spruce Island and had cared for the saint's grave and SS. Sergius and Herman Chapel, which was the next stop for the pilgrims. Here Bishop Gregory and Fr. Ishmael served a Mollieben to St. Herman. It is under this chapel that the now-empty grave of St. Herman is located. The pilgrims visited St. Herman's grave, St. Herman's spring (the water of which is considered to be holy), and the hut of Vasily Paskoffsky, the present caretaker, who has already spent a number of years in solitude on the island. The local natives provided a sumptuous brunch in the open air. These natives are from the village of Ouzinkie, located on the island, and their special "piroshki" were most satisfying.

Begin Climb

The pilgrims then boarded their boats again and cast off for Pestrikoff Beach and the ascent to Mt. St. Herman. At this point

Archpriest Kreta asked those who were unsure of their stamina to wait at the foot of the mountain until the others returned. Having read once more the first part of the Akathist, however, the majority decided to give themselves over into the safekeeping of St. Herman, and the two-hour vertical ascent was begun. At the top of the mountain, the pilgrims erected a large, twenty-foot-high cross, now visible from the Pacific Ocean at the entrance to the gulf. Although the descent was even more difficult than the ascent, all agreed that the breathtakingly beautiful scenery and the deep sense of spiritual peace were well worth the effort. After a brief stop at Monks' Lagoon for holy water, the pilgrims returned to Kodiak.

By the time everyone had assembled at Holy Resurrection Church, it was 10:30 p.m. The local faithful had been patiently awaiting the pilgrims and clergy since 7:30. Because of the late hour, only Vespers with Litiya were served, followed with anointing by Bishop Gregory. By the time services were concluded it was nearly midnight, but the sisters of Holy Resurrection Church had graciously prepared a repast for all.

On August 9, the Feast of St. Herman, the flow of people for confession began at 7:30 a.m. By 9, confessions had been heard, and the vesting of the bishops had begun. Five priests concelebrated the Holy Eucharist with Bishops Gregory and Herman. Nearly everyone present received Holy Communion. Following services, a banquet took place in the church hall.

Girls' Octet Sings

Concluding the three-day festival, a concert was held in the local theatre by St. John's Octet, who sang a number of religious and secular pieces.

The tradition of pilgrimages is of venerable antiquity in the Orthodox Church. Yet, there is a basic difference between those pilgrimages of past years and pilgrimages today. In our day pilgrimages do not impose such deprivation and self-sacrifice as was the case in earlier times, and in the Old World. Today, the greater part of the pilgrimage may be completed in modern airplane, complete with all conveniences. If a pilgrimage to Spruce Island is planned far enough in advance, and as part of a regular summer vacation, there is no loss of working time or pay. And yet, despite all this, only half a dozen pilgrims came from the "Lower 48" this year to participate in the St. Herman Pilgrimage. We are sure



His Grace, Bishop Gregory and His Grace, Bishop Herman cross bay on first leg of journey to Mt. Herman.

that those who did come will treasure their memories of this spiritual pilgrimage for the rest of their days. With all the talk of the "spiritual vacuum" that seems to be enveloping our beloved nation, one can only pray that St. Herman will strengthen our intercessions before the Throne of Almighty God, that the Orthodox Faith, which offers the answers to man's deepest and most perplexing problems, may be firmly established in our land. To this end ought not we, who profess Orthodoxy, show our genuine commitment by means of spiritual pilgrimage? That Orthodox classic, "The Way of a Pilgrim," begins with these words: "By the grace of God I am a Christian man, by my actions a great sinner, and by calling a homeless wanderer of the humblest birth who roams from place to place. My worldly goods are a knapsack with some dried bread in it on my back, and in my breast-pocket a Bible. And that is all."

We have so much more. Or have we?



Akathist to St. Herman