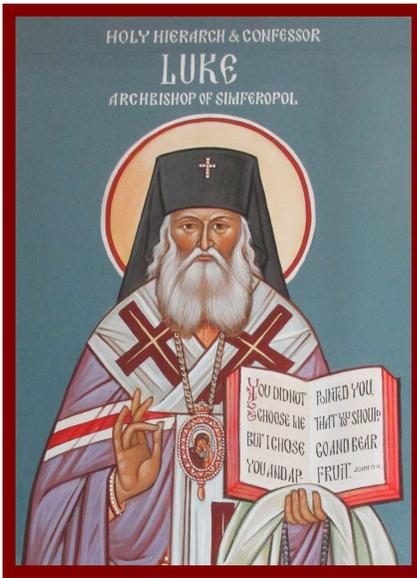


ARCHBISHOP LUKE OF SIMFEROPOL, CRIMEA

(1877 - 1961)

Feast Days: March 20th & June 11th



On Vestry wall, St. Innocent Church, Redford

Saint Luke, the Blessed Surgeon, miracle-worker and Archbishop of Simferopol, is one of the most amazing of our recently glorified twentieth-century saints. He was a world-famous pioneering surgeon, who was appointed chief surgeon overseeing the treatment of injured soldiers during World War II, and even the Soviet government could not deny his surgical skill, giving him the Stalin award for his pioneering surgical work. Communist Party leaders would appeal to him to do the most critical surgeries for themselves or family members. Yet at the same time, as a priest and a bishop, he was a much-suffering confessor (*i.e. someone who suffers for his Christian faith, but is not killed*), imprisoned, tortured and exiled three times by the Soviets. He refused to hide or compromise his Orthodox Faith, and was an outspoken witness to it, which was an embarrassment to the Communists.

The future confessor, surgeon and Archbishop, Valentin Felixovich Voino-Yassnetsky, was born on April 27, 1877 in the Crimea, in southern Russia. When he was about ten years old, the family moved to Kiev. He had a natural gift for drawing, and graduated from the Kiev Academy of Fine Arts concurrently with secondary school. He was going to continue his art studies, when he decided that he should use his life to help suffering people, and gave up his dream of a career in art. The future saint studied the Bible carefully, and felt the Lord was calling him as a laborer in His vineyard. So in 1898 the young Valentin entered the Medical School of Kiev

University, specializing in anatomy and surgery. He graduated in 1903, and wrote that he “studied medicine with the sole purpose of becoming a village, peasant doctor and of helping poor people.”

He worked in an eye clinic where he quickly perfected complex eye surgeries, and then was sent to a military hospital in the Far East and placed in charge of surgery during the Russian-Japanese War of 1904-05. Here he met a nurse, Anna Vassilyevna, whom he soon married; they had four children. He was then assigned to various hospitals and clinics, and everywhere he stretched himself beyond his limits, as he did for the rest of his life, in order to help the poor, suffering people, treating everyone with equal compassion, regardless of rank or status. After a number of years of intensive pioneering research on local anaesthesia, he received his doctorate in medicine, and international recognition for his innovative work. He returned to his village practice of medicine, becoming a master of the most complex surgeries. As always, he worked constantly with very little rest. He was always kind, gentle and patient with everyone; always calm and self-controlled, he never spoke a harsh word.

In March of 1917 the family of six moved to Tashkent, where Professor Valentin became chief of surgery at a large city hospital. Soon the Communist Revolution reached Tashkent, and life was forever changed. Treating the wounded was non-stop, exhausting work, and there was little food, but the future saint never complained. However, the health of his wife deteriorated rapidly, and she departed this life of suffering, her husband by her side. His nurse surgical assistant, who was widowed and childless, took over the care of the doctor’s four children.

Professor Doctor Valentin Felixovich’s deep faith was reflected in his desire to help the suffering and sick. He attended Divine Services on Sundays and Feast Days. Before surgery he would cross himself, pray, and make a cross with iodine on the patient’s body. He refused to perform surgery without an icon in the room. When the Communists removed his icon in 1920, he walked out. He resumed surgery when his icon was replaced. At the end of 1920 the good doctor gave a speech at the diocesan council, after which the ruling bishop said to him “Doctor, you must become a priest!” The future bishop believed this to be God’s call to him, and he immediately accepted. Two months later, in the midst of the Communist persecutions, on February 15th 1921, he was ordained priest. He was made fourth priest at the cathedral and assigned to preach. He combined his priesthood with his lecturing at the medical school and his surgical practice. This was an incredible act of courage, as the Bolshevik persecution of the Church and clergy was widespread. But Father Valentin lectured on medicine, was chief surgeon of Tashkent City Hospital, and served at the Cathedral on Sundays. By early 1923 the Archbishop of Tashkent had disappeared, and the diocese was left without a chief shepherd. At a local council, the people elected Father Valentin as bishop. He was secretly tonsured a monk, and given the name Luke, in honor of the Apostle who was both an artist and physician. He had to secretly go to Samarkand, where there were two bishops, in order to be consecrated bishop, which occurred on May 31st, 1923, and immediately return to Tashkent.

A few weeks later he was arrested, and his first of three imprisonments and exiles began, totaling eleven years altogether. He was forty-six. He got very sick, and the first signs of heart disease appeared, which would get progressively worse for the rest of his life. For almost three years he was sent from one frozen frigid place in Siberia to another, suffering terribly, but he relied totally on God's help. In each place he sought to help people as a physician of both bodies and souls. The village people everywhere treated him with great respect. Finally, on the Feast of the Nativity of Christ, 1926, he was released and allowed to return to Tashkent.

In May of 1930 he was arrested a second time. During the first year he was constantly sick. A year later he was sent in exile to Archangelsk, where he was able to do some limited medical work. The Communists kept trying to get him to renounce his episcopal office, and pursue only his medical work, which they highly respected. He was finally released from exile at the end of 1933. He was 56 now, and his health was deteriorating badly from his tortures, imprisonments and exiles. In late 1934 his *Essays on Surgery of Pyogenic Infections* was published, after ten years of research, and highly acclaimed by surgeons worldwide. For two years he lived peacefully in Tashkent. The year 1937 saw the most severe persecution of the Church and its leaders. Bishop Luke was arrested a third time.

After two years of torture and imprisonment, and serious decline in his health, he was sentenced to five years in exile in Siberia, near Krasnoyarsk, where he was when the Soviet Union entered World War II. In 1941 a huge military hospital was being set up in Krasnoyarsk to treat wounded soldiers. Without malice towards the Soviets, but only with love for suffering humanity, the bishop-doctor offered his experience, knowledge and skills. In October 1941, while still an exile, he was appointed the consultant of all the Krasnoyarsk region's hospitals and the chief surgeon of the evacuation hospital. Yet he was forbidden to eat at the military hospital cafeteria, and usually went hungry, but some nurses secretly left food in his room. By the spring of 1942 the authorities' attitude towards him totally changed, witnessing the incredible results he achieved with the wounded, and his living conditions improved significantly. His exile was ended and the Patriarchal *locum tenens* elevated him to archbishop and appointed him Archbishop of Krasnoyarsk. So once again he could combine service to the Church with his surgical work. He continued his exhausting schedule of surgery on injured soldiers and medical research till the end of the war, and published two more works on infections and surgery in late 1943 and 1944, which won him the Stalin award. But his health kept deteriorating. In 1944 the government moved the evacuation hospitals to Tambov, and the surgeon-bishop-confessor moved also. He then was appointed Bishop of the Tambov Diocese.

After the war, he was given a high award for his service during the war. In 1947, at the age of seventy, sick and going blind, he was transferred to Simferopol, in the Crimea, in order to resurrect the church life there, which was in shambles. He served there for the remaining fourteen years of his life, transforming the Crimea by his labors. As always, he fearlessly refused to compromise the Orthodox Faith and practice, nor to be cowed by Communist threats. He helped the poor and guided the people on the true Way. Until forbidden to do so, he preached daily, and wrote that during his thirty-eight years as a priest and bishop, he gave about 1,250 sermons, of which 750 were written down and preserved. The world-renown and awarded surgeon tried to participate in the medical community, but was persecuted because of his outspoken faith, and forbidden to lecture. Almost blind from glaucoma, he could no longer do surgery, but he daily treated the many patients who came to his apartment free of charge, but this decreased as his vision failed further. By 1956 he was totally blind, but he continued serving in Church from memory, preaching, and administering the diocese. Doctors sent the most difficult cases to him for diagnosis, which he would do by touch. There are countless examples of miraculous cures and precise diagnoses that had gone undetected. In 1957 he dictated his memoirs, which became available to people after the end of the Communist regime in 1991.

Just before his repose the new wave of Khrushchev's most severe persecutions of the Church flamed up, which greatly affected Archbishop Luke's fragile health. He departed this life on June 11, 1961, the feast of All Saints of Russia. His funeral itself was a miracle, and after his repose, he continued to heal all who came to him. St. Luke's life was dedicated to serving God and his neighbor, Throughout his 40+ years of suffering under the Communists, he had absolute faith in God's will, and bore his cross with courage and faith, without complaining, always aware that Christ was carrying the cross with him. On November 22, 1995, St. Luke was declared numbered among the saints, and on March 20th, 1996 (*his second feastday*), his relics were transferred to the cathedral in Simferopol, to be venerated by all.

By Sister Ioanna, St. Innocent of Alaska Monastic Community, Redford, MI

