

# Will They Be There?

## Processions Meet Amidst Great Rejoicing!

*Father Arseny*

*In the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, despite the growth and solidification of parishes in Canada, various problems remained. Some communities were fraught with dissension and involved in litigation with the Uniates over buildings. Some of these problems would continue for many years and even require the higher courts to make a settlement. There were bright spots in differences, however. When Father Arseny was serving in Canada as administrator of parishes, one of the great moments of the early Church was experienced. It was the union of two parishes at Rabbit Hill, Alberta, the Uniate and the Orthodox, after years of differences. Amidst discussion, even opposition, the two parishes agreed to amalgamate as one, and to make the St. Mary's temple, their new Orthodox home parish.*

*How were they to mark their union? Both congregations agreed to meet on the road between the two parishes, a march of several miles at least, for both groups, and then proceed as one to St. Mary's Church. This reconciliatory act on September 27, 1910 was reported in Vestnik<sup>1</sup> by Father Arseny as follows.*

Twenty miles from Edmonton is a colony known as Rabbit Hill. Ruthenians settled there about ten years ago, Galicians, from different villages in the Old Country, from the Yaroslavsky area. At about the same time to these parts the light of the Orthodox faith was brought

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<sup>1</sup> The full name of the publication was *Pravoslavniy Amerikanskiy Vestnik* (*The American Orthodox Messenger*) – (ed).

by the Alaskan missionary, Father D. Kamnev. Sparks from this light fell in many places but did not turn into a flame. Only ten families turned from the Uniate faith and organized an Orthodox parish, built a small church, a bell tower to this day not finished....The lively impression of this new joy urges me to write to you. On the 27<sup>th</sup> of September, a large Uniate Colony of about 500 people was united with the Orthodox Church...

On the 27<sup>th</sup> at 9 o'clock in the morning the procession began from the Orthodox bell-tower amidst the singing of *Under Your Protection*. It was a frosty fall morning. The sun would show itself now and again and then disappear behind dark autumn clouds. The fine dust kicked up from the road covered the singers, making them cough often. Every now and again from among the Orthodox travelers one could hear the question: What will be? Will they meet the procession? It is impossible to say that these anxious questions did not cause the leaders of the procession any lack of peace.

This was not the first procession in Canada. It is not the first time the Canadian reaches were filled with the voices of pilgrims. But here, it is true, is something else. We are going to meet not our own but others. What if, on the last moment, they seize some idea and change their minds? What would we do then? Would we serve a Liturgy in the forest? Or return to our bell tower? ...

Another mile and a half was passed. The road is flat and one can see far, and there is no evidence of anyone coming to meet us. Doubts, minute by minute are creeping in!

Suddenly, a cry 'Praise to God! They are coming!' Yes! Closer and closer, one could see banners waving and the drift of a song. And now one can the image of the Holy Mother of God carried by the hands of some of the women and girls. An unearthly joy was in the midst of the small Orthodox flock. O Merciful God! O earthly paradise! One could hear everywhere. And truly, it was a most holy moment.

The soul softens! Let us embrace this holy moment and taste the sweetness of the presence of the Lord! Blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called the sons of God. That is the cause of the incomparable joy in this moment! After so much bickering, to come together beneath the sign of the cross and to forgive all, cover all with a brotherly embrace! And even if the way is filled with hardship, with difficult circumstances, with sweat, with hunger, with cold, then let life be all of that--a moment like this redeems it all! Here are the tears of *umilienie*,<sup>2</sup> tears of joy...

"God's peace and love has come to us!" – with these words Father Arseny began after the veneration of the cross and the banners:

Heaven has opened and angels sing, 'Glory to God in the Highest and on earth peace, good will toward men!' Dear kin, children of one mother, fed from one land, the open reaches and forests give you the same melody, one tough fate has placed you in this foreign land. Here are no nightingales to sing a morning song, no cuckoos, no native willows to hymn their melancholic song. Here you embraced a wide stretch of land. Your poor and torn sheepskins you have exchanged for a 'coat'." A piece of black bread you have exchanged ...and is your soul satisfied? Is your heart quiet? Is it close to God? Do you glance every now and again toward the Old Country with tears in your eyes? ...

The procession turned toward the Church. Song after song rose to heaven from these eased Ruthenian hearts. Here is the Church. All is quiet, still. No sign of opposition or protest. At the doors of the Church stands an 80-year old man with bread and salt, and with tears he says several phrases and ends with blessing, mentioning our Orthodox Bishop Platon.

Beautiful, contrite singing fills the service, such purity and order! From the Epistle a teaching about love to one's enemies and the

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<sup>2</sup> Tender emotion – (ed).

forgiveness of offences [is read]. After the Liturgy [there is] a parish meeting, at which there is unanimous affirmation of the movement to Orthodoxy and a request for a priest is made.

And so our Orthodox Mission gained one of its dearest parishes and ended ten years of adversity. Glory to God!"