

A Reflection on the Metropolitan's Visit to St Mary's Cathedral

By Fr. Andrew Morbey

Last week's wonderful visit by Metropolitan Tikhon was spiritually significant in a number of ways over and above the archpastoral love and care that it demonstrated. It resonated with several important historical events and themes in the life of St Mary's.

For example: although it was Bishop Vladimir (Sokolovsky-Avtonomov) who while resident in San Francisco received St Alexis Toth and the Greek Catholic community of Minneapolis into Orthodoxy in 1891, it was Bishop Nicholas (Ziorov) who made the first hierarchical visit to Minneapolis. That visit was on April 7, 1892. In later years, Bishop Nicholas went on to become the Archbishop of Warsaw, and a famous missionary active in promoting the growth of the Orthodox Church in Poland. Bishop Nicholas' successor in North America was Bishop Tikhon, later Archbishop and ultimately Patriarch of Moscow and New-Confessor. In 1906, Archbishop Tikhon consecrated the current St Mary's Cathedral. Between the first visit by a hierarch - on April 7, 1892 - and the repose of St Tikhon - on April 7, 1925 - are thirty-three years, the earthly lifespan of our Lord....

We are proud of our choir at St Mary's. Bishop Nicholas (Ziorov) is the one who actually set the musical tradition at St Mary's in motion, assigning the first choir director in 1892 with the task of training and building up a choir. In our parish center there are interesting photographs of the choir in the days of Fr Leonid Turkevich (later Metropolitan Leonty), identifying it as the "church singing group in the name of Archbishop Nicholas of Warsaw" - so the memory of Bishop Nicholas lived on here, for a time... A brief biography of Bishop Nicholas can be found at orthodoxwiki.org/Nicholas_%28Ziorov%29_of_Warsaw. Bishop Nicholas understood that the attractive power of good liturgical singing can be an important dimension of mission.

April 7 is the civil date of the Annunciation - March 25 as reckoned by the 'old calendar'. In 1892, April 7 was also the Sunday of the Cross, as it is this year. The spiritual significance of this coincidence of dates links the the theme of the Annunciation - 'today is the beginning of our salvation' - with the beginning of the mission among Greek Catholics returning to Orthodoxy. This is precisely how St Alexis saw the conversion of the community in his care and is a recurring theme in his writing and preaching.

The New-Confessor Patriarch Tikhon is shown in our icon (with relic) at the front of the Church holding the Cathedral in one hand. The very altar table which he consecrated and vested is still here, clothed with its strachítsa and holding in it the sacred relics he placed there, all nested within our present holy table. He died as a New Confessor at the Donskoy monastery in Moscow, under house arrest and likely poisoned, on April 7, 1925. He is the heavenly patron of His Beatitude, Metropolitan Tikhon, who thus celebrated his name day with us on Sunday. I think it interesting that while St Tikhon's Monastery - where Metropolitan began his monastic vocation - is named for St Tikhon of Zadonsk, St Tikhon's Seminary - where His Beatitude taught for many years - was originally founded 'in the name of Patriarch Tikhon' back in 1937. Clearly the visit of His Beatitude manifests the spiritual legacy of St Tikhon at work in the life of our Church.

It is divine providence that shapes the complex network of spiritually significant moments which we encounter throughout life. When we understand and accept and delight in these 'signs', we are confirmed in our Orthodox Christian identity. We call to mind the rich, fruitful tradition of faith that we have received, and those who - according to God's will - have helped to shape the Church we know and love, the Church in which our salvation is being worked out. We are refreshed, challenged and inspired in our life in Christ.