A decorative vertical element on the left side of the cover, consisting of three parallel lines and a laurel wreath. The wreath is a branch with several leaves, positioned vertically and partially overlapping the lines.

Bishop Flopko
Confessor of
Faith

by A. Pekar, O.S.B.M.

BISHOP BASIL HOPKO, S. T. D.
CONFESSOR OF THE FAITH

(1904-1976)

A. Pekar, OSBM.

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BISHOP BASIL HOPKO, S.T.D.
(1904-1976)

FOREWORD

Bishop Basil Hopko, S.T.D., the Auxiliary Bishop of the Prjashev Eparchy (1947–1976), is our modern day Confessor of the Faith. This booklet is written in testimony to the loyalty of the Ruthenian people to the Apostolic See of Rome and to their living faith. Bishop Hopko's loyalty and faith were tried by the fire of sufferings, and yet, using his own words, "God's mercy and my faith saved me!" He passed to a better life July 23, 1976, in peace and with a complete resignation to the will of God.

For his faith and loyalty to the Apostolic See, Bishop Hopko spent almost fourteen years in a Communist prison and four more years in exile, under police surveillance. He also suffered for his love and dedication to his Ruthenian people, for which he was persecuted, maligned and even removed from the administration of his native Eparchy. Nevertheless, he did not turn bitter towards his persecutors, but willingly forgave all harm unjustly inflicted on his person, neither did he seek any vindication or recognition for himself, readily accepting even the humiliating decision of the Apostolic See not to appoint him the Eparch of Prjashev.

I never met him personally. However, since 1946, when he invited me to write for the Prjashev Eparchial fortnightly, *Blahovistnik*, he impressed me by his lofty ideals. Since that time I have not stopped writing, although the Communist takeover in Czechoslovakia (1948) interrupted our epistolary relations. Twenty years later, during Dubcek's regime of 1968, we renewed our acquaintance. This time I was called to defend the Bishop-Confessor against the unscrupulous campaign of a certain Slovak group of clergy in Koshice. On account of this defense, I also had to endure numerous personal attacks, malicious accusations, even a canonical reprimand. But I did it gladly, in the interest of truth.

Since 1968, I wrote more than forty articles about Bishop Hopko, which were printed in various languages and in various periodicals. For such work, I needed first hand information, which I received from Bishop Hopko himself. Hence my priceless collection of some sixty-two letters written by the bishop. The last one, dated April 6, 1976, was typed by a Sister in charge (only signed by him), since he was already losing his sight. These

letters from the Bishop serve as the basis for this brief biography. There are many things which, for obvious reasons, I cannot yet publish. Hopefully, the time will come when I will be able to tell the *whole story*. But even this abbreviated edition is sufficient to bring out the spiritual greatness of Bishop Hopko.

The bishop's letters are quoted by me freely in this booklet, without indication of reference. All other sources, however, are specified in the text. I dedicate this booklet with filial devotion to our beloved *Bishop Basil Hopko, S.T.D.*, on the occasion of what would have been his seventy-fifth birthday, hoping to perpetuate a memory of his "sacrifice for his Church, his ready acceptance of God's will, and his genuine love for his people." (cf. Bishop Dudick's art. in the *Eastern Cath. Life*, May 26, 1974, p. 2)

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BISHOP BASIL HOPKO— CONFESSOR OF THE FAITH (1904–1976)

Bishop Paul P. Gojdich, OSBM., in announcing the appointment of his Auxiliary Bishop, wrote: “At the time when the angels from heaven are bringing us ‘news of great joy’ (Lk. 2:10), we also bring joyous news to our people. His Holiness, Pope Pius XII, has heard our humble plea and has granted us an Auxiliary Bishop in the person of Monsignor Basil Hopko, S.T.D., Professor at our Eparchial Seminary.

“In the person of Monsignor Hopko, episcopal dignity is bestowed upon a priest who, by twenty years of his dedicated service, has proved himself worthy and well-deserving of such high honor. His priestly work, first as a pastor in Prague and, later, as Spiritual Director at the Seminary, Bishop’s Secretary, Instructor of Religion and, finally, as Professor of Moral and Pastoral Theology, was always most conscientious, generous and full of zeal.

“The Bishop-Elect never sought his own interest, but always tried to serve the cause of Jesus Christ, his Church and his people. The main traits of his personality, which enabled him to reach such a high dignity, were his unquestionable loyalty to the Catholic Church, his great love for the Eastern Rite, and his untiring zeal and dedication to his work. These same noble traits of his priestly character are for us a guarantee the Bishop-Elect will be of great help to us not only in the administration of our widely extended Eparchy, but also in its restoration after the deplorable destruction of the war.” (cf. *Blahovistnik*, Jan. 25, 1947, p. 1)

Bishop Gojdich did not exaggerate the noble qualities of his Auxiliary, who fully justified his expectations. By his unselfish service and dedication, Bishop Hopko proved beyond any doubt that he was, indeed, *Axios*—worthy of his episcopal dignity. For his Catholic faith and loyalty to the Apostolic See he suffered persecution, imprisonment, and brutal humiliation. At the end of his dedicated life, he went through a sorrowful agony, when “his own” received him not. Rightly then he deserves the honor of a true *Confessor of the Faith*, for he knew how to suffer for the sake of Christ and His Gospel.

1. PRIESTLY VOCATION

Bishop Basil Hopko, S.T.D. was born April 21, 1904, in the Ruthenian village of Hrabске, near Bardejov, in the hilly District of Sharish. He was preceded by an older sister Mary, born in 1900. Bishop's parents, Basil and Anna nee Petrenko, were poor peasants, who had to support themselves and their children with the work of their bare hands. His father, besides working on the farm of his parents, was also engaged by the parish as a bell-ringer. In the summer of 1905, while ringing the bells during a thunder storm, he was struck by lightning and killed. In 1908, his mother left her two children with her parents and emigrated to the United States. She found work with the Johnson & Johnson Co. in New Brunswick, New Jersey and sent her meager earnings to her father to support her children.

In 1913, Bishop's maternal uncle, Demetrius Petrenko Jr., was ordained a priest and assumed responsibility for Basil's further education. Bishop Hopko received his primary and secondary education in Hungarian schools, first in Bardejov and, then, in Prjashev. After World War I, when the entire Prjashevschina was incorporated into newly established Czechoslovakia, he continued his studies in the Hungarian Evangelical Gymnasium of Prjashev, from which he was graduated with honors in 1923.

Upon his enrollment into the Eparchial Seminary, Bishop Dionysius Nyaradi, S.T.D., who administered the Eparchy of Prjashev at that time (1922-1927), decided to send this promising seminarian to Rome for his theological studies. Before his departure, Hopko was asked to sign a promise he would receive Holy Orders in celibacy. The youth, according to his own admission, was "afraid to make such an important decision" at that time. He, therefore, decided to remain in Prjashev.

After his second year in the seminary, Bishop Hopko was drafted into the army and spent some long months in military barracks in Prague as an assistant to the military chaplain. On Sundays, he would gather all the Ruthenian soldiers and take them to Greek Catholic services. The leading personality of the Ruthenian community in Prague, at that time, was Dr. John Parkanyi, who represented Subcarpathian Ruthenia in the Czechoslovak government. He took a liking to the young seminarian-soldier and promised to bring him back to Prague after his priestly ordination. And indeed he eventually did bring him back; but not without interesting intervening complications.



HOPKO'S GRADUATION PICTURE (1923)

Bishop Hopko finished his theological studies in 1928. Prior to his ordination, his mother asked him to come and visit her in the United States. She had hoped her son would like the country and would request Bishop Basil Takach (1924–1948) to ordain him for the Pittsburgh Exarchate. As he was preparing for his journey, he became ill. Some sort of putrid cavity suddenly appeared on his back. But, let us hear how the bishop himself described his own agony:

“When I finished the fourth year of Theology, my mother insisted I come to the United States and stay at least a year with her. She even sent me the necessary money, in the sum of 14,000 Czechoslovak crowns. As I was preparing for my journey, I became sick. On my back there appeared some kind of cavity and the doctor ordered an operation. I was ashamed to have the operation performed in Prjashev, where everyone knew me, so I decided to go to Koshice.

“In order to save some money, I asked for the cheapest surgeon. Thus, I was operated on by an inexperienced intern. The operation revealed that I was a part of twins. The other twin had not developed properly and its remains had grown into my back, between the shoulders. Since the operation was unsuccessful, the wound continued to discharge matter. I had to stay in the hospital for seven long months. They operated on my back three more times. Nevertheless, the cavity would not heal. Naturally, I had to spend all my trip-money on the hospital and doctors, and I gave up any hope of seeing my mother. At that time, I did not realize it was God’s will, for He wanted me to stay in my native country.

“Just before Christmas of 1928, I decided to make a novena to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. I also made a promise that, in the event of my recovery, I would accept Holy Orders in celibacy. During the novena, I attended the Divine Liturgy and received Holy Communion for the same intention every day. The doctors usually examined my wound and changed the dressing every morning. In the morning of my last day of the novena, which coincided with Christmas Eve, my doctor looked surprised. He immediately called his colleague and exclaimed: ‘Look, the wound is healed!’ Astonished, I asked whether it was true. In their amazement, they just nodded their heads. I had to remain in the hospital three more days for observation. I was then released and returned home.”

The happy young man hastened to Prjashev and asked Bishop

Paul P. Gojdich, OSBM. (1927–1960) to ordain him in the celibate state. The bishop, too, was surprised and added: "Here I can see the hand of God!" Then he continued: "Some time ago I received an urgent letter from Prague, in which our Greek Catholic community begs me to send them a priest, possibly Father Hopko. Since there was no hope of your speedy recovery, I decided to send them Father Gresh." And then, showing an envelope addressed to Father Gresh, Bishop Gojdich said: "Here is his appointment, ready to be mailed. But now I will not mail it; I will wait for your ordination. The people in Prague will be happy to hear the good news."

Hopko was ordained a priest February 3, 1929, and was immediately assigned to Prague. With St. Paul, we can only remark: "It is impossible to understand the ways of God." (Rom. 11:33).

2. PRIESTLY SERVICE

At that time many Greek Catholic officials, students, soldiers, and various types of workers lived in Prague, the capital of Czechoslovakia. In 1926, Bishop Nyaradi had sent the Rev. Emil Midlik to Prague to organize a Greek Catholic parish. Burdened by his family, Father Midlik was unable to do the necessary missionary work.

Two years later, he was relieved of this assignment. Thus, in February of 1929, a newly ordained priest, Father Basil Hopko, was appointed to Prague. Having at his disposal two small rooms in St. Nicholas' Roman Catholic parish, he started his missionary work in Bohemia with great zeal and dedication. In a short time he obtained the beautiful church of St. Clement from the Archbishop of Prague, and adapted it to the requirements of the Byzantine Rite. Thus, since 1931, St. Clement's Church has become a spiritual center for the Ruthenian faithful of all Bohemia.

It is to the credit of the dedicated work of Father Hopko that the Government approved the establishment of a Greek Catholic parish in Prague. It was canonically erected by a decree of the Holy See, dated January 1, 1934, and placed under the jurisdiction of the Bishop of Prjashev. Bishop Gojdich immediately appointed Father Hopko as the first pastor of St. Clement's Greek Catholic Church in Prague. Here is what one of our young students, who studied in Prague, said:

"On account of the vast territory and continuous political

meddling, the work of the Greek Catholic pastor in Prague was not an easy task. But Father Hopko was the right man for this position. He was an able organizer. In a short period of time, he formed a closely knit parish. Due to his efforts and solicitude, the parish received the beautiful church of St. Clement as a gift from the Latin Archdiocese, obtained canonical status, and necessary financial support.

“In his pastoral zeal, Father Hopko displayed a great love for poor people, workers and Ruthenian youth. These were times of economic depression. Many of our people came to Prague empty-handed, looking for some kind of work. Father Hopko took care of them with a fatherly concern. He was well known in various administrative offices. He was able, therefore, to find work, lodging or even some financial assistance for these people. Many Ruthenian professional people owe their education to Father Hopko.

“Father Hopko paid special attention to our youth in pursuit of higher education. He organized them into a very active *Society of Greek Catholic Students*, and provided them with continued religious formation. To keep them out of dangerous places, he encouraged them in various projects. He organized young working girls into *St. Anne's Circle*, while the soldiers and working boys were enrolled into *the Union of Greek Catholic Youth*.

“Our students as well as the workers in Prague remember with gratitude their pastor at St. Clement's, the Rev. Basil Hopko, for his genuine love of our people and our Church. At that time, the Communists were trying to get our people into their organizations by every means. Father Hopko eagerly attended meetings of our youth and, in his fatherly concern, warned them of ‘*false prophets*’ who, for the prize of a better job, lodging or scholarship, tried to involve our young people in their party. Father Hopko never ceased to admonish them to hold fast to their faith and religious heritage. Who knows how many Ruthenian students and workers in Prague would have been lured by the Communists into their own camp without Father Hopko's surveillance? I am sure that, in the annals of St. Clement's parish, his name will be inscribed in golden letters.” (From my—*Private Files*)

From this testimony of a young student, who eventually became a priest, one can conceive a general idea of Father Hopko's pastoral zeal. Justly then, in 1936, he was awarded the dignity of Papal Chamberlain with the title of Monsignor. In the same



FATHER HOPKO WITH HIS MOTHER (1932)

year, because of extreme exhaustion, Monsignor Hopko was transferred to the Eparchial Seminary in Prjashev as Spiritual Director. He also gave religious instructions in the secondary schools to Greek Catholic students. In 1937, he was appointed Consistorial Consultor.

While in Prague, Father Hopko somehow managed to continue his higher theological studies at the famous Charles University. He completed his last semester at the Komensky University in Bratislava, where he received a Doctor of Sacred Theology degree in 1940. In this way he attempted to compensate for refusing to pursue higher theological studies in Rome.

Monsignor Basil Hopko, S.T.D. was proud of his Ruthenian ethnicity, but he never allowed this to interfere with his priestly service. He always tried to satisfy the spiritual needs of all nationality groups in the Eparchy, whether they were Hungarians,

Slovaks or Ruthenians. He spoke all three languages fluently and used them casually, according to pastoral needs. He clearly explained his "national policy" in an article, *Faith and Nationality*, in which he condemned all kind of "chauvinism" or "super-nationalism" as the "number one enemy" of Christian charity and mutual understanding among the Greek Catholics of Prjashevschina (cf. *Dushpastyr*, Uzhorod 1931, p. 187-191). It would be a great injustice, therefore, to accuse him of any national partiality in his pastoral work. Nevertheless, he became a victim of Slovak chauvinism, which haunted him all his life.

It is not my intention to speak about the insidious Slovak campaign against Bishop Paul P. Gojdich, OSBM., which has been sufficiently described and documented by Monsignor Hopko himself in his book, *His Excellency Paul Gojdich, OSBM.—On His Twentieth Episcopal Jubilee* ("J. E. Pavel Gojdič, ČSVV.—k Jeho 20-ročnomu juvileju," Prjashev 1947). But it must be mentioned here that Monsignor Hopko also became a victim of an unscrupulous Slovak campaign launched against Bishop Gojdich during the Tiso regime, and was forced out of the Eparchial Seminary in 1941. To avoid further implications, Bishop Gojdich appointed Monsignor Hopko his personal Secretary, but the Slovak government refused him a salary.

By 1943, under the pressure of the Holy See, the relations between the Slovak government and the Episcopal Curia of Prjashev were somewhat improved. The Slovak government recognized the academic qualifications of Monsignor Hopko and accepted his appointment to the Eparchial Seminary as Professor of Moral and Pastoral Theology. But the anti-Ruthenian campaign in Prjashevschina continued until the end of World War II and the fall of Tiso's regime.

In Prjashev, Monsignor Hopko once again became active in the youth movement. One of his students fondly recalls him as youth-leader, writing: "Monsignor Hopko was the first to point out to us the beauty of our Eastern Rite and to teach us to love our Ruthenian people and national heritage. He was highly concerned with the future of our Ruthenian youth." (cf. *Blahovistnik*, May 25, 1947, p. 4-5)

After World War II, when Slovak pressure somewhat eased, Monsignor Hopko was entrusted with the Ruthenian religious press, which was banned by the Tiso regime. He began the publication of the religious fortnightly, *Blahovistnik*, the first issue of which appeared on January 1, 1946. He provided our

people with a yearly almanac, "*Kalendarj Blahovistnika*" (1947), and with critically needed spiritual books, under the collective title, *Books of Blahovistnik*. He authored four of these booklets; namely: 1) *The Greek Catholic Church* (1946), 2) *His Excellency Paul Gojdich, OSBM., Bishop of Prjashev (1927-1947)*, 3) *Christ Among Us*—concerning visits and adoration of the Holy Eucharist (1947), and 4) *Christ in Us*—on frequent Holy Communion (1948).

Foreseeing a political turn-over in Czechoslovakia, in the fall of 1946, Bishop Gojdich petitioned the Holy See to appoint an Auxiliary Bishop in the person of Monsignor Basil Hopko, S.T.D., who was one of the most promising young priests in the Prjashev Eparchy. Bishop Gojdich's petition was granted and Monsignor Hopko was appointed Auxiliary Bishop of Prjashev. His episcopal ordination took place May 11, 1947. He became the right hand of Bishop Gojdich, who already started to prepare his faithful for a Communist take-over.

3. BEGINNING OF HIS CALVARY

The appointment of Monsignor Basil Hopko as Auxiliary Bishop of Prjashev came as a blow to Slovak nationalists, including some Eparchial priests, who organized themselves into a Slovak "religious" society, *the Union of SS. Cyril & Methodius*, under the leadership of the Rev. John Murin, instructor of religion in Michalovce. It should be remembered the Apostolic See, at that time, was properly informed as to the national situation in the Eparchy of Prjashev.

Vatican circles were alerted to the fact the Slovak government intended to use the Greek Catholic Church as a vehicle of Slovakization in Eastern Slovakia. To maintain a national balance in the Eparchy, Pope Pius XII, therefore, decided to appoint Bishop Hopko, who shared the national policy of Bishop Gojdich. Bishop Gojdich had explained: "Other nationalities (*Slovaks—A. P.*) have their own government officials, political parties and their national representatives in Parliament. But the major part of my faithful (*Ruthenians—A. P.*) have no one to defend their national and cultural rights. Consequently, when my own people, in confidence, turn to me for help, I cannot turn them down, I must at least to try to help them, even though later I will suffer for it." (cf. Bishop's *Jubilee Book*, 1947, p. 51-52)

Seeing the systematic Slovakization of the Ruthenian people, Bishop Gojdich also appealed to the national conscience of his clergy, saying:



AS NEWLY ORDAINED BISHOP (1947)

“Open widely your priestly hearts and extend your love to our despised Ruthenian people, who deserve a much better fate. Being surrounded on all sides by their (national—A. P.) foes, they find themselves in constant danger of losing not only their souls but also their own national identity. We (the clergy—A. P.) are the leaders, placed by Almighty God to lead our people. It is our vocation and our duty to help them. We will be held responsible before God and before history for both their religious and national future!” (cf. A. Pekar, *Bishop Paul P. Gojdich, OSBM.*, Pittsburgh, Pa. 1968, p. 24–25)

The unscrupulous Slovakization of the Ruthenian people and the Church in present time Prjashevschina is the best proof of the bishop’s premonition and his wise move in securing the assistance of Bishop Hopko, who was proud of his Ruthenian ancestry and had an ardent love for the Greek Catholic Church (cf. Hopko’s *Greko-katolicheskaia Cerkov*, Prjashev 1946). In his love and dedication to his abandoned people, Bishop Hopko was supported by his beloved mother, who returned to him in

1930, just as he was organizing St. Clement's parish in Prague. In one of his letters Bishop Hopko reminisced:

“After my appointment to Prague, I was joined by my mother, who provided me with excellent housekeeping. I cannot think of a better arrangement. She took such good care of me as only one's mother can. After twenty-two years of hard work in America she returned to me and stayed with me in Prague for six and one-half years. When we moved to Prjashev and I, as Spiritual Director, had to stay in the seminary, my mother bought a house, where I visited her every day, trying to help her as much as I could. When the Slovak government compelled Bishop Gojdich to remove me from the seminary, because I gave spiritual conferences to seminarians in the Ruthenian language, he appointed me his Secretary and I had to live in the bishop's residence for four more years. But, in 1945, after being appointed professor at the seminary, I finally moved in with my mother and lived with her five more years until my imprisonment. On the day of my episcopal ordination (May 11, 1947—A. P.) my mother was the happiest woman in the entire world.”

In the spring of 1948, the Communists seized complete control of the government in Czechoslovakia and initiated their anti-religious propaganda. Dark clouds began to accumulate over the Eparchy of Prjashev. As Bishops Gojdich and Hopko were preparing the faithful for the worst, the Communists struck. On April 28, 1950, they forcibly liquidated the Eparchy of Prjashev and imprisoned Bishop Gojdich. Bishop Hopko was isolated and placed under police surveillance. The Communists tried to persuade him to join the Orthodox Church, but all their efforts failed. Finally, on October 18, 1950, they imprisoned him also. He was taken to Secret Police headquarters in Ruzin, near Prague, where they intended to “condition” him for a trial.

After Bishop Hopko's imprisonment, the Communist authorities confiscated his house and forced his mother from her own home. Even though Mrs. Hopko proved the house was her private property, they assigned the house to an Orthodox priest. Homeless and deprived of her son, Mrs. Hopko passed away on January 30, 1952. The Communist authorities did not allow Bishop Hopko to attend the funeral of his own mother. She was buried in a public cemetery in Prjashev by an Orthodox priest.

4. PRISONER FOR HIS FAITH

After his imprisonment, Bishop Hopko was taken to the central investigation prison in Ruzin, Bohemia, where they tried to build up a case of "*spying*" and "*treason*" against him. Endless nerve-wracking interrogations began. First, they locked him in a solitary dark cell. Then they made him stand on his feet or walk for four days and nights without rest. During this time he was not permitted to sleep, not even to lean against a wall. His daily diet consisted of a piece of hard bread and glass of water. Shortly, his legs became swollen like logs. In his mind he already began to envision his own funeral. But he kept praying for moral strength to remain faithful to his Catholic faith.

When the investigating officers realized they could not break his spirit, they concentrated on making him "*confess his crimes.*" During the second stage of his tortures, he was allowed to sleep at night, but during the day he had to walk and walk. Thus he walked for four entire months. (to be exact, for 122 days—A. P.), praying to St. Joseph for the grace to "be permitted at least to sit down." After such gruelling exertion, Bishop Hopko was allowed to sit down under the condition he would write his "confession." Inventing all kinds of stories, he kept writing for two weeks, just to be able to sit. Among other stories, he made up a tale about training "young spies." In this story he described in detail how he taught young boys foreign languages, how he led them through basic military training and how he drilled them with wooden rifles in order to send them later into the Soviet Union as spies. These "young spies," he continued, used to send him classified military information, which he then forwarded to the Apostolic Nuncio in Bratislava.

In reference to these "confessions," Bishop Hopko later remarked: "By now I do not remember exactly what I had written, but at the end of my '*confession*' I added that all these stories were not true and that I had invented them just to please my investigators." This last remark infuriated his investigating officers and they punished him with two additional weeks of walking. But the State Prosecutor, whose name Bishop Hopko did not remember, ingeniously picked up an incriminating fact from his "confession." After all, Bishop Hopko did have contacts with the Apostolic Nuncio, who was a representative of a "foreign power." Consequently, on account of his contacts with the foreign power, (Apostolic See—A. P.), Bishop Hopko automatically became a "*spy*" and a "*traitor.*"

Bishop Hopko was then taken to the Leopoldov prison in Slovakia, where his “confession” was properly doctored and a legal case against him formally prepared. In the spring of 1952, he was brought to trial and sentenced by the Slovak Supreme Court in Bratislava to fifteen years imprisonment for “subversive activity” and for having “contacts with a foreign power.”

Thus began his “pilgrimage” from one prison to another, twenty-one times in all. Five times he was in Leopoldov prison, twice in Illava, four times in Valdice, and so on. He was not spared even the worst penitentiaries in the country, those of Ruzin and Mirov. There he had to do the most menial jobs, like making cellophane bags, patching flour sacks, mending mattresses, making ropes, etc. Reminiscing on his prison days, the bishop remarks:

“During my imprisonment, there were many difficult moments, which I would not wish even for my greatest enemies. Nevertheless, I consider my prison days as a higher education in humility. In prison I learned a great many things as, for example, how to cope with different kinds of people, how to observe silence, how to be of real service to others. You know, the prison by itself is not so terrible a place after all. What is terrible is the company you have to keep, being locked in the same cell with criminals, spies, insane people and all sorts of characters.”



**BISHOP WITH HIS SISTER AND THE SISTERS
OF THE HOLY CROSS IN OSEK (1966).**

5. SUCCESSOR OF BISHOP GOJDICH

Early in 1960, Bishop Hopko met Bishop Gojdich in the Leopoldov prison, as he was walking in the backyard. At first Bishop Gojdich did not recognize him. But later he spent long hours with him, especially when Bishop Hopko started to suffer from acute depression. In those lonely moments, Bishop Gojdich was a great consolation to his Auxiliary, encouraging him to hold out. Bishop Hopko always maintained great admiration for Bishop Gojdich, for whom he even provided a confessor, before his untimely death (July 17, 1960), in the person of imprisoned Father Aloysius Vrana.

The last month or so, Bishop Gojdich was confined to the prison hospital and his Auxiliary was not allowed to visit him there. And yet, just a few days before his death, Bishop Gojdich was seen in the courtyard imparting his last blessing to the prisoners. F. Ondrushka, who attended Bishop Gojdich that day, recalls:

“Several days before his death, Bishop Gojdich asked me to take him in a wheelchair to the courtyard, where some of the inmates were taking a walk. As we were leaving the building, the Bishop remarked: ‘Before I die, I would like to send my last blessing to the people!’ Just at that moment, there was a group of inmates from another ward marching across the yard to keep their appointment with the dentist in the hospital building. Bishop Gojdich immediately recognized Bishop Hopko among the prisoners, pulled himself up and, in a subdued voice, imparted to him as to his successor his last blessing.” Bishop Hopko recalled the incident and added: “In my conversation with the late Bishop Gojdich, he often mentioned that after his death I would succeed him as the Ordinary of Prjashev.”

Long years of imprisonment and harsh treatment finally undermined Bishop Hopko’s health. He suffered acute mental depression. Yet the authorities did not permit him to be taken to the hospital, hoping he would have a mental break-down. But the good Lord sent him a Jesuit priest (Bishop Hopko did not mention his name—A. P.), who extended to him moral support and kept his mind sound. Bishop Hopko described his own sickness in the following way:

“Mental depression is a very humiliating and unpleasant illness, during which I lost all hope and desire to live. Everything looked gloomy. I lost all appetite, suffered severe irregularity, and was unable to fall asleep. In a short period of time, I became

only a shadow of a man and could hardly walk. But the good Lord, through the prayers of good people, saved me.”

After eighteen months, Bishop Hopko regained his health and was able to function normally again. But, in the fall of 1963, he suffered another attack. Only this time, he had a more humane warden who immediately sent him to a clinic in Prague. Under professional care his attack of depression lasted only six months. On the advise of his doctor, Bishop Hopko then wrote a petition asking to be released from prison. Strangely enough, his petition was granted and he was released from prison in 1964, on “three years trial.” They placed him in an old-age home in Osek, Bohemia, where he remained under constant surveillance.

The Bishop’s new home was an old Cistercian monastery, which the Communist authorities turned into an old-age home for clergy and religious. It was under the care of Holy Cross Sisters and School Sisters of Notre Dame. In Osek, Bishop Hopko had another relapse which, however, lasted only three months. This time he underwent shock therapy. The Bishop ascribed his quick recovery to Mary, the Mother of God, saying: “I was healed this time by the blessed Mother of Lourdes through the prayers of the Holy Cross Sisters. The day after they finished their Novena, I suddenly felt as if born again. From that time on I felt well, although the doctors discovered I had diabetes.”

In another letter, from the same period (April of 1966), the Bishop writes: “I never had it so good as here, except when I was living with my mother. You know, a mother is always a mother! But even with my mother I did not enjoy such attention and comfort as here. The most important thing for me is that here I have sufficient time for prayer and I am able to lead a truly spiritual life.”

After the long period in prison, even an old-age home seemed to the bishop a little paradise. But the best therapy for him at that time was the visit of his sister Mary, who has lived since 1918 in New Brunswick, N.J. After forty-four years of separation, Mrs. Dragan visited her brother in Osek in 1966, and spent almost a whole month with him. On that occasion, Bishop Hopko received permission to accompany his sister to their native village of Hrabske and to visit their relatives. Sharing his feelings of this visit, he wrote:

“I was little pleased with my visit to my native village. There is only an Orthodox priest there and the people are forced to attend the Orthodox church, even my own relatives. They



BISHOPS GOJDICH & HOPKO CONCELEBRATING (1949)

explained to me that they wanted to pray and to hear God's word. In case some of the villagers attended the services in the Roman Catholic church three villages away, the Orthodox broke all their windows. In Prjashevschina there are many villages like mine. But I told my cousins they should always remember they are Catholics and they attend the Orthodox church only out of necessity. And in case of a death in the family, they should tell the Orthodox priest the dying person is a Catholic and they had called him only because there was no Catholic priest in the village."

During his visit to Prjashevschina, Bishop Hopko was not allowed to celebrate a Divine Liturgy in public, much less to preach. But he succeeded in contacting some of his priests and

religious. In the home of Osek there were about 160 old Roman Catholic Sisters, who were concentrated there from various Czech, Slovak and Hungarian convents. Bishop Hopko was always ready to hear their confessions, give them spiritual conferences in their own language or even a week-long retreat. The bishop's kindness and charity was known to all. They gave him a nick-name: "*Our Golden Man.*" He was always happy to help others. Even the money his sister brought him from the United States he distributed to the needy, saying: "Dear sister, the Lord always takes care of me and provides me with everything I need!"

One of the happiest days of Bishop Hopko in Osek was May 11, 1967, when he celebrated the 20th anniversary of his episcopal ordination. For that occasion many of the priests, Basilian monks and Sisters came to Osek and took part in the solemnities. Of course, they came only as civilians. Commenting on their singing, Bishop Hopko wrote: "The occasion was excellent publicity for our beautiful Eastern Rite. The impressive celebration of the Episcopal Liturgy and singing was a clear indication of our survival and love for our own heritage. If only we would have freedom of religion!"

In October of the same year, Bishop Hopko reported on his health as follows: "Once again I am enjoying good health and it makes me happy, since I am able to work. My nerves and my lungs are in excellent condition and, surprisingly, I am gaining the same energy and fervor, I used to have in my better years. I hope the good Lord will permit me to make up for all those years I had to spend in prison. Nevertheless, I am completely resigned to the will of God."

6. REVIVAL OF EPARCHY

The year of 1968 brought about the liberalization of the Communist regime in Czechoslovakia under the leadership of the Party's Secretary, Alexander Dubcek. Early in March of that year, the Czechoslovak government agreed to grant permission to re-establish the Greek Catholic Church which was forcibly suppressed in 1950. Bishop Hopko was immediately released from his confinement in Osek and began a drive for the restoration of the Eparchy of Prjashev. The bishop's efforts, sustained by a good number of the clergy and people, were successful. After prolonged and numerous consultations, Dub-



**WELCOMED BY HIS PEOPLE IN VYŠŇYJ ORLIK (1970)
PASTOR: Rev. Marian Potash, OSBM.**

chek's government officially recognized the Greek Catholic Church in Czechoslovakia, and, by the decree of June 13, 1968, authorized its renewal.

St. John's Cathedral in Prjashev was returned to the Greek Catholics on July 7, 1968, but the episcopal residence remained in the hands of the Orthodox. Two weeks later, the Bishop's Chancery was re-established in Prjashev, but it had to use limited facilities in the cathedral's rectory. Steps were taken for Bishop Hopko's early rehabilitation and his prompt appointment to the administration of the Eparchy. However, it was not realized since a group of Slovak priests decided to impose a "Slovak bishop" in Prjashev.

I do not intend to describe in detail the Slovak campaign against Bishop Hopko, which I have done already in a documented essay in 1973. But, in writing the bishop's biography, I cannot pass it over in silence since it caused a great deal of harm to the Bishop and to the Eparchy of Prjashev. For this reason, I will quote a longer passage from an article, entitled "*Rehabilitation or Speculation?*" that appeared at that time in a periodical.

"Certain proof of their (i.e. Slovak extremist group of the priests—A. P.) speculation in this entire affair is the regrettable

way in which they handled the rehabilitation of their head, their only living bishop, Dr. Basil Hopko. As everybody knows, the bishop spent long years in prison and was released in 1964. And yet, until this day, he has not been rehabilitated, because they do not want him to have the administration of the re-established Greek Catholic Church in Czechoslovakia. In the meantime, which is disgusting even to mention, they intentionally spread all kinds of malicious rumors against him, taking all necessary steps to replace him with a Slovak bishop. They are proposing complete removal of Bishop Hopko or, better yet, his "promotion" to the title of Archbishop under the condition he would live far away from his people, in Prague or even in Rome. We admit the fact that among the Greek Catholics of Prjashevschina there are many Slovaks who, originally, were Ruthenians. But the actions taken against a living bishop and the manner in which they are done are dishonorable for any religious or even civic group." (cf. *Nove Zhytt'a*, Prjashev, July 27, 1968, p. 3)

The conspiracy of the Slovak group of Greek Catholic priests against Bishop Hopko not only brought new sufferings to our Confessor but also had deplorable consequences for the entire Eparchy: 1) it caused great confusion from the beginning in church leadership; 2) it kept a great number of the faithful in the Orthodox church; 3) it involved the undesirable Slovaki- zation of our Liturgy, etc. In some instances, even so-called *Slovak* parishes remained or returned again to Orthodoxy, just to be able to preserve their Old-Slavonic services, e.g. in Ubrezh, Shumjac, Kuzmice, Pozdishovce, etc. A few years later, one of the more responsible Slovak priests publicly confessed:

"We did not foresee the deplorable consequences of Slovaki- zation. A great number of the faithful are returning again to the Orthodox Church; in many villages the people are insisting on a common use of our churches, and our priests, by their un- becoming behavior, inspire hatred rather than love. Some government officials informed me that in every village, where there exists dissention among the people on account of Slovaki- zation of church services, they will reappoint an Orthodox priest."

Not to be repeatedly accused of bias by the same Slovak group, I turn to the report of Bishop Hopko to the Holy See, dated October 19, 1968: "I have good reason to believe the Slovak members of the Acting Committee, headed by Rev. John Murin, have made attempts to remove my person from the administra-

tion of the Eparchy and, thus, they have considerably curtailed my episcopal authority.”

On October 29, 1968, the mortal remains of Bishop Gojdich were transferred from the prison cemetery in Leopoldov to Prjashev. On that occasion, Bishop Hopko shared some of his memories with the faithful. Among other things, he mentioned various abuses of the Slovak Roman Catholic clergy, which he often discussed with the late Bishop Gojdich. Believing in fair play, Bishop Hopko explained: “I had to say these things so that the people would know the entire truth about their martyred Bishop, who was constantly persecuted by Slovak circles. In my talk I only conveyed the Bishop’s own thoughts. Of course, the talk did not please many of our “Slovak friends” and they immediately condemned me. But the people, who were constant victims of such injustice, were happy to know the truth.”

The good Bishop did not even suspect that, by his speech in the interest of truth, he destroyed his chances to be confirmed as the Ordinary of Prjashev. The Slovak forces regrouped behind the very influential Bishop Ambrose Lazik of Trnava (d. 1969) who, at that time, played an important role in Slovak church politics.

7. HIS CALVARY CONTINUES

On December 9, 1968, Bishop Hopko finally arrived in Rome, where he intended to settle all the pressing problems of the Eparchy. In sincerity, he later admitted: “The gentlemen in the Vatican did not like to hear what I had to tell them.”

It is too early yet to publish some of Bishop Hopko’s letters, but I would like to quote him, saying: “I know it is not for me to criticize higher ecclesiastical circles, but I think it is not a sin to burst out weeping from a sorrowful heart.” In the interest of the same truth, therefore, I will try to describe Bishop Hopko’s side of the story concerning his removal from the administration of the Eparchy of Prjashev.

Bishop Hopko received an audience with the Holy Father *two weeks* after his arrival in Rome, after the case of his removal was properly prepared. Even before his audience with the Pope, he was informed that the “Slovak government rejected his appointment because he was a *Ruthenian!*” Bishop Hopko described his audience with Pope Paul VI on December 21, 1968, in the following way:

“I was received by the Holy Father with great kindness. He



IN AUDIENCE WITH POPE PAUL VI (1968)



affectionately held my hand for a long time, considering himself fortunate to be able to meet me in person. He also assured me of having all my previous faculties. But to my direct question whether I will return home with the faculties of an Ordinary (i.e. as Bishop of Prjashev—A. P.), the Holy Father did not answer. When I repeated my question, he remained silent for a while and then, pensively, told me I would receive my answer in writing before my departure.”

At the airport, just before his departure, Bishop Hopko was reached by an official of the Sacred Congregation for the Oriental Churches and was handed a sealed envelope, addressed to Bishop Ambrose Lazik of Trnava. The letter contained the appointment of the Rev. John Hirka as the Apostolic Administrator of Prjashev, while Bishop Hopko’s faculties were limited to those of an Auxiliary Bishop.

Upon his return from Rome, Bishop Hopko was informed by his lawyer about his complete rehabilitation. The Bishop immediately contacted the Office for Ecclesiastical Affairs in Bratislava, where he was advised to write two separate petitions: 1) that his court sentence be deleted from his records, and 2) that he be recognized by the State as the Bishop of Prjashev. When Bishop Hopko informed the Deputy about the appointment of Father Hirka to that post, the Deputy was surprised and firmly replied: “Rev. Hirka cannot be an Ordinary of Prjashev, since he does not have State’s approval!” In his letter the bishop continues:

“He (The Deputy—A. P.) frankly told me all official circles are waiting for my appointment and, for this reason, the District Office in Koshice even precipitated my rehabilitation. Then he added: ‘Justice and humaneness demand that you be appointed Ordinary, since you have been waiting *so long* for your rehabilitation. From our side (meaning the Government’s side—A. P.) there is *no objection* regarding your appointment.’ ” Here the bishop remarks, “There is something strange and disturbing in this whole affair!” He had been told in Rome the Slovak government had rejected his appointment.

It took a great deal of diplomatic maneuvering on the part of Bishop Lazik to receive the State’s approval for Father Hirka, since it was granted only on April 2, 1969. Prior to that date, Bishop Hopko wrote: “It seems that at the end a Latin Rite Bishop (i.e. Lazik—A. P.) will be appointed our Ordinary, since he has become deeply involved in all our affairs.” Bishop Hopko



GREETED BY ARCHBISHOP S. KOCISKO &
BISHOP M. DUDICK IN ROME (1968)

was right. The appointment of Rev. John Hirka came from Bishop Lazik who, according to the official announcement, has “sacrificed much of his work and efforts in settling the question of the administration of the Greek Catholic Diocese of Preshov.” (cf. *Katolícké Noviny*, Bratislava, April 13, 1969, p. 1)

In order to prevent eventual disturbances among the faithful, Bishop Hopko magnanimously endorsed the appointment of Rev. John Hirka by his *Pastoral Letter* of May 13, 1969, asking the clergy and the people: “Accept your new Ordinary, the Rev. John Hirka, with love and confidence, entrusting to him all your needs and problems, since the recently established Greek Catholic Ordinariate in Prjashev by the approval of

the State as of April 2, 1969, becomes the only main office for all Greek Catholics in Czechoslovakia.”

On April 23, 1969, Bishop Hopko took part in the funeral of Bishop A. Lazik in Trnava, where he celebrated a *Panachida* at his grave. On that occasion, Monsignor John Cheli, who represented the Holy See at Bishop Lazik’s funeral, called Bishop Hopko aside and assured him the arrangement in Prjashev was only *temporary* and the Holy See contemplated rewarding him with the title of the Assistant to the Papal Throne or that of Archbishop. Bishop Hopko’s remark to this offer was very interesting: “They are treating me like a child. First, they punish me and then, the day after, they try to placate me with a piece of candy. By now I am at peace with everyone, and I bow my head to the will of God, as long as the faithful are satisfied.”

Due to such a remark, Bishop Hopko’s promotion, of course, never came. But, from his letters, it seems he soon adjusted himself to his new role: “Now I visit one parish after another, celebrating the Holy Liturgy, confirming the children and preaching the word of God. The people are happy to see their Bishop and they continue to send their letters, insisting on my appointment. I hear that even in Rome they are not satisfied with the decision they have made and they would be ready to appoint me as the Ordinary, but it is too late. As a person, I am satisfied with the arrangement, but the faithful are not. I fear if they find out what really happened, there will be trouble. Since I profess myself a faithful and loyal son of the Catholic Church, I do not want to cause any harm.”

8. FAITHFUL TO THE END

Shortly after his removal from the administration of the Prjashev Eparchy, Bishop Hopko began to feel the Slovak pressure once again. His Old-Slavonic services and Ruthenian sermons became a target of a new Slovak campaign, since they were jealous of the bishop’s popularity. At first, the Bishop preached to Ruthenian people in Ruthenian and to Slovak people in Slovak. But soon the Bishop’s visits were limited only to the Ruthenian parishes, where Father Hirka, as the Administrator, preached first in Slovak while Bishop Hopko was allowed to say a few words in Ruthenian at the end of the Liturgy. In 1969, during the SS. Peter & Paul Pilgrimage in Bardejov, when they tried to take from him even this little privilege, the Bishop reacted:



BISHOP HOPKO'S LAST PICTURE (1975)

“I know ninety percent of the people here are Ruthenian and only ten percent are Slovaks. It is only just, therefore, our people hear a sermon in their own language. Now they (Slovak group—A. P.) don't want me to use my own Ruthenian language, even though justice demands it.”

After the return of Administrator Hirka from Rome in the summer of 1969, Bishop Hopko wrote: “He did not say much since he was in a hurry to go to Koshice (the Slovak's group center—A. P.), where all our troubles started. I only pray our own existence will not end there. By now, they (Slovak group—A. P.) are accustomed to the idea only Slovaks can be in command and the Ruthenian Greek Catholics should completely disappear. They justify their way of action by the government's

policy expecting the administration of the Prjashev Eparchy to adapt an entirely Slovak orientation. All those who dare to interfere with such a course are threatened with prosecution. It seems even I will be deprived of the right to preach, since I am a *Ruthenian* and I use the *Ruthenian* language in my sermons.”

Writing about the harm caused to the Eparchy and to our people by the Acting Committee in Koshice, which was controlled by Slovak extremists, Bishop Hopko remarked in a characteristic manner: “They did something good, but how much harm have they done? I do not consider myself competent to make a judgment. But there are some people who, in time, will properly weigh their actions and give a true estimate.”

What Bishop Hopko feared, happened. His activity was more and more limited, until he was forbidden even to preach. His health also began to decline. Various complications developed. During the last year of his life, he needed constant assistance, charitably extended to him by the Sisters Servants of Mary Immaculate. Nevertheless, he continued to celebrate the Divine Liturgy in his private chapel every morning. In the evening, he attended a High Liturgy in the cathedral.

Bishop Hopko liked to be with people and he gladly accepted an invitation from any parish. The last Sunday before his death, July 19, 1976, he celebrated the Holy Liturgy in Davidovo, in the Zemplin district. He already felt very weak and in his sermon mentioned it was his time. Upon his return, he went each day to confession. When one of the Sisters questioned him, he replied: “There is always something that comes to my mind.” He was getting ready to go . . .

On Wednesday, July 21, 1976, he felt like going somewhere. They took him to Jablon to visit the Sisters there. On his way back, he needed medical attention. On Thursday his condition improved and he kept his regular schedule. Friday morning he slept longer than usual. After the Holy Liturgy, he had visitors and spent some time with the Sisters. When he started to perspire excessively, one of the attending Sisters gave him an injection, which calmed him. Half asleep, he kept repeating: “I want to go home!” When the Sisters tried to tell him he was at home, he only mumbled: “Eh, you do not understand!” and dozed off.

By lunch-time, he awakened and asked for something to eat. After finishing his soup, he felt poorly. The Sisters helped him into an easy-chair where he could rest. As he dozed off, at about 3:00 P.M. on Friday, July 23, 1976, his head suddenly



RESTING IN PEACE (1976)

slumped, and he “gave up his spirit.” (Jn. 19:30) At that moment, a thunder storm broke out, as if announcing the departure of the saintly Bishop-Confessor to his eternal rest.

The body of Bishop Hopko lay in state at St. John’s Cathedral in Prjashev on Wednesday, July 28. The following day interment services were celebrated by the Auxiliary Bishop of Krizevtsi, Jugoslavia, the Most Rev. Joakim Segedi, S.T.D. and Monsignor John Hirka, the Apostolic Administrator of Prjashev. In his Slovak eulogy, Monsignor Hirka tried to describe the feelings of the faithful that came in great numbers for the funeral of **THEIR BISHOP**, saying:

“Our hearts are seized by deep sorrow, since Father (sic) Bishop was part of our people and our Church. By his heroic faith and long sufferings he personified our Venerable Eparchy. He learned humility, and an understanding of others in the school of pain and prayer. To all of us, he was an exalted example of true Christian living, a good Father and a friend. Because of his innocence, he preserved peace of mind to the last moment of his saintly life.” (cf. *Blahovisnyk*, 1976, n. 11, p. 14).

Bishop Hopko had prepared a resting place for himself beside his loving mother in the public cemetery. But the Eparchial

Council, fearing possible provocation, decided to place Bishop's body in the crypt alongside his martyred predecessor, Bishop Paul P. Gojdich, OSBM. Bishop Hopko's love for his people, his great sacrifices for his Church, his ready acceptance of God's will, including the humiliating decision of the Holy See, mark him as a true *Confessor of Faith*.

CONCLUSION

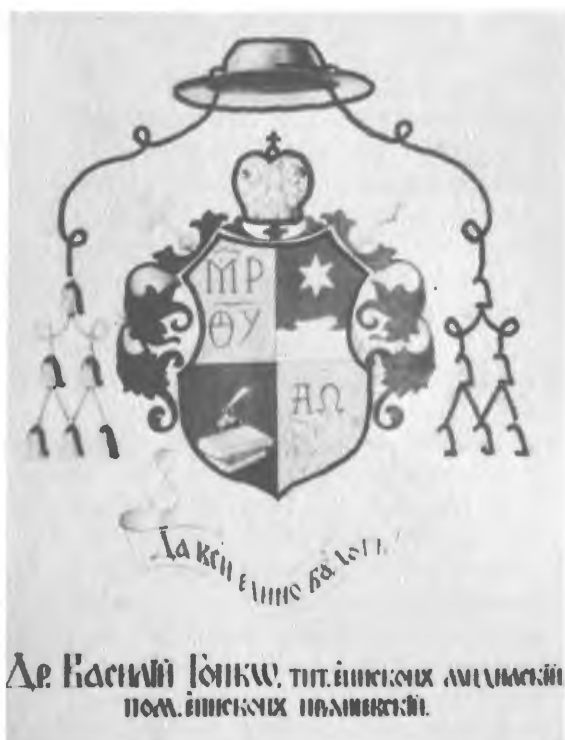
In conclusion, I would like to present Bishop Hopko's description of his *Coat of Arms*, in which he reveals those high ideals by which he lived, suffered and died. Bishop Hopko writes:

"Enclosed I am sending you a picture of my *Coat of Arms*. Its entire design was personally conceived by me and was executed by one of our famous Eparchial painters (Artist Nicholas Jordan—A. P.). My Coat of Arms, tested by the strict rules of heraldry, would be a complete failure. But in its conception I was guided not by the medieval rules of chivalry, but rather by religious sentiments and simplicity.

"The Coat of Arms, as one can observe, starts on top with the Greek initials of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Mother of God, since under her motherly protection I started my episcopal service (he was consecrated on May 11, 1947—A. P.). The adjacent top field symbolizes my complete confidence in the Providence of God—guiding me safely in an oarless boat through the treacherous sea of life by the Star of the Sea (another symbol of Mary—A. P.). Let the sea of my life by its waves take me wherever God wills, but I will never lose heart, knowing the Blessed Mother is always watching over me.

"In the lower right field (in heraldic language—A. P.) there are books and an ink-well, symbolizing my principal work—study and writing. I cannot live without work and I must be constantly active, just as Almighty God is. Man, created to the image and likeness of God (Gen. 1:26), should always be doing something. The last field of my Coat of Arms contains wheat and grapes, the symbols of the Holy Eucharist, the very heart of my priestly ministry. Hovering above are the Greek letters—Alpha and Omega, representing Christ, the 'beginning and the end' of our lives. (Apoc. 1:8) Under the shield is the motto of my priestly service: '*That all may be one*' (Jn. 17:22), borrowed from Christ's *Priestly Prayer*.

"By all these symbols I wish to indicate that under the Patronage of the Blessed Mother I intend to reach my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, by my complete confidence in God, by my filial devotion to the Mother of God, and by my dedicated priestly service within the fold of 'one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church.'"



BISHOP HOPKO'S COAT OF ARMS

In these simple but sincere words of Bishop Hopko we discover the limpid soul of our heroic *Confessor of the Faith*, who remained faithful to his lofty ideals throughout his entire life, marked by many sufferings and tribulations. May his heroic example be a constant inspiration to our oppressed Ruthenian people in Czechoslovakia as they walk their own *Way of the Cross*.

