

Saint Alexis Toth

Confessor and Defender of Orthodoxy in America

Our holy Father Alexis Toth was born in the Austro-Hungarian Empire in 1854 [1]. His father and brother were priests of the Greek Catholic Church, while his uncle was a bishop. [Many citizens of the Austro-Hungarian Empire who traditionally had been of the Orthodox Christian Faith, were compelled to enter into communion with the Roman Catholic Church after the Union of Uzhorod in 1646. Known thereafter as “Greek Catholics” or “Uniates” – a term that, while originally derogatory in nature, enjoyed wide popular acceptance – they were permitted to retain certain practices, customs and liturgical traditions common to and rooted in Orthodox Christianity.]

Alexis was always close to the Church, and began studies for the priesthood. An excellent student; he was fluent in Latin, German, Magyar and Russian, and acquired a reading knowledge of Greek [2]. In 1878, he married the former Rosalie Mihalich, whose father also was a priest. Later the same year, he was ordained to the priesthood [3] and assigned Associate Pastor of a Greek Catholic parish. Tragedy soon followed as both his wife and their only child died. Father Alexis was filled with grief, but he continued to serve God with love and prayerful dedication. The next year brought new responsibilities as Father Alexis began teaching Church History and Canon Law at the seminary in Presov [4]. He also served as secretary to the Bishop of Presov and Administrator of the Diocese.



Greater changes were to come. In October 1889, Father Alexis was sent to Minneapolis, Minnesota, where he had been assigned Pastor of Saint Mary Greek Catholic parish [5]. Soon after his arrival, he called on the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Saint Paul and Minneapolis, John Ireland, who refused to recognize him as a Catholic priest or to allow him to serve in his diocese. [Archbishop Ireland, perhaps not well versed in Greek Rite Catholicism, questioned how Father Alexis could have been a Catholic priest since he had been married.] After further difficulties, Father Alexis appealed to the Russian Orthodox Church, the North American head of which lived in San Francisco. On March 25, 1891, he and 361 parishioners of Saint Mary Church were reunited to the Orthodox Christian faith of their ancestors by Bishop Vladimir of the Aleutian Islands and Alaska [6].

Father Alexis was very devoted to his flock, healing and comforting the sick [7] and, despite his personal poverty and that of his flock, giving generously to those in need [8]. Using his broad education and experience, he wrote and published many educational resources explaining the differences between Orthodox Christianity's fullness of faith and other faiths and offering practical advice on living an Orthodox Christian life [9].

The year 1893 brought another major change in Father Alexis' life as he was transferred to the parish in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania, which would be his home for the rest of his life [10]. He was soon called upon to help Saint Tikhon – at that time the Ruling Bishop and later Archbishop of the North American Church – in establishing Saint Tikhon of Zadonsk Monastery and Orphanage in South Canaan, Pennsylvania [11]. Father Alexis traveled far and wide to proclaim Orthodox Christianity while encouraging Greek Catholics to return to their ancestral faith [12]. Though humble about his own abilities, he was a true missionary. He has been credited with inspiring tens of thousands of former Greek Catholics to return to the Orthodox Faith.

Saint Alexis died on May 7, 1909. Seven years after his death, his body was transferred from Wilkes-Barre to a prominent burial site behind the altar of Saint Tikhon Monastery Church [13]. At that time, it was discovered that his remains were incorrupt.

On May 29-30, 1994, the Rite of Glorification of Saint Alexis was celebrated during the annual Memorial Day Pilgrimage to Saint Tikhon Monastery [14].

O Holy Father Alexis, pray unto God for us! ■