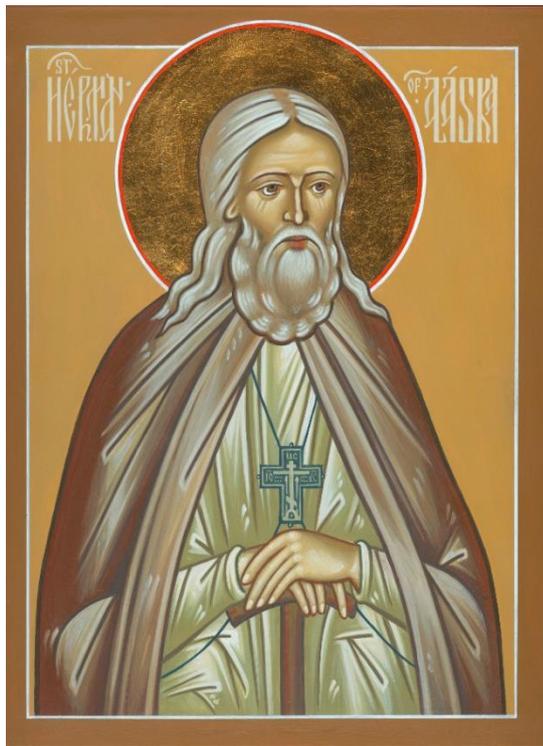




PARISH BULLETIN

HOLY ARCHANGHEL MICHAEL'S ROMANIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH

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Saint Herman of Alaska

December 13th

A spiritual mission was organized in 1793, made up of monks of the Valaam Monastery. They were sent to preach the Word of God to the native inhabitants of northwestern America, who only ten years before had come under the sovereignty of Russia. Saint Herman was among the members of this Mission.

Miraculous Healing

At the Saint Sergius Hermitage there occurred the following incident to Father Herman. On the right side of his throat under his chin there appeared an abscess. The swelling grew rapidly, disfiguring his face. It became difficult for him to swallow, and the odor was unbearable. In this critical condition Father Herman awaited death. He did not appeal to a physician of this world, but locking his cell he fell before an icon of the Mother of God. With fervent tears he prayed, asking of Her that he might be healed. He prayed the whole night. Then he took a wet towel and with it wiped the face of the Most Holy Mother, and with this towel he covered the swelling. He continued to pray with tears until he fell asleep from sheer exhaustion on the floor. In a dream he saw the Virgin Mary healing him.

When Herman awoke in the morning, he found to his great surprise that he was fully healed. The swelling had disappeared, even though the abscess had not broken through, leaving behind but a small mark as though a reminder of the miracle. Physicians to whom this healing was described did not believe it, arguing that it was necessary for the abscess to have

either broken through of its own accord or to have been cut open. But the words of the physicians were the words of human experience, for where the grace of God operates there the order of nature is overcome. Such occurrences humble human reason under the strong hand of God's Mercy.

In America, Father Herman chose as his place of habitation Spruce Island, which he called New Valaam. This island is separated by a strait about a mile and a quarter wide from Kodiak Island on which had been built a wooden monastery for the residence of the members of the mission, and a wooden church dedicated to the Resurrection of the Savior. (New Valaam was named for Valaam on Lake Ladoga, the monastery from which Father Herman came to America. It is interesting to note that Valaam is also located on an island, although, this island is in a fresh water lake, whereas, Spruce Island is on the Pacific Ocean, although near other islands and the Alaskan mainland.)

Spruce Island is not large, and is almost completely covered by a forest. Almost through its middle a small brook flows to the sea. Herman selected this picturesque island for the location of his hermitage. He dug a cave out of the ground with his own hands, and in it he lived his first full summer. For winter there was built for him a cell near the cave, in which he lived until his death. The cave was converted by him into a place for his burial. A wooden chapel, and a wooden house to be used as a schoolhouse and a guest house were built not too distant from his cell. A garden was laid out in front of his cell. For more than forty years Father Herman lived here.

Father Herman's Way of Life

Father Herman himself spaded the garden, planted potatoes and cabbage and various vegetables in it. For winter, he preserved mushrooms, salting or drying them. The salt was obtained by him from ocean water. It is said that a wicker basket in which the Elder carried seaweed from the shore, was so large that it was difficult for one person to carry. The seaweed was used for fertilizing the soil. But to the astonishment of all, Father Herman carried a basket filled with seaweed for a long distance without any help at all. By chance his disciple, Gerasim, saw him one winter night carrying a large log which normally would be carried by four men; and he was bare footed. Thus worked the Elder, and everything that he acquired as a result of his immeasurable labors was used for the feeding and clothing of orphans and also for books for his students.

His clothes were the same for winter as for summer. He did not wear a shirt; instead he wore a smock of deer skin, which he did not take off for several years at a time, nor did he change it, so that the fur in it was completely worn away, and the leather became glossy. Then there were his boots or shoes, cassock, an ancient and faded out cassock (riasa) full of patchwork, and his headdress (klobuk). He went everywhere in these clothes, and at all times; in the rain, in snowstorms, and during the coldest freezing weather. In this, Father Herman followed the example of many Eastern Ascetic Fathers and Monks who showed the greatest concern for the welfare and needs of others. Yet, they themselves wore the oldest possible clothes to show their great humility before God, and their detachment from worldly things.

A small bench covered with a time-worn deerskin served as Father Herman's bed. He used two bricks for a pillow; these were hidden from visitors by a skin or a shirt. There was no blanket. Instead, he covered himself with a wooden board which lay on the stove. This board Father Herman, himself called his blanket, and he willed that it be used to cover his remains; it was as long as he was tall. "During my stay in the cell of Father Herman," writes the creole Constantine Larionov, "I, a sinner, sat on his 'blanket'-and I consider this the acme of my fortune!" ('creole' is the name by which the Russians referred to the children of mixed marriages of native Indians of Alaska, Eskimo and Aleuts with Russians.)

On the occasions when Father Herman was the guest of administrators of the American Company and in the course of their soul-saving talks he sat up with them until midnight. He never spent the night with them, but regardless of the weather he always returned to his hermitage. If for some extraordinary reason it was necessary for him to spend the night away from his cell, then in the morning the bed which had been prepared for him would be found untouched; the Elder not having slept at all. The same was true in his hermitage where having spent the night in talks, he never rested.

The Elder ate very little. As a guest, he scarcely tasted the food, and remained without dinner. In his cell his dinner consisted of a very small portion of a small fish or some vegetables. His body, emaciated as a result of his labors, his vigils, and fasting, was crushed by chains which weighed about sixteen pounds. These chains are kept to this day in the chapel. Telling of these deeds of Father

Herman, his disciple, the Aleut Ignaty Aligyaga, added, "Yes, Apa led a very hard life, and no one can imitate his life!" (The Aleutian word "Apa" means Elder or grandfather, and it is a name indicative of the great affection in which he was held).

Our writing of the incidents in the life of the Elder deal, so to speak, with the external aspects of his labor. "His most important works," says the Bishop Peter, "were his exercises in spiritual endeavor in his isolated cell where no one saw him, but outside the cell they heard him singing and celebrating services to God according to the monastic rule." This witness of the Bishop is supported by the following answers of Father Herman, himself, "How do you manage to live alone in the forest, Father Herman? Don't you ever become lonesome?" He answered, "No I am not there alone! God is here, as God is everywhere. The Holy Angels are there. With whom is it better to talk, with people, or with Angels? Most certainly with Angels."

Father Herman and the Native Alaskans

The way in which Father Herman looked upon the natives of America, how he understood his own relations with them, and how he was concerned for their needs he expressed himself in one of his letters to the former administrator of the colony, Simeon Yanovsky. He wrote, "Our Creator granted to our beloved homeland this land which like a newly-born babe does not yet have the strength for knowledge or understanding. It requires not only protection, because of its infantile weakness and impotence, but also his sustenance. Even for this it does not yet have the ability to make an appeal on its own behalf. And since the welfare of this

nation by the Providence of God, it is not known for how long, is dependent on and has been entrusted into the hands of the Russian government which has now been given into your own power, therefore I, the most humble servant of these people, and their nurse stand before you in their behalf, write this petition with tears of blood. Be our Father and our Protector. Certainly we do not know how to be eloquent, so with an inarticulate infant's tongue we say: Wipe away the tears of the defenseless orphans, cool the hearts melting away in the fire of sorrow. Help us to know what consolation means."

The Elder acted the way he felt. He always interceded before the governors on behalf of those who had transgressed. He defended those who had been offended. He helped those who were in need with whatever means he had available. The Aleuts, men, women and children, often visited him. Some asked for advice, others complained of oppression, others sought out defense, and still others desired help. Each one received the greatest possible satisfaction from the Elder. He discussed their mutual difficulties, and he tried to settle these peacefully. He was especially concerned about reestablishing understanding in families. If he did not succeed in reconciling a husband and wife, the Elder prevailed upon them to separate temporarily. The need for such a procedure he explained thus, "it is better to let them live apart, or believe me, it can be terrible if they are not separated. There have been incidents when a husband killed his wife, or when a wife destroyed her husband."

Father Herman especially loved children. He made large quantities of biscuits for them, and he baked cookies for them; and the children were fond of the Elder. Father Herman's love for the Aleuts reached the point of self-denial.

An Epidemic Strikes

A ship from the United States brought to Sitka Island, and from there to Kodiak Island, a contagious disease, a fatal illness. It began with a fever, a heavy cold, and difficult respiration, and it ended with chills; in three days the victim died. On the island there was neither a doctor nor medicine. The illness spread rapidly through the village, and then throughout the nearby areas. The disease affected all, even infants. The fatalities were so great that for three days there was no one to dig graves, and the bodies remained unburied. An eyewitness said, "I cannot imagine anything more tragic and horrible than the sight which struck me when I visited an Aleutian 'Kazhim'. This was a large building, or barracks, with dividing sections, in which the Aleuts lived with their families; it contained about 100 people. Here some had died, their cold bodies lay near the living; others were dying; there were groans and weeping which tore at one's soul."

"I saw mothers over whose bodies cold in death crawled a hungry child, crying and searching in vain for its food...My heart was bursting with compassion! It seemed that if anyone could paint with a worthy brush the full horror of this tragic scene, that he would have successfully aroused fear of death in the most embittered

heart.” Father Herman, during this terrible sickness which lasted a whole month, gradually dying out towards the end, visited the sick, never tiring. He admonished them in their fear, prayed, brought them to penance, or prepared them for death. He never spared himself.

Father Herman as a Spiritual Teacher

The Elder was concerned in particular for the moral growth of the Aleuts. With this end in mind a school was built for children—the orphans of the Aleuts. He himself taught them the Law of God and church music. For this same purpose he gathered the Aleuts on Sunday and Holy Days for prayer in the chapel near his cell. Here his disciple read the Hours and the various prayers while the Elder himself read the Epistle and Gospel. He also preached to them. His students sang, and they sang very well. The Aleuts loved to hear his sermons, gathering around him in large numbers. The Elder’s talks were captivating, and his listeners were moved by their wondrous power. He himself writes of one example of the beneficial results of his words.



“Glory to the holy destinies of the Merciful God! He has shown me now through his unfathomable Providence a new occurrence which I, who have lived here for twenty years had never seen before on Kodiak,” he wrote. “Recently after Easter, a young girl about twenty years of age who knows Russian well, came to me. Having heard of the Incarnation of the Son of God

and of Eternal Life, she became so inflamed with love for Jesus Christ that she does not wish to leave me. She pleaded eloquently with me. Contrary to my personal inclination and love for solitude, and despite all the hindrances and difficulties which I put forward before accepting her, she has now been living near the school for a month and is not lonesome. I, looking on this with great wonder, remembered the words of the Savior: ‘that which is hidden from the wise and learned is revealed to babes’” (Matthew 11:25).

This woman lived at the school until the death of the Elder. She watched for the good conduct of the children who studied in his school. Father Herman willed that after his death she was to continue to live on Spruce Island. Her name was Sophia Vlasova.

Yanovsky writes about the character and the eloquence of the talks of the Elder thus: “When I met Father Herman I was thirty years old. I must say that I was educated in the naval corps school; that I knew many sciences having read extensively. But to my regret, the Science of sciences, that is the Law of God, I barely remembered the externals—and these only theoretically, not applying them to life. I was a Christian in name only, but in my soul and in reality, I was a freethinker. Furthermore, I did not admit the divinity and holiness of our religion, for I had read through many atheistic works. Father Herman recognized this immediately and he desired to reconvert me. To my great surprise he spoke so convincingly, wisely—

and he argued with such conviction—that it seemed to me that no learning or worldly wisdom could stand one’s ground before his words. We conversed with him daily until midnight, and even later, of God’s love, of eternity, of the salvation of souls, and of Christian living. From his lips flowed a ceaseless stream of sweet words! By these continual talks and by the prayers of the holy Elder the Lord returned me completely to the way of Truth, and I became a real Christian. I am indebted for all this to Father Herman he is my true benefactor.

“Several years ago,” continues Yanovsky, “Father Herman converted a certain naval captain G. to Orthodoxy from the Lutheran Faith. This captain was well educated. Besides many sciences, he was well versed in languages. He knew Russian, English, German, French, Italian and also some Spanish. But for all this he could not resist the convictions and proofs of Father Herman. He changed his faith and was united to the Orthodox Church through Chrismation. When he was leaving America, the Elder said to him while they were parting, “Be on guard, if the Lord should take your wife from you then do not marry a German woman under any circumstance. If you do marry a German woman, undoubtedly she will damage your Orthodoxy.” The Captain gave his word, but he failed to keep it. The warning of the Elder was prophetic. Indeed, after several years the Captain’s wife did die, and he married a German woman. There is no doubt that his faith weakened or that he left it; for he died suddenly without penance.”

Further on Yanovsky writes, “Once the Elder was invited aboard a frigate which came from Saint Petersburg. The Captain of the frigate was a highly educated man, who had been sent to America by order of the Emperor to make an inspection of all the colonies. There were more than twenty-five officers with the Captain, and they also were educated men. In the company of this group sat a monk of a hermitage, small in stature and wearing very old clothes. All these educated conversationalists were placed in such a position by his wise talks that they did not know how to answer him. The Captain himself used to say, ‘We were lost for an answer before him.’

“Father Herman gave them all one general question: ‘Gentlemen, What do you love above all, and what will each of you wish for your happiness?’ Various answers were offered ... Some desired wealth, others glory, some a beautiful wife, and still others a beautiful ship he would captain; and so forth in the same vein. ‘It is not true,’ Father Herman said to them concerning this, ‘that all your various wishes can bring us to one conclusion—that each of you desires that which in his own understanding he considers the best, and which is most worthy of his love?’ They all answered, ‘Yes, that is so!’ He then continued, ‘Would you not say, Is not that which is best, above all, and surpassing all, and that which by preference is most worthy of love, the Very Lord, our Jesus Christ, who created us, adorned us with such ideals, gave life to all, sustains everything, nurtures and loves all, who is Himself Love and most

beautiful of all men? Should we not then love God above everything, desire Him more than anything, and search Him out?’

“All said, ‘Why, yes! That’s self-evident!’ Then the Elder asked, ‘But do you love God?’ They all answered, ‘Certainly, we love God. How can we not love God?’ ‘And I a sinner have been trying for more than forty years to love God, I cannot say that I love Him completely,’ Father Herman protested to them. He then began to demonstrate to them the way in which we should love God. ‘If we love someone,’ he said, ‘we always remember them; we try to please them. Day and night our heart is concerned with the subject. Is that the way you gentlemen love God? Do you turn to Him often? Do you always remember Him? Do you always pray to Him and fulfill His holy commandments?’ They had to admit that they had not! ‘For our own good, and for our own fortune,’ concluded the Elder, ‘let us at least promise ourselves that from this very minute we will try to love God more than anything and to fulfill His Holy Will!’ Without any doubt this conversation was imprinted in the hearts of the listeners for the rest of their lives.’

“In general, Father Herman liked to talk of eternity, of salvation of the future life, of our destinies under God. He often talked on the lives of the Saints, on the Prologue, but he never spoke about anything frivolous. It was so pleasant to hear him that those who conversed with him, the Aleuts and their wives, were so captivated

by his talks that often they did not leave him until dawn, and then they left him with reluctance;” thus witnesses the Creole, Constantine Larionov.

The Spirit of Father Herman’s Teaching
In order to express the spirit of Father Herman’s teaching, we present here a quotation from a letter that was written by his own hand.

“The empty years of these desires separate us from our heavenly homeland, and our Love for these desires and our habits clothe us, as it were, in an odious dress; it is called by the Apostle ‘the external (earthy) man’ (1 Corinthians 15:47). We who are wanderers in the journey of this life call to God for aid. We must divest ourselves of this repulsiveness, and put on new desires, and a new love for the coming age. Thus, through this we will know either an attraction or a repulsion for the heavenly homeland. It is possible to do this quickly, but we must follow the example of the sick, who wishing for desired health, do not stop searching for means of curing themselves. But I am not speaking clearly.”

O Holy Father Herman of Alaska, pray unto God for us!

Source: ([https://oca.org/saints/lives /](https://oca.org/saints/lives/))



Liturgical Schedule

Tuesday <i>December, 20</i>	8.30 am	Divine Liturgy, Saint Ignatius; St. John of Kronostat
Wednesday <i>December, 21</i>	18:00 pm	Paraklesis to the Theotokos
Friday <i>December 23</i>	8.30 am	Divine Liturgy
Saturday <i>December, 24</i>	8.30 am 5.00 pm	Liturgy Vespers and Litya for Christmas Eve
Sunday <i>December, 25</i>	8.30 am 9.30 am 7.00 pm	Matins Divine Liturgy, Christmas Vespers
Monday <i>December, 26</i>	8.30 am 9.30 am 7.00 pm	Matins Divine Liturgy, Christmas Vespers
Tuesday <i>December, 27</i>	8.30 am 9.30 am	Matins Divine Liturgy

Announcements:

- *For those who have not donated their stewardship funds this year, please try to get donations in before the year's end.*
- *Confessions – since it is one of the great fasts of the year confessions are recommended.*
- *St. Michael's will not be announcing Divine Liturgy weather cancellations the over the radio this winter. We will have Divine Liturgy during all Weather-related circumstances. Nevertheless, please follow weather advisories and be safe.*



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