

**THE MOTHER OF ORTHODOXY IN CANADA:  
STS PETER & PAUL RUSSIAN ORTHODOX SOBOR  
CELEBRATES 100 YEARS IN MONTREAL**

MONTREAL - It was an amazing weekend on 20 and 21 October, as Sts Peter & Paul Russian Orthodox Sobor celebrated a century of history. The winds were up when the faithful began to trickle in for the blessing of the Church Museum by Vladyka Seraphim, with hymns and holy water. People travelled from all over the country to attend this once-in-a-lifetime event. As the cameras flashed, His Eminence, Archbishop Seraphim, attired in the purple robe (*mantiya*), listened with interest while the parish rector, Archpriest Anatoliy Melnyk, carefully explained in Russian and English the history of the Church. After, a soprano gave a beautiful mini-concert at the piano, and as more and more faithful gathered, we waited anxiously for His Beatitude, Metropolitan Herman to appear.

At around 4:45pm, while the clergy were gathered inside the Church for the vigil and the faithful venerated the Theotokos of Port Arthur icon, His Beatitude, Metropolitan Herman arrived with his assistants in a shiny black car. The Metropolitan was deeply gracious when he was greeted outside, and as he entered the sanctuary a great hush fell over the crowd of nearly 300 people.

A vigil service ensued, with His Beatitude, Metropolitan Herman, His Eminence, Archbishop Seraphim, Archpriest Anatoliy Melnyk, Archpriest Alexander Janowski, Archpriest John Jillions, Archpriest Nicolas Boldireff, Igumen Irénée (Rochon), Hieromonk Basile (Paradis), Archdeacon Alexei Klimachev concelebrating. During Matins, His Beatitude anointed all the faithful with blessed oil, and the little children brought a smile to his face. An *agape* (*à la fourchette*) bustling with lively conversation and a vast array of delicacies followed.

The Primatial Divine Liturgy began at 9AM Sunday morning, with nearly 400 people attending. How glorious the Church appeared, with dozens of candles, rich iconography, red and white roses and carnations and the pure white and gold jeweled vestments of all the hierarchs and priests. Con-celebrating were His Beatitude, Metropolitan Herman, His Eminence, Archbishop Seraphim, His Grace, Bishop Job (Moscow Patriarchate), Archpriest Anatoliy Melnyk, Archpriest Alexander Janowski, Archpriest Nicolas Boldireff, Hieromonk Basile (Paradis), Archdeacon Alexei Klimachev, Deacon Gregory Scratch, and other subdeacons, readers, and servers from all over Canada. The choir sang in Slavonic like angels from their elevated height on the balcony above, with perfect acoustics. The Epistle was read first in English and then Slavonic by the deacon and a reader, and the Gospel was read in Slavonic by Archdeacon Alexei Klimachev. Then His Grace, Bishop Job gave the homily in Russian.

Towards the end of the Liturgy, we were blessed to have the sun come out just in time for the procession. It was the longest procession I myself have ever seen, with every Orthodox Christian present participating. Clergy and faithful processed around the Church. At each of the four sides, the hierarchs sprinkled holy water on everyone, flinging it as far as they could! At the front door Metropolitan Herman read the Gospel in English. Before re-entering the Church, the photographers had all the people gather near the clergy on the steps for a picture.

Above the door to the Church outside, an elegant new mosaic icon of Sts Peter & Paul, in addition to a new plaque commemorating the 100 years' anniversary, were also blessed.

After the veneration of the cross, Metropolitan Herman, Archbishop Seraphim, Bishop Job and many other dignitaries, and special guests, headed over to *Restaurant La Mer* on *Avenue Papineau*, where an elaborate banquet and four-course meal was held. With a PowerPoint presentation on the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary, and lovely Russian music playing in the background, inspirational speeches were made by all the hierarchs, and by many long-standing members of the community.

His Beatitude, Metropolitan Herman spoke on the importance of continuing to preserve Sts Peter & Paul Sobor, and described also how touched he was by a couple who had approached him, and talked about meeting him many years ago in Montreal. Vladyka Seraphim explained how Sts Peter & Paul Sobor, the oldest Russian Orthodox Church in Quebec, and the third oldest urban Orthodox Church in Canada, is also "the mother of our diocesan life in Canada." He also stated that "Montreal is the heart of Canada."

Vladyka Job gave a speech in Russian, and many congratulatory letters were read, including ones from Her Excellency, Governor-General Michaëlle Jean, and Prime Minister Stephen Harper. In November, Sts Peter & Paul Sobor is producing a special commemorative book, which will include photos from the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations, and the letters of congratulations.

Some pewter *nagradas* (medals) on powder blue satin ribbons were awarded, first to His Beatitude, Archbishop Seraphim and Bishop Job, and then to many outstanding members of the community, including Vladimir Boldireff, a Cossack Colonel, and finally to a greatly surprised Father Anatoliy and his wife, Matushka Irina. During the award ceremony, some rather appropriate marching music was played and the guests clapped over and over.

Finally, it was time for everyone to leave, but not before several photos were taken with the hierarchs. Overall, it was a joyous occasion, and a true blessing to be part of such a major force in Canadian Orthodox history. Among the many wonders of this Church is a bust in the garden of Alexander Pushkin, for whom the Church Library is named. The library contains an array of literature in

Russian, and serves as the main library for the entire Russian community in the city. Sts Peter & Paul Russian Orthodox Sobor was founded in 1907, and incorporated in 1915 by immigrants from the Russian Empire. The parishioners have been served over the years by many of Canadian Orthodoxy's shining stars, including His Grace, Bishop Antony and His Eminence, Archbishop Sylvester, (whose vestments and two mitres lie on display in the new Church Museum), and Archpriests Oleg Boldireff, George Benigsen, John Tkachuk, and now of course Anatoliy Melnyk. As a result of this sacred Church's efforts to expand the faith, Sts Peter & Paul Sobor has produced a large number of clergy for the Church.

Truly, our country has been given a real treasure in Montreal, something that can never be replaced. Each Orthodox community has its own gifts and qualities, and one can be certain that Sts Peter & Paul is filled with many of them. May this beautiful Church continue to serve the Lord! *Mnogaia lyeta!*

by Rebekah Goodyear