

## On the Veneration of the Holy Relics and Remains of the Saints

by Archpriest Vasily Demidov

*"Behold we count them happy which endure..." (Js. 5:11).*

In the apostolic Church, all the remains of the "friends of God," the righteous strugglers (I Cor. 9:25), were referred to as relics—bones, heads, hair, hands, feet, and sometimes entire bodies, if they were preserved, through which the Lord God is glorified by mysterious wonders. The Protestant Lutherans and all sectarians reject the veneration of the holy remains of Christian strugglers, and, like the heretics of times past, laugh at this pious custom and scoff at Orthodox Christians who call upon the friends of God in their prayers to Him. The sectarians, without any serious proof, maintain that it is nowhere proclaimed in the Bible that we should honor the friends of God (Jn. 15:14), to reverence the remains of the holy martyrs and ascetics, and to glorify in sacred hymns those who have suffered for Christ, shedding their blood.

Of course, the question of the veneration and glorification of the holy martyrs, and the ascetics that served Christ during their life without the shedding of their blood, touches upon a number of beliefs—the impious reject them all. They do not believe in God, they do not acknowledge the immortality of the soul, they reject even man's conscience and feeling of shame and accept only material things, disregarding the spiritual realm. The communists blaspheme, making a mockery of the relics of the holy ascetics; but for believers, relics are objects of great veneration, and this is why, from the days of the apostles, Christians have reverently honored both the martyrs themselves and all the "friends of God"—the ascetics, and their bones, as well as all their remains.

Christians are convinced and deeply believe that the "friends of God" who have come out of great tribulation and have made their robes white in the Blood of the Lamb, abide now before the throne of God and serve Him day and night in His temple (Rev. 7:14-15). Christians turn with prayer to God and believe in the power of the prayerful intercession of the Saints before Him, for they have that One Intercessor with the Blood—Jesus Christ—and a multitude of intercessors in prayer (II Cor. 1:11). Only ignorant and thoughtless people can reject that which is mystical in the Christian religion. Religion itself—i.e., the bond between the human soul and the everlasting Spirit of God—is the greatest mystery. All of human life is surrounded by mystical and incomprehensible phenomena. The birth and death of man constitute a great marvel, for people know not whence they come and whither they go. "For who hath known the mind of the Lord?" asks the apostle. "How unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past finding out!" (Rom. 9:33-34). Yet, the Righteous Job of the Old Testament pointed out mysterious phenomena incomprehensible to many, saying: "The Mighty One...hath done great things which we knew not" (Job 37:5).

The Lord God works in the world in various ways. "in wisdom hath He made them all" (Ps. 103:24). Of all His creations on the earth, the Lord considered man alone worthy of great gifts, investing in him something divine which is called the conscience. He gave him the gift of speech, the feeling of shame, regret, sympathy, pity, reverence and worship for the Most High. Possessing the divine spark in his soul, man, enlightened by faith in Christ, already glorifies God, showing himself in his bodily form to be a

temple of the Holy Spirit. "Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, which is in you, which ye have of God?" (I Cor. 6:19).

Christ Himself attests that He lives in His friends: "I in them and Thou in me" (Jn. 17:23). "If a man serve me, him will My Father honor" (Jn. 12:26). "And the glory which Thou gavest Me I have given them" (Jn. 17:22). "I am glorified in them" (Jn. 17:10). The Church of the apostles does not deify inanimate objects; it does not honor the Saints for any sort of divinity; it does not render to anyone any form of worship; being instructed by the word of the Scriptures, it humbly offers worship to the One Almighty God, deeply, with child-like simplicity, believing that the holy relics are divinely-chosen instruments of the power of God and His might. In the holy relics the power of God is shown forth.

### **MAN WAS CREATED FOR INCORRUPTION**

"God made not death: neither hath He pleasure in the destruction of the living" (Wisdom 1:13). "God created man for incorruption and made him to be an image of His own eternity" (Wisdom 2:23). Corruption appeared after the fall. "Through the hatred of the devil death entered the world" (Wisdom 2:24). "Righteousness is immortal, but injustice causeth death" (Wisdom 1:15). "For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord (Rom. 6:23). As a result of the fall, the fate of man was altered. After death, his dust returned to the earth from which it had been taken, and his spirit returned to God Who had bestowed it (Eccl. 12:7). Therefore, the bodies of all men, both righteous and sinful, are interred in the earth. But the bodies of certain "friends of God," in accordance with His will, escape the universal corruption and remain, at times whole, at times partially intact. Death is the common rule for all that live. However, the words of the Bible point out to us the exceptions to this law. Enoch and Elias, born on earth and subject to the common law of death, did not die; but having conquered the law of death, they were transported to the Kingdom of Heaven while yet in the body. The accounts of their translation and present state are recorded in Genesis 5:4 and III Kings 2. In the course of so great a time these righteous men have remained in that degree of growth in which they were taken up, in accordance with the special Providence of God. They have teeth, a stomach, reproductive members, even though they have no need of food or wives.

Who can comprehend or explain this mystery? The kingdom of death, the dominion of the Queen of terrors, was overcome by the Resurrection of Jesus Christ, the firstfruits from among the dead. And "if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature" (II Cor. 5:17) and incorruption is given unto him. "Be not thou therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord... Jesus Christ, Who hath abolished death and hath brought life and immortality to light through the Gospel" (II Tim. 1:8, 10).

At the Resurrection of Christ "many bodies of the Saints which slept arose, and came out of the graves after His Resurrection, and went into the holy city, and appeared unto many" (Mt. 7:52). Tradition bears witness that several of these resurrected Saints survived until the beginning of the second century and were known amongst the Christian societies as living witnesses to the Resurrection of Christ. Those who deny God and who reduce everything to matter are in no position to understand the miracles of the Gospel. The majority of Protestants do not believe in the Resurrection of Christ and deny His divine nature.

Concerning St. John the Theologian, the beloved disciple of Christ, the following mysterious words are recorded in the Gospel: "if I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? Then went his speech abroad among the brethren, that the disciple should not die" (Jn. 21:22). From the life of St. John the Theologian Christians know the wondrous account of his repose. It is known that, exiled to the island of Patmos "for the word of God and witnessing concerning Jesus," he wrote his final book, the "Revelation" or "Apocalypse," in which, under signs and symbols, he described the coming Judgment of the Church of Christ. According to the account of his life, he himself asked to be interred alive; but afterwards his disciples were unable to find his body in the grave. One may suppose that the mysterious statement of the Savior had indeed come to pass: John did not die, but according to the Church's belief, was translated like Enoch and Elias to a place beyond our knowledge, and will be preserved until the last days. In the lives of the Saints compiled by Metropolitan Makary, in the reading for the day commemorating the repose of St. John the Theologian, following the account of his supposed death, we read: "And John the Theologian walketh amongst us, and no one knoweth him."

The ancient apostolic Church of the first centuries of Christianity, in the person of its best instructors and interpreters of the sacred text of the Bible (Sts. John Chrysostom, Ephraim the Syrian, et al.) concerning the two prophets Enoch and Elias, saw them to be the two "witnesses" of whom the Book of the Revelation of St. John the Theologian says: "And I will give power unto My two witnesses, and they shall prophesy... clothed in sackcloth. These are the two olive trees, and the two candlesticks standing before the God of the earth. And when they shall have finished their testimony, the beast that ascendeth out of the bottomless pit shall make war against them, and shall overcome them, and kill them. And their dead bodies shall lie in the street of the great city, which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt, where also our Lord was crucified" (Rev. 11:3-4, 7-8). Further on, St. John refers to them plainly as "prophets" (v. 10, "two prophets") who later will be brought back to life, will stand up and, at the command of God, ascend to Heaven on clouds (v. 12). These prophets will be sent in the last days as "assistors of human weakness" in the battle with the forces of antichrist (St. Theodore the Studite, pt. 1, p. 236), and will be slain on the streets of the great city of Jerusalem.

Before our very eyes, the nation of Israel has risen again, and the city of Jerusalem has been made the capital of that land. For those that do not close their eyes to the events occurring in the world, it is quite plain that much foretold by "holy men of God,... moved by the Holy Spirit" (II Pet. 1:21), has clearly been fulfilled and is still being fulfilled:

- 1) *The general, world-wide falling-away from faith in God predicted by St. Paul has already come to pass, and at present the battle of faith with unbelief attains ever greater dimensions (I Thess. 2:3);*
- 2) *the spirit of antichrist reigns throughout nearly all the world;*
- 3) *the persecution of Christians is an incontestible fact;*
- 4) *the restoration of the nation of Israel has taken place in our times.*

Thus, a portion of what is foretold in the Holy Scriptures has already taken place and is accomplished. A universal tragedy is unraveled in the scriptural revelation. There remains but to await the fulfillment of the second portion of the prophecy: the appearance of Enoch and Elias the two prophets, witnesses and

denouncers of the deception of antichrist, their deaths, resurrection, and later, the Second Coming of Christ to judge mankind. "That all this must be, one ought to believe," says Augustine of Hippo, "but in what manner and in what order it shall be, it is better to leave to the actual experience of the events themselves: at present, human understanding is in no position to attain to full comprehension [thereof]." The terrible events of future world history will show how correct were those that, inspired from on high, foretold these manifestations. Among the last of the harbingers of this unfolding tragedy we can point out the poet and philosopher Vladimir S. Soloviev who, before his death, wrote the terrifying "Tale of Antichrist," a composition unique in Russian literature for its tragic character.

## **THE LORD PERFORMED MIRACLES THROUGH TANGIBLE OBJECTS**

*"And they besought Him that they might touch, if it were, but the border of His garment; and as many as touched Him were made whole" (Mk. 6:56).*

*"And a certain woman, who had an issue of blood twelve years when she had heard of Jesus, came in the crowd behind, and touched His garment. For she said, 'If I may touch but His clothes, I shall be whole.' And straightway the fountain of her blood was dried up; and she felt in her body that she was healed of that plague. And Jesus immediately knowing in Himself that power had gone out of Him, turned about in the crowd, and said, 'Who hath touched My clothes?'" (Mk. 5:25-30). The woman believed deeply in the Wonderworker, and received healing according to her faith, for, in the words of the Scriptures, faith can move mountains (cf. Mt. 17:20, Mk. 11:23).*

The Holy Scriptures show us that Christ our Savior Himself was not unique in the performing of inexplicable, miraculous healings, but gave such power to His apostles as well and, after them, to their successors—the Christian ascetics.

It is not man who, by his own power and might, performs great deeds, but Almighty God, Who is wondrous in His Saints, "And God wrought special miracles by the hands of Paul, so that from his body were brought unto the sick handkerchiefs or aprons, and the diseases departed from them, and the evil spirits went out of them" (Acts 19:11-12).

And it was not only through tangible objects such as the garments of Christ, or the kerchiefs and aprons of Paul that alleviation of pain and complete healing was bestowed upon them that believed, but even the shadow of the Apostle Peter worked healings. "And believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women, insomuch that they brought forth the sick into the streets, and laid them on beds and couches, that at least the shadow of Peter passing by might overshadow some of them ... and they were healed every one" (Acts 5:14-16).

Many regard with perplexity the Gospel account of the healing of the man born blind, and they ask: Why did Christ employ this outlandish method of healing? He spat on the ground and made some mud with His spittle, and with this He anointed the eyes of the blind man and said: "Go, wash in the Pool of Siloam... He went his way, therefore, and washed, and came seeing" (cf. St. John 9:1-7). Christ utilized clay and washing in the pool as the media of the spiritual gifts bestowed upon the man born blind, and in such a manner, through tangible things—clay and water—granted him healing. If the Savior and

Wonderworker acted thus, it means that He deemed this method necessary, and no one can question or object, asking why He acted thus. "Who art thou that repliest against God?" (Rom. 9:20).

Why were these mystical and inexplicable events necessary for the infant Christian Church? What purpose did the apostles pursue by using kerchiefs and aprons when they performed miraculous signs? What of Peter's shadow? Would it not have been sufficient to utter a single sermon about Jesus Christ, His teaching, miracles and Resurrection? Why did the apostles consider special signs, outside the realm of ordinary life, necessary for the bestowal of healing upon those that suffered from bodily infirmities? The Holy Scriptures explain what the Lord's purpose was in granting these signs and miracles. St. Luke, the author of the Book of Acts, presents such an explanation in this grace-bearing passage: "The Lord ... gave testimony unto the word of His grace, and granted signs and wonders to be done by their hands" (Acts 14:3). The Church of Christ was then only in its infancy. Christians were surrounded by ravenous wolves, like a flock of meek sheep. To destroy this little community would not have been a great task. However, it was in God's plan to convert the hard-hearted Jews to faith in Him Who was crucified and rose again, and through them, as with a tool, to plant the Church throughout the whole world, giving her the promise that "the gates of hell shall not prevail against it... even unto the end of the ages" (Mt. 16:18; 28:20). In order to draw the hearts of stiff-necked Israel to the faith in the confirmation of the "word of grace"—the preaching of the apostles, -the Lord gave signs of healing and miracles which flowed forth abundantly upon the faithful who received manifold gifts of the Holy Spirit. If the Spirit will abide eternally in the Church of Christ as the Savior has promised (Jn. 14:16), the abundance of His gifts, poured forth in miracles and signs, shall be forever, even until the end of his age. The beginning of the Church of Christ shall be in accord with her end.

As in the first, apostolic community many miracles were observed, so shall it be at Christ's Second Coming. The holy king and Psalmist states prophetically: "Many are the tribulations of the righteous, and the Lord shall deliver them out of them all" (Ps. 33:20). Dying a single death, the righteous man, like all men, paying back his earthly debt, returns to the earth, and his spirit returns to God (Eccles. 12:7), but by the special Providence of God, his bones are not destroyed, but made he instrument of signs and wonders. Concerning this the holy Apostle Paul wrote cryptically to the Thessalonians: "The very God of peace sanctify you wholly, and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ" (I Thess.:23-24). "Spirit and soul" are the one, spiritual essence of man: it will be returned to God, for He gave it, but the body in all its fulness can be preserved by the almighty right hand of God without any decay until the Coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. Righteous men will live forever, setting an example to all their brethren and co-workers by their struggles, and after death they shall edify Christians by the good works which they wrought during their lifetime. In this prophetic contemplation, St. John beheld the fate of those that died in the Lord: "Blessed are the dead that die in the Lord from henceforth. Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest I from their labors, and their works do follow them" (Rev. 14:13).

## **MIRACLES DURING THE LIFE OF THE PROPHET ELISHA AND HIS WONDROUS MIRACLE AFTER HIS REPOSE**

"Wondrous is God in His Saints, " exclaims the Prophet David; and His works were striking and wondrous in the Old Testament, and shall be until the day of His Coming. In the Old Testament Church, the Lord wrought miracles through the bones of the Prophet Elisha, and in the New Testament the wondrous

works of grace shall be made manifest in all their fulness unto the faithful on the day of His dread Coming.

Of the holy Prophet Elisha, Jesus, son of Sirach, bears witness: "No word could overcome him, and after his death his body prophesied. He did wonders in his life, and at his death were his works marvelous" (Eccles. 48:13-14). In what do his marvelous works after his death consist? The Fourth Book of Kings contains an account thereof: "And Elisha died, and they buried him... And it came to pass that as they were burying a man, that behold, they saw a band of men [Moabites], and they cast the man into the grave of Elisha: and as soon as he touched the bones of Elisha, he revived and stood up on his feet" (IV Kings 13:20-21). This wondrous fact, recorded in the pages of the Bible, strikes at the unbelief of the sectarians. The bones of the prophet of God were shown to be a grace-bearing instrument of the power of the prophet, and foreshadowed the general resurrection of all mankind, when the trumpet of the archangel shall sound and the bodies of the departed shall be united to their bones and shall stand before the judgment seat of the Lord. Of this St. Paul bears witness thus: "When He [Christ] shall come to be glorified in His Saints, and to be admired in all them that believe (because our testimony among you was believed) in that day. Wherefore, also, we pray always for you, that our God would count you worthy of this calling, and fulfill... the work of faith with power" (II Thess. 1:10-11).

### **THE GIFTS OF THE SPIRIT ARE GIVEN TO MAN IN TANGIBLE OBJECTS**

Christ gave us nothing tangible, but rather spiritual things as material objects. Thus, at baptism, the spiritual gift is conveyed through tangible water. (St. Peter said: "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit"—Acts 2:38). But spiritual activity consists in birth and renewal from on high. In Communion it is bread and wine; in anointing, oil (Jas. 5:14). "If thou hadst been incorporeal, He would have delivered thee the incorporeal gifts bare; but because the soul hath been locked up in a body, he delivers thee the things that the mind perceives in things sensible" (Jn. Chrysostom, Homily LXXXII on the Gospel of St. Matthew, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Series 1, Vol. X, p. 494). In the establishment of "sensible things" Christians see a manifestation of the will of God, for we know that Christ Himself established the Mystical Supper, commanding His followers to celebrate it forever until the end of this age: "This do in remembrance of Me" (I Cor. 10:11). At the Lord's Supper bread and wine are offered, which, transformed through prayer, Christians accept as the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ. At baptism water is the means. And this is not a human invention, but the will of God, which is blessed and perfect, that the man of flesh might more readily receive the gifts of God's grace. "And all the people that heard him, and the publicans, justified God, being baptized with the baptism of John. But the Pharisees and lawyers rejected the counsel of God against themselves, being not baptized of him" (St. Luke 7:30). In the body of a believing Christian, in that temple of the Holy Spirit, the life of Jesus is revealed, as in a vessel sanctified for the Master's use (cf. II Tim. 2:21). Through the Communion of the Holy Mysteries of the Body and Blood of Christ, Christ Himself unites with the soul and body of believers in the closest possible manner, for His words are not false: "He that eateth My Flesh, and drinketh My Blood, dwelleth in Me, and I in him" (Jn. 6:56). "But he that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit with the Lord" (I Cor. 6:17).

As the deified Body of Christ wrought great wonders even through the simple material of His garments, so also the bodies of the ascetics, Saints and friends of God, who were permeated with the sanctifying

grace of the Holy Spirit and were cleansed of their sins by the holy Body and Blood of Christ, of which they partook at the Lord's Supper, work great signs and wonders by the power of God. The garments of Christ the Savior, the kerchiefs and aprons of the Apostle Paul, the shadow of the Apostle Peter as he passed by, the hands of the apostles, the bones of the holy Prophet Elisha, and even bread and wine, water and oil, in accordance with God's will, are shown to be those means or instruments whereby the Lord has been well pleased to bestow the gifts of His grace upon the faithful. He that receives the Holy Mysteries, since they have been established by our Lord Jesus Christ and His holy apostles, and afterwards by the Holy Church, gives glory to God and fulfills His will. He that rejects the things that are material in the Mysteries is, like the Jewish Pharisees and scribes, a transgressor and is disobedient to the will of God.

### **NOT ALL, BUT ONLY CERTAIN SAINTS' BODIES ARE GLORIFIED BY INCORRUPTION**

As the struggles of Christians are not the same, but of various sorts, so also their glorification after death may take many forms. "There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; for one star differeth from another star in glory" (I Cor. 15:41). Gifts of grace are also given to people in different degrees, although they flow from the same source. "Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit... Who worketh all in all" (I Cor. 12:4, 6).

According to the testimony of the ancient, apostolic Church, "We receive the witness of men" (I St. John 5:9). The relics of the prophets Isaiah, Jeremiah, Obadiah, Zachariah and several of the apostles remained incorrupt. The relics of the holy Prophet Elisha, as we see from the Fourth Book of Kings, were preserved as bones.

Christians of the second century reverently gathered the remains of those who were martyred for Christ—Ignatius the God-bearer, Polycarp of Smyrna, Irenaeus of Lyons—and they constructed churches over them when freedom was given to Christianity; they erected altars and tables of oblation, and celebrated the Eucharist over their graves. By the word "relic" the ancient Christians always understood either an entire body preserved incorrupt or a portion thereof, or even the bones of the holy Saints, since the executioners quite often cut the Christians they had slaughtered in pieces, throwing them to the wild beasts to be devoured. What remained of the bodies of the martyrs, the Christians gathered with profound reverence and with hymns of prayer, often bribing those on guard with gold, and at such gatherings the annals and accounts of the heroes who endured torture and death for the name of Christ were read. Russian Christians, emulating the ancient forms of worship of the Greek Christians, have prayerfully honored their own ascetics who strove in the arena of life to receive a crown (I Cor. 9:24-25), and have glorified them, for the Holy Scriptures say: "I will... honor them that honor Me" (I Kings 2:30). A Russian chronicler, narrating his account of the construction of the Cathedral of the Dormition in Moscow (A.D. 1472), reports the following: "They found [Metropolitan] Jonah to be incorrupt; but Photius had decayed in part, and Cyprian had decayed completely, leaving only bones."

### **FURTHER TESTIMONIES CONCERNING THE INCORRUPT RELICS OF THE SAINTS**

*"He must have a good report of Mom which are outside" (I Tim. 3:7)*

Reports by modern chroniclers on the incorruption of the relics of the holy Saints of the Universal Church, especially if such accounts come from persons opposed to Orthodoxy, are particularly valuable and important.

One of the secular writers on the staff of a Russian newspaper published the following account of what took place when the bolsheviks opened to tombs of some Russian Saints. "I was in Novgorod at the time of the exhibition of the relics of the Saints who rested in the Cathedral of the Holy Wisdom. The local bishop informed me in detail of what was transpiring. The relics were examined, and after the examination, on orders from the bolsheviks, the reliquaries were moved to the nearby Cathedral of the Entry into Jerusalem and were there exposed to be inspected by anyone who so desired. The relics of two Saints were incorrupt—i.e., St. Nicetas, first bishop of Novgorod (11th century), and the pious Prince Theodore, brother of St. Alexander Nevsky. On St. Nicetas there was only one portion of the skin that had disintegrated; this was on the back, and in places the ribs were exposed. Decay had also touched St. Theodore slightly in the area of the jaw. At the entrance to the church in which the relics had been set out for inspection, an armed soldier of the Red Army stood guard. Despite the presence of scoffers, a multitude of visitors showed their veneration for the Saints—many wept, a few kissed the vestments of the Saints. The examination of the relics stimulated an increase in the flow of those who desired to pray in that church. Because of the encroachments upon the sacred relics, molebens were served continually in the cathedral. During the divine services it often occurred that the Cathedral of the Holy Wisdom was unable to hold those that wished to pray, and part of the crowd had to stand in the square in front of the church" (Russian Gazette, 1919, #214, published in Ekaterinburg).

The mockery and ridicule displayed by the bolsheviks at the examination of the holy relics not only failed to accomplish their goal—i.e., to turn believers away from the veneration of the holy remains of the Saints,—but, on the contrary, furthered the strengthening of the faith and disgraced the godless, demonstrating the inherent contradictions in their actions. The atheistic communists most of all fear being held up to ridicule and made to look foolish. Yet this is exactly what transpired in their war on religion at the examinations of the holy relics which were carried out, as admitted even by Maxim Gorky himself, with scandalous blasphemy and provocative shamelessness ... This was evident in particular at the examination of the relics of St. Innocent of Irkutsk.

A report of the latter examination was published by the communists themselves in the newspaper Power of Labor. This historic account is an irrefutable denunciation of the bolsheviks, a sharp sword turned against the atheists. We shall cite it from the newspaper of Chitinsk, The Red Rifleman, #18 (January 28, 1921).

## **Report**

"On January 24, 1921, a commission headed by the physician L. N. Fedorov, superintendent of health for the province of Irkutsk, comprising Prof. Bushmakin, rector of the State University of Irkutsk, who also holds the chair of anatomy at the State University of Irkutsk, Prof. Sinkevich, who holds the chair of surgery at the State University of Irkutsk, Dr. Teregulov, assistant instructor at the State University of Irkutsk, Dr. Kalinikov, superintendent of the Division of Social Medicine, on the orders of the National Revolutionary Committee of Irkutsk, conducted an examination of the remains of Archbishop Innocent of Irkutsk which were enshrined in the church of the Monastery of the Ascension in the village of

Podgomo-Yelkino. During the examination the following transpired: At the opening of the coffin (reliquary) and the removal of the vestments, it was found that the corpse subject to study was desiccated (a natural mummy): 157 centimeters in height; weight, approximately 12-15 pounds. The skull is covered with a thin layer of parchment-like skin, of whitish-gray coloration, in the temporal and occipital regions; negligible remains of reddish hair were preserved only in places. The face is dark brown, in places blackish in color; the eyes are sunken, the eyelids half closed; the left eyebrow is preserved intact. The nose is depressed, quite desiccated. On the lip is visible a considerable amount of short-clipped hair of a reddish color. The lower lip is covered by a very small amount of such hair as is found on the upper lip; around the nasal and oral orifices cracks of a remarkable depth have occurred in the skin; the aural helixes have shriveled to a great degree, pressing closely against the skull. The integuments of the neck, of a whitish-yellow color, have dried out. The anterior surface of the thorax is covered with parchment-like skin of a yellow color, without any defect. On the lateral surfaces of the thorax, and especially in the armpits, the skin is covered with the remnants of clothing. The abdomen has fallen in greatly, and on its lateral surfaces traces of decay are visible. On the exterior surfaces of the shoulders the soft portions have decayed, on the outer and inner surfaces the skin has been preserved in the same condition as that on the lateral surface of the thorax. The forearms have been well preserved, covered with parchment-like skin; the soft portions (the subcutaneous cellular tissue and muscles) have shriveled greatly. The hands, especially the right hand, are covered with desiccated skin of a blackish hue; the fingernails are intact; the left index finger has been amputated at the bottom phalanx joint: this was done posthumously. The soft portions of the hips have severely fallen in, the skin being of a parchment-like texture; on the inner surfaces of the thighs there are traces of decay. On the shins the soft portions have shriveled; skin is parchment-like; deep cracks have appeared on it in places. On the rear surface of the feet the skin found a significant quantity of a dark, powder-like mass in which are appreciable remains of white insect larvae. A decayed garment has firmly adhered to the back surface of the torso and the extremities; along the length of these remains it seems that the skin on the neck and on the spine is of a parchment-like texture without defect; on the back surface of the neck are found two deep, narrow, intersecting fissures caused by a chain from which a cross hangs. In the pelvic region, the skin is missing; the soft portions of the sciatic area, the perineum and the external genitalia have decayed; here also is to be found a significant quantity of a dark, powder-like mass in which there are appreciable remains of white insect larvae (worms). The bones of the skull, torso and extremities are firm and whole, the ligaments have been preserved; no artificial violation of the wholeness of the bone structure, apart from the finger amputated from the left hand mentioned above, is in evidence.

"Conclusion: The corpse examined is a very well preserved natural mummy. To estimate the time of death is not possible, since a corpse, passing into a state of mummification, under known soil and climatic conditions, can be preserved for centuries in consequence of natural dessication. (N.B.: St. Innocent reposed in the year 1731.) Copy certified as accurate: Archpriest P. Nechaev." (The report of this examination is taken from the newspaper *The Red Rifleman*, official publication of the sub-department of the Revolutionary Army Council (Revoensovet) of the Fifth Army and the Eastern Army-Siberian Region. Irkutsk: Friday, January 28, 1921, #18, (476).)

This document speaks for itself. If we compare and contrast all the arguments and reasonings that the godless communists have used in the question of the incorruption of holy relics, we can perceive a blatant contradiction in their "proofs." First of all, they and the sectarians with them argue that there are no incorrupt bodies, nor have there ever been, that instead of relics dummies of wood and stuffing, or corpses fashioned of wax are to be found in the reliquaries. The communists have based all their

allegations on scholarly deductions and conclusions, even referring to their own journal Faith & Science. In this journal, and also in The Worker's Gazette (#420, 1919), the atheists have blasphemously attempted to show that during the examination of the relics only wood, stuffing, wax and rotting garments were found. But later they began to expose the relics publicly and to examine them in the presence of medical personnel and clergymen. And what was the outcome? During the examinations, apart from the bones of the departed Saints, there came to light hair, undecayed garments, and even incorrupt bodies, as for example Sts. Nicetas and Theodore of Novgorod, Innocent of Irkutsk, Theodosius of Chernigov, and many other Saints in the Kiev-Caves Lavra. This circumstance has forced the atheistic mockers, willingly or unwillingly, to change their stance and, contradicting their former statements, to state openly that under certain conditions corpses can be preserved for centuries, that "relics are mummified portions" or "saponifications of a corpse." Hence there is no more talk of "wax figures," or of "wood and stuffing," which they had been unable to find in even one of the ascetic's coffins; this strange phenomenon is now interpreted as the "desiccation of corpses" and natural "mummification." However, it is well known that no one at any time turned their bodies into "mummies," but rather they always interred them according to the usual ecclesiastical ritual, in the place where death overtook them. Saints have reposed even in lands with hot climates (as, for example, St. Spiridon); they have been buried in frigid Siberia (as, for example, St. Innocent of Irkutsk and St. John of Tobolsk) and in the temperate zone of Russia (Chernigov and Moscow provinces, and the Trinity-St. Sergius Lavra); yet in not one province of Russia has anyone been able to point to the skillful embalming of the remains of the holy Saints of God. To refute the sanctity of holy relics, the godless have concocted the theory of the "saponification of corpses," attaching to their "findings," as is their wont, a "medical/scientific" interpretation. In this respect, an article in Izvestia (The News) (August 14, 1919, # 179 (731)) is particularly noteworthy. This article is entitled "Relics: A Medical/Scientific Interpretation." We quote therefrom: "An examination of relics has been conducted by a special commission, and bones were found in the tombs. But could anything else have been found? The fact of the matter is that, besides the usual form of decomposition of living matter—i.e., corruption,—science knows several others. [N.B.: Living matter does not decompose; only dead matter. A corpse is no longer a living being, but is earth, whose lot is corruption.] For example, in the sandy regions of Africa [?] where the ground is porous, dry and ventilated, cases of saponification of corpses are met with. In the Sahara, for example, corpses are found buried in the sands many decades after death, which preserve externally all the characteristics of a living body; yet no sooner does one touch such a corpse than it either disintegrates or crumbles into a viscous mass similar to soap [hence the term 'form of decomposition']. There exists also the so-called mummification of corpses, their indefinite preservation in a desiccated state, and again under known soil conditions. This is why, from the point of view of science [sic], there can never be anything surprising should, along with 'hair and bone particles,' anything else be found in tombs. For example, the sandy, rocky, well ventilated soil of the banks of the Dnieper offers excellent ground for the 'saponification' or mummification of corpses. And one cannot exclude the possibility that during the examination of the corpses of the Kiev Caves Lavra the passage of air therein, noticed by all visitors, to be something else which effects the saponification and mummification of portions of bodies."

The above citation from an article which pretends to be "scientific" shows to what degree the accusations and groundless arguments and denials directed against the holy relics have been carried:

1) First of all, from this selfsame communist publication we can be certain that all of their tales of "wooden and wax dummies" are blatant and conscious lies and slanders. Hundreds of the tombs of the

holy Saints have been opened by the communists, and in not one of them any such thing found. All of their protocols unanimously confirm that whole skeletons, hair, bones, garments and entire bodies were found in the reliquaries, relics whose preservation they strove, though to a markedly unsuccessful degree, to "explain away" scientifically.

2) The bones of the holy ascetics and other remains are relics in the literal sense of the word, as in the Scriptures: "The Lord preserveth all their bones, and not one of them shall be broken" (Ps. 33:21), as the bones of Elisha the Prophet were preserved and after death prophesied (Ecclus. 49:14), that is, they performed mystical works: "and at his death were his works marvellous." "By the prophet understand a teacher; by prophesy, the dignity of service," says the Blessed Jerome. The body of the Prophet Elisha prophesied even after death, i.e. predicted and foretold the general resurrection which will be when Christ comes to judge.

3) "In Africa desiccated corpses are found in the sands"—thus do the communists dismiss the appearance of incorrupt bodies. What childish reasoning! Is frigid Irkutsk with its frozen ground located in Africa? Was St. Theodosius of Chernigov, who has been bodily preserved, buried in the sands of Africa? Yet these holy hierarchs lay in the ground for hundreds of years. What does the Sahara Desert have in common with the Russian monasteries where the relics of the Saints have been preserved? And these monasteries were located in the north, in central Russia, and in the south. In the hot Mediterranean climate of the island of Corfu, the relics of St. Spiridon of Trimithon have existed for a millenium and a half which astounds physiologists. "The body of St. Spiridon is a cause of amazement for physiologists: it is soft and flexible, and almost alive, as it were; as concerns the body, it has not decomposed, nor has it been subject to corruption; the prominent features of his face expand and again return to their former positions when the body is removed and replaced in its coffin where it stands upright for the solemn procession around the city. His feet, in such a hot place as Corfu, are subjected to warm and damp miasmas, yet they have neither decayed nor changed in the slightest degree. All of this, which apparently does not contradict the universal laws of physics, is beyond doubt indisputable and fundamentally proven" (Chronicle of Bishop Arsenius, p. 557). How can those that reject relics explain this universal phenomenon? Paying this no heed, they contradict and refute themselves. "One need only touch the dessicated corpse lightly... and it disintegrates into a viscous mass similar to soap." Just like the serpent which was raised upon the pole in the desert (which Christ mentioned in His conversation with Nicodemus—St. John 3:14), upon which the sick gazed with faith, did not in of itself heal those that had been bitten, but rather the healing was wrought by the power of God the Savior, so also the bones of the Prophet Elisha raised up the dead man, not by their own power, nor even by the power of the prophet, but through the might and power of God exclusively, and in order to foretell the coming general resurrection, they (the Jews in the wilderness) perished with the stings of crooked serpents... But they were troubled for a small season, that they might be admonished, having a sign of salvation... For he that turned himself toward it was not saved by the thing that he saw, but by Thee, that art the Savior of all" (Wis. Sol. 6:5-7).

The preserved body of St. Innocent, which was moved to a special case and which did not "disintegrate into a soap-like mass," was dispatched to a museum in Moscow. This shows that there can be no talk of the "saponification" of a body due to its being touched, else how did the communists transport it to Moscow? No, from the "medical point of view" one cannot in any way explain the mysterious phenomenon of the preservation of the incorrupt bodies.

4) Now, "the well-ventilated banks of the Kiev Caves." This argument too, will not sustain criticism. If conditions of the soil have caused incorruption among the Saints of the Kiev Caves, one might ask why thousands of people buried under identical circumstances have decayed? The wonderworkers of Solovetsk were preserved in the frozen ground of their Arctic island, St. Innocent in the Siberian taiga, St. Sergius of Radonezh lay in water for decades, St. Theodosius of Chernigov lay for a long time in the tepid climate of Little Russia, and Greek ascetics are preserved in the sultry climate of the Ionian islands where the sands of the Sahara or the ventilated banks of the Dnieper are nowhere in evidence. In Irkutsk, for example, in the same frozen conditions of the taiga, thousands of the city's inhabitants were interred, yet not one of them was "saponified" and thus preserved in his former, almost life-like state, as is evinced in the protocol of the examination. Of all the thousands of those who died in Irkutsk there remained incorrupt, with all the features of a living person preserved, only one single old man, slight of build and feeble, who had been known during his lifetime as the Archbishop of Irkutsk. All the others decayed, but he was preserved, for this feeble old man was a great ascetic and struggler "and a most radiant beacon for the Church," a godly hierarch who, even during his lifetime, wasted his body through tasting, making of it "a vessel unto honor, sanctified and meet for the Master's use" (II Tim. 2:21).

The sectarian author and preacher V. F. Martsinkovsky, in his interesting book *Notes of a Believer* testifies as follows concerning the incorruption of the relics of the martyrs Anthony, John and Eustathius who suffered in Who in the fourteenth century during the reign of King Olgerd of Lithuania. The relics of the holy martyrs were located in the Monastery of the Holy Trinity in Vilno until 1915. In that year, due to the invasion of the Germans, the relics were transported to Moscow, and after the October Revolution were placed in an anti-religious museum by the bolsheviks. Next to the relics of the holy martyrs the bolsheviks placed the corpses of dead dogs and rats with a sign stating: "These are also relics!" The sectarian Martsinkovsky saw them in the Moscow museum and writes the following: "I saw the relics of the martyrs Anthony, John and Eustathius of Vilno myself. They were on display in Moscow at the Petrovka in the suburb of Narkomzdrava in a glass case. Our eyes were confronted with a picture of half decay. Almost all the skin of the bodies was whole; it was of a greyish hue, similar to parchment, tightly covering the bones of the skeletons; the marks of the tortures to which these Christians were once subjected were clearly visible—the dislocated bones of the feet, a wound above the heart of one of the martyrs, apparently caused by a sword" (quoted in *The History of the Religious Movement in Russia: 1917-1923*; Prague, 1929, p. 60). The former Lithuanian, and also the Polish government repeatedly petitioned the Soviets to return the holy relics of the martyrs to Vilno, but without success, although on the strength of peace treaties these national treasures should have been returned. In July of 1946, in view of the approaching six hundredth anniversary of the martyrs' execution, the bolsheviks decided to transfer the relics to Vilno. The relics were taken from the atheist museum, placed in three coffins, and flown from Moscow to Vilno. The relics were placed in the cave church of the Monastery of the Holy Spirit which had been constructed by Metropolitan Joseph (Shimansky) of Lithuania, and at which the reunion of the Lithuanian Uniates had been solemnized during the reign of Emperor Nicholas I. The holy relics of the martyrs of Vilno were exposed for the veneration of all and were honored by Orthodox and Roman Catholics alike. Crowds of the faithful approached them with prayer to God Who is wondrous in His Saints, and have received alleviation of their afflictions according to their faith. The incorrupt bodies of the martyrs of Vilno graphically bear out the truth of Orthodoxy: "The Lord preserveth all their bones, and not one of them shall be broken," and through them, as through the bones of the Prophet Elisha,

grace-bearing gifts of healing are bestowed upon the faithful. This truth is confirmed even by the sectarian author Martsinkovsky.

Faithful Christians are deeply convinced that the examinations of relics by the communists have not taken place without the special Providence of God. In this case, the Lord has shown the faithful His power and might for the edification of the faithless, sinful and adulterous generation of this age—a generation trapped in its own lies. "God is not mocked" (Gal. 6:7). "God Who is glorified in the council of the Saints is great and terrible" (Ps. 88:8). The time approaches when the "bones [of the Saints] shall flourish again out of their place" (Ecclus. 49:12).

The veneration of the remains of the holy strugglers, the cultus of our spiritual forebears, the friends of God, the communion with them in prayer—all of these constitute an object of faith. In the Christian religion much is mysterious and incomprehensible to many, but Christians do not doubt, continuing to honor the Saints' remains, for the bases of this are to be found in the Sacred Scriptures. The American preacher Warren Kendler said: "He that harbors any doubts in our faith and who strives to twist it is doing the devil's work." Those of the Protestants and sectarians who have lost the remaining vestiges of their own faith and endeavor to spread their bankrupt belief among their neighbors indeed do "the devil's work." And we should recall the words of Christ the Savior which He spoke to the woman whom He had healed of an issue of blood: "Daughter, be of good comfort, thy faith hath made thee whole" (Mt. 9:22).

*A translation of On the Veneration of the Holy Relics and Remains of the Saints, by Archpriest Vasily Demidov, (Jordanville: St. Job of Pochaev Press, 1950). Reprinted in Orthodox Life, Vol. 30, No. 2 (March-April 1980), pp. 23-33.*