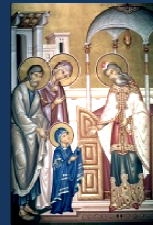


February 5, 2012

# Sunday Sermon

Fr Ambrose Young  
*Entrance of the Theotokos Skete*



Sunday, February 5, 2012 – The Publican and the Pharisee

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In the Name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Today is the Sunday of the Publican and the Pharisee, the first of the preparatory Sundays that will lead us into the holy season of Lent and the Great Fast this year.

But it is also a day on which something very significant for our time has taken place in Munich, Germany—and that is the canonization of the anti-Nazi martyr and passion bearer, the Orthodox Christian Alexander Schmorell, who was executed by beheading by the Nazis in 1943. On the Russian Church calendar this is also, appropriately, the feast of the New Martyrs and Confessors of the Russian Lands, and Orthodox bishops from America, Russia, and all over Europe gathered in Munich for this occasion.

And, glory to God, today we Orthodoxy, regardless of our ethnic background or heritage, may also join them in spirit!

The background to this event is as follows: during the summer of 1942 several leaflets began to circulate in Germany from a very small organization calling itself the “White Rose”. Hundreds of these leaflets were turned in to the Nazi police because even just possessing one of them would result in a long prison sentence. Additionally, some feared that this was actually a Nazi scam to trap dissenters and traitors of the Third Reich. The authorities initially had no clue as to the origin and authorship of these leaflets, but they knew that the largest concentration of them was appearing in the Munich area.

St. Alexander was one of the founders of the White Rose Movement, and while firmly confessing the Orthodox Faith, he resisted the atheistic Nazi regime and urged his close student friends to resist. He was one of five students at the University of Munich who formed this particular resistance group.

February 5, 2012

# Sunday Sermon

Fr Ambrose Young  
Entrance of the Theotokos Skete



This group was inspired by sermons (which, needless to say, were not reported in the German press) given by the Catholic bishop of Munster, August von Galen, who denounced Aryan racism and the Nazi program of extermination of Jews, gypsies, homosexuals, various Christian dissidents, and other so-called “undesirables.” The Gestapo immediately put this good bishop under house arrest, but not daring to imprison him. However, after the war it was discovered that Hitler had placed Bishop von Galen on a list of those to be exterminated at the close of the war.

As the Orthodox writer, Jim Forest, has written: the White Rose Movement envisioned something very “simple but daring: publication of a series of anti-Nazi leaflets...Once launched, the group managed to publish and widely distribute six leaflets advocating active resistance by the German people to Nazi oppression and tyranny. Rejecting fascism and militarism, the White Rose called for a federated Europe committed to tolerance and justice. The leaflets quoted extensively from the Bible, Aristotle, Goethe [and others]... The White Rose also carried out a night-time action of writing anti-Nazi slogans on walls such as ‘Freedom’ and ‘Down with Hitler’ as well as a white swastika with a red slash running through it.

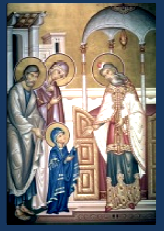
“In less than a year, all the principal participants in the group plus many collaborators had been identified, arrested and executed, but their memory lives on. Today not only has the White Rose become important to Germans, but it is internationally known.”

Alexander Schmorell's father, a medical doctor, was born in Germany but raised in Russia. Alexander's mother was the daughter of a Russian Orthodox priest, and she died when he was two, after which his father married a German woman. In 1921 the family fled Russia and the Communists and moved to Munich, Germany. Alexander grew up bi-lingual—speaking fluently both Russian and German—and always considered himself to be both Russian and German in culture and upbringing. His family and German friends always called him by his nickname, “Shurik”.

As was the case with all young men at that time, after high school he was drafted into the Reich Labor Service and then the Wehrmacht—the Nazi army. Somehow or other he had managed not to take the oath of loyalty to Adolf Hitler, but of course this meant that he was already a marked man. And then, following his mandatory military service, St. Alexander began medical studies in 1939. It was during this period of time that a political and religious awakening took place within his heart and soul, causing him to join other

# Sunday Sermon

Fr Ambrose Young  
Entrance of the Theotokos Skete



like-minded students in quietly founding the White Rose Movement. Although he was required to serve as a combat medic on the Eastern Front in 1942, he strongly opposed the Nazi treatment of enemy soldiers. Everything he saw and witnessed was a constant reproach to his conscience.

After the appearance of the anti-Nazi leaflets and the arrest of two of his friends, Alexander tried to escape to Switzerland, using a forged passport, but was identified and arrested in an air raid shelter on February 24, 1943. Tried and sentenced to death on April 19 of that year in the so-called People's Court, his judge, an ultra-Nazi, had screamed "Traitor!" at him. During his imprisonment he wrote letters to console his family and assure them that he was completely at peace with God and with his fate, and not fearing death in any way or regretting anything he had done. Thus, on the following July 13, at the age of only 25, he was guillotined in Munich at the Stadelheim Prison. He was truly a Witness in very dark times. The kind of witness we need today in our country and in our degenerate culture and in our very feeble and weak Orthodox Church.

Even though living in Germany and a German citizen, Alexander had always remained a devout and observant member of the Orthodox Church, attending the liturgy regularly. His friends remembered that he always had a Bible with him and often spoken in glowing terms of his admiration and love for Orthodoxy.

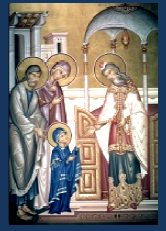
In one of the subversive leaflets St. Alexander helped to author and secretly distribute we find these words: "Everywhere and at all times demons have been lurking in the dark, waiting for the moment when man is weak, when of his own volition he leaves his place in the order of Creation as founded for him by God in freedom, when he yields to the force of evil, separates himself from the powers of a higher order, and after voluntarily taking the first step, he is driven on to the next and the next at a furiously accelerating rate."

Brothers and sisters, are these not words for us to ponder in our own times, too?

After his beheading, St. Alexander was buried just outside the Prison; at the end of the war the American army constructed a military base next to this cemetery. The base was closed in the mid-1990's and all of the buildings reverted to the German government. But, as it happened, and certainly by God's providence,

# Sunday Sermon

Fr Ambrose Young  
Entrance of the Theotokos Skete



the Russian Orthodox community in Munich was searching for a building to use for their church, and they found it here, right across the street from where this martyr is buried!

There are still a few people alive today, although of course very, very old, who remember well St. Alexander and are able to speak of him and testify to his Christian courage and his devotion to holy Orthodoxy. They remind us, and all young people today, that Alexander was “just” a college student, like so many today. Yet he obeyed the voice of his conscience, *even unto death*. These acquaintances of Alexander do not think of him as a “hero”, however, but as something at once less than that, and yet more than that, because of his radiantly shining faith which, according to letters he wrote from prison, deepened day by day. Speaking of his approaching execution he wrote, for instance, “This difficult ‘misfortune’ was necessary, to put me on the right road, and therefore was no misfortune at all... What did I know until now about belief, about a true and deep belief, about the truth, the last and only truth, about God?” In the last letter, written the day of his death, he told his family, “Never forget God!!” Just before he was taken to the guillotine, he told his lawyer, “I’m convinced that my life has to end now, early as it seems, because I have fulfilled my life’s mission. I wouldn’t know what else I have to do on this earth.”

In our culture of abject relativism and subjectivism, we seem to have lost track of even the very concept of “truth”, of absolute truth, and that this “truth” is the Lord Jesus Christ, who is “the way, the truth, and the life.”

In one of the leaflets written by the members of the White Rose, we find this appeal to the German people: “We will not shut up, we are your bad conscience. The White Rose will not leave you in peace. *Freedom and honor!* For ten long years, Hitler and his friends have sickened us with their overuse and misuse of these two wonderful German words, squeezing all meaning out of them, as only amateurs can, casting a nation’s highest values before swine ... Germany’s name will be forever dishonored if German youth does not finally rise up, in vengeance and atonement, to destroy its tormentors and establish a new, spiritual Europe. Fellow Students! The eyes of the German people are on us!”

But, as we know, neither the German people nor their youth rose up, and inevitably, relentlessly, the “Gottterdammerung” of the German folk occurred, according to the divine providence of God.

February 5, 2012

# Sunday Sermon

Fr Ambrose Young  
Entrance of the Theotokos Skete



In the Old Testament apocryphal Book of the Wisdom of Solomon, chapter 7, we find this reading appointed for martyrs and righteous ones:

"1 But the souls of the righteous are in the hand of God, and there shall no torment touch them. 2 In the sight of the unwise they seemed to die: and their departure is taken for misery, 3 And their going from us to be utter destruction: but they are in peace. 4 For though they be punished in the sight of men, yet is their hope full of immortality. 5 And having been a little chastised, they shall be greatly rewarded: for God proved them, and found them worthy for himself. 6 As gold in the furnace hath he tried them, and received them as a burnt offering. 7 And in the time of their visitation they shall shine, and run to and fro like sparks among the stubble. 8 They shall judge the nations, and have dominion over the people, and their Lord shall reign for ever."

"Like sparks among the stubble..."

Brothers and sisters: may we, too, become "like sparks among the stubble"--the "stubble" of our society, our culture, our civilization! And may we take as our exemplar and patron this newly revealed martyr of our own times, St. Alexander of Munich, who discovered and served the Truth, at the cost of his very life here on earth.

Holy Martyr Alexander, pray to God for us!

In the Name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.