

Chapter Twenty-Three

Sunday, September 6, 2015,

Orthodox Feast of Saint Michael the Archangel.

Vatican City, Inside the City of Rome, Italy.

From an Aeroflot jetliner circling above the center of Rome, Patriarch Filaret III looked intently and with excitement out the window of his first class cabin seat. His heart thrilled as he identified the dome of Saint Peter's basilica, the head church of all Christendom, glimmering in the bright afternoon sun. He noted how the twin colonnades of Bernini, which extended out from the front of the basilica to enclose Saint Peter's Square, reminded him of a mother's arms reaching out to embrace her children as they came home from the far corners of the world.

As his eyes studied the sprawling cityscape below, he located the ruins of the ancient Roman Coliseum, still jutting skyward in oval walls of stone which enclosed the place where early Christian martyrs had been slaughtered by wild beasts as a form of public entertainment. For the first millennium all Christians had accepted the primacy of the successors of Peter, the Bishops of Rome, as the custodians of the Keys of the Kingdom of Heaven, given by Christ Himself to Saint Peter. Since the tragic schism of 1054, the Orthodox half of the Christian world had never been able to settle any new doctrinal disputes, because, being cut off from the authority of the Pope, they could not convoke a valid Church council. They could only profess doctrinal matters that had been settled by Church councils prior to 1054.

Filaret's breast was bursting with joy as his plane made its final approach into Rome. Soon, for the first time in a millennium, a Russian Orthodox Patriarch would kneel before the Pope and kiss the Fisherman's ring. Filaret felt nothing but sorrow for the senseless centuries of obstinate separatism. In his heart there echoed a silent paean of praise to Mary, She who told Bernadette Soubirous at Lourdes, "I am the Immaculate Conception." Filaret reached inside his shirt to finger the Miraculous Medal, suspended on a neck chain, which had been a recent gift from Archbishop Bogmolov at the Catholic Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception in Moscow.

Today was the sixth of September, which in the Orthodox Rite calendar was the Feast of Saint Michael the Archangel. Filaret prayed that the Holy Archangel would protect him and his nation through the times of turbulent change that lay ahead. Saint Michael and his legions of angels had prevailed against the corrupted heart of Lucifer the light-bearer and his legions of fallen angels. In response to Lucifer's "*non serviam*," Michael and the Heavenly Hosts had cast them out of Heaven and into the depths of hell. Filaret pondered how the world was filled with human souls, the majority of whom daily repeated in their hearts the fatal words of Lucifer: "I will not serve"; or more commonly, revealed by their

behavior their real attitude toward Christ: “We will not have this man to reign over us.”¹⁰⁴ Human life was lived out in the physical world, but all the while a parallel warfare was enjoined between the hosts of Heaven and the demonic minions of hell, in a battle waged for the eternal destiny of each individual soul. The real struggle was “not against flesh and blood,” Filaret reminded himself, but “against the spirits of wickedness in the high places.”¹⁰⁵

As a new Roman Catholic Archbishop who remained a Russian Patriarch in the Orthodox Rite, Filaret was coming to Rome for his first *ad limina* visit face to face with the Pope. Every new Catholic Metropolitan or Archbishop, at some time during his first year in office, was required, if at all possible, to travel to Rome and meet the Pope. While there, a ceremonial strip of sheepskin called a “pallium” was placed on the bishop’s shoulders, to represent his office as the shepherd of his local flock. In the Orthodox tradition a wider band of cloth, called an “omophor,” was worn by Metropolitans, and Filaret had long since been invested with that. He was pleased to think that Pope Nicholas, after his election as Pope, had changed the form of the Catholic pallium, making it wider to more closely resemble its Orthodox counterpart.

An *ad limina* visit was a quinquennial requirement for all Catholic bishops, and would now include all Russian bishops in the Orthodox Rite of the Catholic Church. Every five years each bishop was expected to visit the thresholds of the tombs of the Blessed Apostles Peter and Paul, and to meet with the Pope to report on the state of his diocese. Filaret recalled that these visits were based on Saint Paul’s report¹⁰⁶ in his letter to the Church in Galatia, that after three years of traveling abroad evangelizing he went up to Rome to see Peter and stayed with him for fifteen days. Filaret was moved to think that, after a thousand years of schism during which Orthodox bishops had never gone to Rome to see Peter’s successors, now he was privileged to be the first among his brethren to make this historic journey. The minions of hell would be seething with rage at this event, and again he prayed to Saint Michael to protect and defend Holy Mother Russia, and to protect him as Russia’s chief shepherd.

As Filaret exited the jet way into the crowded corridor of the Leonardo da Vinci Airport terminal, he was immediately approached by two smiling Catholic priests, who extended their arms and welcomed him with warm embraces.

“Welcome to Rome, Your Excellency,” beamed Father John Herald, the elderly but spry personal assistant to Pope Nicholas.

“Welcome, Patriarch Filaret,” smiled Father Ignacio Battista, the middle-aged pro-life activist who had secretly hosted the Pope overnight, in his Rome apartment, on the eve of the historic consecration. Father Battista was noted for his expertise as a tour guide for traditional Catholics

¹⁰⁴ Luke 19:14, DRV.

¹⁰⁵ Ephesians 6:12, DRV.

¹⁰⁶ Galatians 1:18.

making pilgrimages to Rome, and indicated to Patriarch Filaret that he would be at his disposal to acquaint him with the city and its history, art, and monuments.

“Your Excellency, you will be staying in the *Domus Sanctae Marthae*, within Vatican City,” explained Father Herald. “It is a simple dormitory built for the use of bishops during papal conclaves, with furnishings typical of a monastery. But you will be nearby the Holy Father and Saint Peter’s Basilica, and you will be insulated from the world except when you choose to face the media or to venture out into the city of Rome.”

“That will be perfect,” said Filaret. “I have no interest in a luxury hotel. I have come to pray, to demonstrate my filial submission to the Bishop of Rome, and to explore some of the ancient historic sites that Catholic and Orthodox Christians have always revered in common. I’ll admit that I was tempted to follow the example of the Holy Father, during his secret retreat in Detroit, and go out into the city in disguise. But I am also here before the eyes of the whole world, to demonstrate that the schism between the Catholic and Russian Orthodox Churches has finally come to an end. Therefore, I will have to let myself be seen in public, and will accept being hounded by the press and by enthusiastic faithful as my duty to Christ.”

Father Battista, the relative youth among the three priests, assisted in the retrieval of two very large suitcases from the luggage claim carousel. He understood that an Archbishop coming to Rome has to travel with multiple liturgical robes and various bulky cassocks, especially if he cannot count on borrowing anything because he will be staying among clergy from a different rite. Father Battista texted the two Swiss Guards, waiting in the airport’s cell phone lot in a black Vatican State SUV, to come around and pick them up at curbside. As they neared the exit from the luggage claim area, Filaret was approached by two Russians, a man and woman, who knelt to kiss his hand (the Orthodox counterpart to the Catholic custom of kissing a bishop’s ring). With tears in their eyes, they thanked him for his courage in coming to Rome to formalize the end of the schism.

“Do not thank me, my daughter and my son,” said Filaret. “Give thanks to the Theotokos, the Holy Mother of God, Mary All-Immaculate – uh, She Who identified Herself as the Immaculate Conception – for it was by Her intercession that this great miracle has come to pass in our day.”

Outside at the curbside, they stood for a moment waiting for their ride. A disheveled man with a Bulgarian accent walked briskly toward them, and as he approached said, “So here is the traitorous bishop who sells out the one true Orthodox Church to commit spiritual fornication with the Catholic whore of Babylon! Begone, you devil! May you burn forever in the fires of hell!”

Filaret smiled benignly at the man, and made the sign of the cross to bless him. Father Battista moved between the man and Filaret, and was grateful to see that the Vatican SUV was arriving just at that moment.

Jacques, a Swiss Guard wearing civilian clothes, jumped out and opened the middle door, assisting Patriarch Filaret into his seat. Meanwhile the driver, Michel, had opened the rear tailgate, and was placing the two large and heavy suitcases into the back. Father Battista climbed into the third seat, and then Father Herald seated himself beside Filaret. Once they were underway, Filaret breathed a sigh of relief.

“Russia may have converted,” he said, “but not the whole Orthodox world.”

“My perception was that the man suffers from some sort of mental disorder,” said Father Battista.

“Perhaps. That is a kind assessment. But you must realize that in many Eastern European nations, a jealous nationalism remains inseparable from the local Orthodox identity. It was so in Russia until after the consecration, when people began to change miraculously in their views about the Catholic Church. You Catholics have always been reasonable toward us Orthodox, wanting to include us and welcome us back, but we have been defensive and separatist. In some countries the Orthodox once seemed to worship their nation and their king more than God Himself. In Russia they would say, ‘The Tsar is next to God!’ and they would expect him to appoint bishops and to direct the Russian Church.”

“But what else could they do, without a Pope?” asked Father Herald.

“You have a point, Father. But now Mary Immaculate has obtained the grace for Russia to come to her senses. I want to share something with you from great Russian literature, from the novels of Dostoevsky. In real life Dostoevsky’s best friend was Vladimir Soloviev, the great Orthodox theologian who died a Roman Catholic, and Soloviev was the model for one of Dostoevsky’s main characters in *The Brothers Karamazov*. So Dostoevsky was certainly acutely aware of the great spiritual issues. I often think of the passage near the conclusion of Dostoevsky’s great novel *The Possessed*, or *The Devils*, where Stepan Trofimovitch is half-delirious as death approaches. He thinks about the parable of the man possessed with demons, and how when Christ cast them out they entered into a herd of swine that rushed downhill into the lake and were drowned. In Dostoevsky’s story, Stepan realizes that Russia is like the man who was possessed. I know the passage by heart:

You see that’s exactly like our Russia, those devils that come out of the sick man and enter into the swine. They are all the sores, all the foul contagions, all the impurities, all the devils great and small that have multiplied in that great invalid, our beloved Russia, in the course of ages and ages ... all those devils will come forth, all the impurity, all the rottenness that was putrefying on the surface ... and they will beg of themselves to enter into the swine ... and perhaps I at the head of them, we shall cast ourselves down, possessed and raving, from the rocks into the sea, and we shall all be drowned – and a good thing, too, for that is all we are fit for. But the sick man will be healed and ‘will sit at the feet of

Jesus,' and all will look upon him with astonishment....¹⁰⁷

"I now realize that, in that passage penned in 1872, Dostoevsky was inspired to foretell the Fatima promise. That great exorcism by Christ has finally come to pass, and it has happened, exactly as the All-Immaculate Mary promised to the little shepherds at Fatima, through the intercession of Our Lady of Fatima. The crazy man is Russia. All the craziness of Russian Orthodox excuses for separation from Rome, and the caesaropapism, and doctrinal denials of things settled in Catholic Church councils after the schism, kept Russia cut off from the life of the vine of the true Church in Rome. And because of that, Russia was spiritually weak, and was the first Christian empire to fall under the dark night of atheistic Communism. But now, the devils have been cast out, and the craziness is over, and Russia is once again in her right mind, sitting at the feet of Jesus, and ready to become the Orthodox-Catholic Confessional State she was always meant to be."

"That is truly amazing," said Father Battista. "To think that Dostoevsky was inspired to see that deliverance would someday come to Russia."

"But you can also see that the other Orthodox states have not yet converted," countered Filaret. "That is why the Bulgarian man was so inflamed against me. He is still thinking like the Orthodox who have always placed nationalism and devotion to their king above Catholic unity. Quite commonly, such nationalists even doubted the validity of the Orthodox Church in other Orthodox nations."

"But in America the Orthodox from various nations commonly share a single Orthodox church in any given community," said Father Herald. "They often don't identify themselves with any particular European nation."

"Ah, but the United States has always been a pluralistic society," said Father Battista. "Unlike European nations, it has no history of any cohesive culture that for centuries overwhelmingly agreed upon a single Christian tradition. So when people move to the United States, they are taught to be 'tolerant' and in time they come to believe that is a virtue. But in reality it is the vice of religious indifferentism, the idea that 'I have my truth and you have your truth and neither one is better than the other.' If truth could be relative rather than absolute, then no one would fight or die to defend his religion."

"Well, Americans tend to be perplexed by the 'radical' assertiveness of the Muslims," noted Father Herald.

"The Muslims exhibit many of the virtues which should be commonplace among Catholics and Orthodox faithful," said Filaret. "They believe their religion is true, and therefore all others must be at

¹⁰⁷ Dostoevsky, Fyodor, *The Possessed* (or *The Devils*), Chapter VII, Part II, with selected omissions, public domain in The Gutenberg Project, downloaded on September 12, 2010 from <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/8117/8117-h/8117-h.htm>. This idea of the Fatima prophecy in Dostoevsky's novel is based on a lecture given by Dr. David Allen White at the *Last Chance for World Peace* conference in 2006. See Discography for details.

least partially false. Based on this logic, in Muslim-majority nations they pass laws to suppress other religions and to encourage Islam by enforcing its moral code. They dress with modesty to protect chastity, and they jealously guard the virtue of women. They disallow contraception, and have large families. They forbid abortion, homosexual behavior, and pornography. They pray regularly and publicly. And in Arab nations they are even moving toward restoring honest money, convertible into gold.”

“And yet, by their very zeal, they show the danger of allowing a false religion to have free rein in a society,” said Father Battista. “Because, as Christians, we have to believe that Islam is a false religion. If we Christians took our Faith as seriously as they take theirs, we would seek to outdo the Muslims in our zeal to spread the Faith in our societies, and to draft laws that would encourage Christian virtue and discourage vice. And we would not be so welcoming of those who believe our religion is false.”

“I have noticed that many modern people find it offensive to speak of any religion as being true or false,” noted Father Herald. “Sadly, people no longer know how to think with precision or how to analyze issues in depth. They think that if a religion has *some* truth in it – and all religions do, of course, or else no one would be attracted to them – then it must be good. Modern people will say, ‘Well, it’s not all bad, it has *some* truth in it, so it *has* to be good.’ And then when you claim that any one religion is *all* true, they deny that is possible. They assume that since most religions are only partly true, then all religions must be partly false. They become offended when Catholics – or Muslims – claim that their religion is completely true and therefore is meant to apply to everyone in the world.”

Father Battista had not failed to note that Michel, the driver, had been watching the rear view mirror intently.

“We are being followed, Jacques,” said Michel suddenly. “By a big black SUV containing two men. I’ll radio for backup.”

Michel pulled a microphone off the dashboard, and called the Swiss Guard central dispatch. In two minutes, he suddenly made a sharp right turn into a narrow alleyway between two ancient Roman buildings. The black SUV followed right behind them, and then Michel made a sudden stop. Immediately, a white Vatican SUV also entered the alley, trapping the SUV that had been tailing them between the two Vatican security vehicles. Michel activated his four-way flashers as a signal, and immediately he and Jacques jumped out of the front doors, while four young men simultaneously exited the white Vatican SUV in the rear. In the middle SUV were two men, about thirty years of age, clean-shaven, muscular, and attired in unremarkable street clothes that would attract no particular attention. Michel ordered them to exit their vehicle with their hands up. When they declined, their windows were smashed, and the two men were dragged out and subdued by the six tough young Swiss guards. After just enough rough handling to make clear who was in charge, their hands were cuffed behind their backs. Michel and Jacques searched them, and determined these men, who refused to speak, carried no identification papers whatsoever. However, in the glove box of the SUV Jacques found

papers indicating that the vehicle was registered to one of the two largest banks doing business in Italy.

“Tell your bosses that their days of ruling the world are ending,” said Michel. “You two boys should consider becoming Catholics. Then you’ll have a Boss who orders you to do good rather than evil. Considering how short life can be, it’s the only intelligent thing to do.”

The Swiss guards handcuffed both men to a heavy pipe astride one of the buildings, and stuffed a Catholic Truth Society booklet into a pocket of each man. Then they piled back into the respective Vatican vehicles and sped off, one going forward and the other going in reverse out of the narrow alley. The bankers’ men could try to explain their predicament to the Italian police. By that time, the Vatican vehicles, protected by diplomatic immunity, would be back inside Vatican City.

“You will be under surveillance by sinister worldly forces while you are here, Your Excellency,” noted Jacques. “But, as you see, we will be able to keep you safe.”

Suddenly Michel turned the SUV off the busy street and entered a steep down-ramp underneath a towering ancient wall.

“This will be the Vatican garage, Your Excellency,” said Father Herald. “It is just after twelve o’clock noon. An elevator will take you up directly into the bishops’ dormitory, where you will have a corner suite overlooking the Vatican gardens, and with a good view of the dome of Saint Peter’s. A private Orthodox chapel has been set up one floor below, where you can say your daily Mass. I will be staying just down the hall from you, and you will have my cell phone number so that I will be able to assist you with anything you may need. You will have a few hours to rest and pray, and then you will meet the Holy Father at four o’clock in the Apostolic Palace. He will grant you a one-hour private audience. Then you will have three hours free before dinner at eight o’clock, which will be with the Holy Father and me in the Pope’s private dining room.”

“So before we sleep this historic night,” said Father Battista, “the Patriarch of ninety-five percent of the Orthodox world will have kissed the Fisherman’s ring, and the Holy Father will have laid his hands upon his head and blessed him as a Catholic bishop in the Orthodox Rite!”

“And what sweet sleep it will be,” said Filaret, “to have traveled so far, and yet to have come home at last!”

Filaret settled into his room, rested for an hour, and then phoned Father Herald to see if he could go for a walk in the Vatican gardens. He also wondered if he might have access to the tomb of Saint Peter, where he wished to pray, without being exposed to the press or the public. Father Herald took him on a stroll through the gardens, passing the Statue of Our Lady of Fatima at which Pope Nicholas had meditated on the afternoon of his birthday, not yet knowing that before he slept that night he would receive “The Russian Request”. Filaret knelt at the weatherproof outdoor kneeler set in the lawn facing the statue, and, after making the sign of the cross, silently thanked Our Lady for the recent public miracle in Russia which

made even the 1917 Miracle of the Sun pale by comparison. The Russian Patriarch's own presence in the Vatican today was in no way the cause, but only and entirely the result, of Her intercession in Heaven following the consecration. True, grace had been flowing for decades through Her faithful servants. It had been especially the work of Father Nicholas Gottschalk in Detroit, and of the various traditional Catholic scholars whose writings had been published by his Fatima Herald apostolate, that had opened the hearts and minds of Patriarch Filaret and of President Polzin. Together they had studied Father Gottschalk's publications and viewed his conference lectures posted on YouTube, and had thereby been moved to issue "The Russian Request" to the Holy Father. Filaret felt that the smile on Our Lady's face almost came alive to him, and his heart thrilled as he noted the outline of Her Queenly figure against the bright azure of the Roman sky, as if the world was being enveloped in the sweet safety of Her blue mantle.

Hearing distant voices calling, he looked up and realized that he was so close to the dome of Saint Peter's basilica that he could see the people walking around the cupola at the very top of the dome, and could even hear them shouting in wonderment at the panoramic vistas of Rome. His heart thrilled to realize that, directly below them, the bones of Saint Peter the Blessed Apostle lay in repose, amid the ancient Roman cemetery on Vatican hill. Archaeologists believed that criminals and other undesirables had been buried at one end of the cemetery, in the less desirable area adjacent to a stadium-like racetrack that had once stood on the future site of the basilica. Father Herald led Filaret along a garden pathway toward the back wall of the basilica, where a stairway set in an outdoor brick well descended to a metal door well below ground level.

"I carry a key, as I often come here at odd hours to pray in the Confessio, the chapel which contains Saint Peter's tomb, directly below the main altar and the massive dome," volunteered Father Herald. "This private route will take us through some of the archaeological excavations beneath the basilica, and then into the Confessio from the back. The chapel will not be open to visitors at this time, so you will be able to pray in private."

Father Herald switched on a string of construction-style light bulbs, so they could find their way through dusty pathways among tombs and monuments of what was obviously the ancient Roman necropolis of Vatican hill. Filaret's heart thrilled as he felt himself coming back to the very beginnings of the Church, to the roots from which had sprung the evangelization of the empire, and, in time, of the very ends of the earth, even Kievan Rus.¹⁰⁸ Before long they came to another metal door, but this one did not require the use of a key from inside the excavation area. Father Herald opened the door, and switched off the construction lighting. They stepped into a dimly lit marbled chapel, where Filaret at once recognized the Niche of the Pallium, which contained a silver casket

¹⁰⁸ The name of embryonic Russia, with headquarters in the city of Kiev, at the time of the baptism of Saint Prince Vladimir in 988 A.D, when Russia first became a Catholic nation.

behind which lay the tomb of the Apostle Peter. In the casket were kept strips of fabric woven from lamb's wool and blessed annually on the Feast of Saint Agnes, January 21. Each *pallium* was destined to be given by the Pope to a newly appointed Archbishop or Metropolitan. They were kept here, at the Apostle's tomb, to symbolize the unity of all bishops who professed their submission to the current successor of Saint Peter, the Bishop of Rome.

Filaret was deeply moved as he approached the kneeler set before the tomb of Peter. Behind him were the curved marble steps that led up out of the sunken chapel to the floor of the basilica just in front of the high altar, which was directly overhead. Towering above was the Baldacchino of Bernini, the ornate Baroque canopy covering the high altar; it was supported on four spiraled bronze pillars that, it was rumored, contained the bones of thousands of ancient Christian martyrs retrieved from the catacombs. High above, the dome of the basilica reached upward toward Heaven, flooding the scene with light from above – and reminding the faithful that here, as on every Catholic altar in the world, eternity penetrates time as Christ descends daily to make Himself present – Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity – under the appearance of bread and wine in the Blessed Sacrament.

Filaret knew that the early Church had been forced, because of vicious persecution by the Roman Empire, to celebrate holy Mass in the underground burial passages called catacombs. It became a custom to set up an altar on the tomb of a martyr or saint. In later centuries, when the Church was permitted to operate openly and it became possible to celebrate Mass in typical Roman buildings called basilicas, relics of saints were placed in the altar stones to continue the ancient custom. In the Mass, the prayers of the saints “whose relics are here” were always invoked, as it had been noted from the earliest days of the Church that special graces were sometimes associated with the proximity of holy relics.¹⁰⁹

And here, thought Filaret, were the first-class relics of the Blessed Apostle to whom Christ presented the Keys of the Kingdom of Heaven. Filaret recalled the Latin inscription that encircled the base of the dome, high above the tomb:

Tu es Petrus, et super hanc petram ædificabo ecclesiam meam,
et portæ inferi non prævalebunt adversus eam. Et tibi dabo claves
regni cælorum.

He whispered to himself its translation:

Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my Church, and
the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto
thee the keys of the kingdom of Heaven.¹¹⁰

Filaret thought of how often Holy Scripture proved to be true in

¹⁰⁹ Acts 5:15; 19:12.

¹¹⁰ Matthew 16:18, DRV

multiple senses. The Church as the Body of Christ was built upon the rock among the disciples, Saint Peter, who, when asked by Jesus “Who do *you* say that I am?” replied:

Thou art the Christ, the Son of the Living God.¹¹¹

And in response, Jesus told Peter he was blessed, because flesh and blood had not revealed this truth to him. It was the Father in Heaven Who had granted Peter the grace to see this truth. Peter was the first among the apostles to make this confession. And so, the chapel at his tomb was traditionally called the “Confessio” in honor of that momentous event.

But the words of Christ were also fulfilled literally, in that the central church of all Christendom, Saint Peter’s Basilica, was built in Rome upon the tomb of Saint Peter. And, as the ancient Church grew and developed, being transformed from the tiny seed of the first believers, into a great tree that filled the whole world, it was always Peter (and his successors) that kept it all together. It was the Bishop of Rome that was the basis of catholic (universal) unity. *Ubi Petras, Ibi ecclesia, Ibi Deus.*¹¹² “Where Peter is, there is the Church, there is God.”

Filaret knelt and began to pray. He asked Saint Peter to intercede for him, and for Russia, and for all other nations, that the miracle recently obtained by the Mother of God might bring great blessings upon all mankind in these days of profound spiritual darkness. Filaret considered that, during the Twentieth Century, former Christendom, in both East and West, suffered a spiritual annihilation so extensive that men of the Nineteenth or earlier centuries could not have believed it could happen so suddenly. Therefore – just as in the first centuries after Christian missionaries travelled to far off lands to proclaim the message of Christ, and to build a new civilization – so now, Filaret realized, it would have to be done all over again. It would begin in Russia. But Filaret prayed that, from Russia, the new Christendom would once again spread out over all the earth. He prayed that countless young men and women would once again become inspired to sacrifice their lives as religious missionaries. He prayed that their lives of loving sacrifice – their “walk” upon earth – would once again become a thing of great beauty, a wonder to the world:

And how shall they preach unless they be sent, as it is written:
How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace,
of them that bring glad tidings of good things!¹¹³

Filaret realized that he was among those now being called to begin this process. Russia was going to become a Christian nation, miraculously, because of divine intervention obtained through the intercession of the Immaculate Heart of Our Lady of Fatima. First Russia would set her own

¹¹¹ Matthew 16:16, DRV.

¹¹² Latin phrase attributed to Saint Ambrose.

¹¹³ Romans 10:15, DRV.

house in order, becoming a Catholic Confessional State. Then Russia would be the fountainhead for the re-evangelization of the once-Christian, now-essentially-pagan world. And Filaret was being called to lead Russia in this historic endeavor, under the guidance of the Chief Shepherd of all Christians, the Bishop of Rome. Fervently, he prayed that the All-Immaculate Mother of God, the Blessed Apostles Peter and Paul, and the Blessed Evangelists Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, would pray for him, for His Holiness Pope Nicholas VI, and for all the Catholic bishops of Russia – both Roman Rite and Orthodox Rite – from their lofty seats in the Courts of Heaven.

Before long Father Herald tapped Filaret on the shoulder, and whispered that it was now time to head back to the bishops' dormitory, to get ready for his private audience with the Pope. As they made their way back through the necropolis, and up the stairs into the sunlight of the Vatican gardens, Father Herald sought to encourage Filaret.

“You know, Your Excellency, that the number of bishops in the world has increased to the point where it is logistically impossible for the Pope to see every bishop every five to ten years, as has been required since 1911. Bishops from farther away than Europe had a ten-year requirement, and even that has proved difficult in recent years. But the Holy Father prioritizes things. He sees the Metropolitans, in the West more commonly called Archbishops, at least every five years in person. And he also calls those bishops who have reputations as troublemakers, such as those who ‘wreckovate’ beautiful historic cathedrals by stripping them of their classical art. Or bishops who still attempt to sabotage the restoration of the Tridentine Mass by any priest who desires to use it.”

“So if it is troublemakers who get precedence, then can it be that all Metropolitans tend to be troublemakers?” quipped Filaret.

“Oh, you will be a big troublemaker, alright. But for the secular world, not for the Holy Father or the Church. And you will be a troublemaker for those liberals in the Western Church who do not want to permit the restoration of tradition in liturgy and doctrinal clarity. You will be a sign of contradiction to the world.”

“Ah, but to be a ‘Sign of Contradiction’ is always a good thing. It is one sign of probable election, of being among the elect of God who appear to have reasonable hope of eternity in Heaven after a time in purgatory. It is how Simeon described the Child Jesus when He was presented in the temple at the age of forty days: ‘This Child is set ... for a sign which shall be contradicted.’ All who follow Christ will be challenged by the world.”

“Yes, and another sign of probable election is devotion to the Immaculate Heart of Mary. So said Saint Louis de Montfort.”

“Archbishop Bogmolov in Moscow presented me with a Miraculous Medal, which I now wear to remind me continually of my devotion to the Immaculate Heart of Mary. On the back, it depicts the Sacred Heart of Jesus, crowned with thorns, and the Immaculate Heart of Mary, pierced through by a sword as Simeon foresaw at the time of the Infant Christ’s

Presentation in the Temple. I thrill when I think how that connects to the Fatima promise concerning Russia: my native land has been miraculously converted so that the whole world will place devotion to Mary's Immaculate Heart alongside devotion to Jesus's Sacred Heart."

"Your Excellency, the Pope will not find you a troublemaker at all. You will console his heart and rekindle his zeal – his apostolic fervor to restore the Church in all those lands which were once Catholic and are now secular, turned aside to serve the prince of this world."

As they stepped off the elevator into the dormitory corridor leading to their rooms, Father Herald explained the schedule. In thirty minutes they would meet at the elevator, and would walk together to the Apostolic Palace, where they were to meet the Holy Father at four o'clock. The Metropolitan should wear his formal robes and mitre, and carry his bishop's staff, as there would be an official Vatican photographer present to record this historic meeting for posterity. Today's meeting with the Pope, including the private dinner this evening, would constitute the *ad limina* visit of the Metropolitan of Moscow and All the Russias. The next day, Filaret would return to the Confessio with the Pope, where the Metropolitan would receive the Roman Catholic *pallium*. For that occasion, Filaret was to wear his liturgical robes and carry his Orthodox bishop's Episcopal staff with the cross and serpents.

At four o'clock Patriarch Filaret III of Moscow and Father John Herald were seated in the foyer outside the private office of Pope Nicholas VI. Two Swiss Guards stood at attention beside the office doors. When a grandfather clock chimed four times, the guards opened the double doors.

"Your Excellency, the Holy Father will see you and Father Herald now," said one of the guards.

A Vatican photographer was discreetly positioned to capture the historic event in a series of snapshots, which would be cropped and then issued to the worldwide media together with a carefully drafted press release approved by the Pope himself.

As Filaret entered the papal office, the Holy Father, dressed in white with red shoes and a white biretta, came toward him, a great smile on his face, and joined the Patriarch of Moscow and All the Russias in a brotherly embrace.

"Welcome home, my dear brother in Christ," said Nicholas. "May the peace of Christ be with you."

Then, for the first time in a millennium, an Orthodox Archbishop knelt on both knees before the Holy Father, and kissed the Fisherman's ring on the third finger of his right hand. The ring featured a bas-relief of Saint Peter fishing from a boat, symbolizing the fact that the Pope is the successor of Saint Peter both as Bishop of Rome and as a "fisher of men." Around the bas-relief were raised letters that read "Nicholas VI, PP." The kiss symbolized Filaret's filial affection for the Pope, and his sincere episcopal submission to the supremacy of the Bishop of Rome.

"Your Holiness," said Filaret, struggling to hold back his tears, "I come

as your most obedient and devoted son, seeking your help and guidance as to how I might best rule my vast flock for the sake of their eternal salvation.”

“Arise, my brother,” said Nicholas, assisting Filaret with both hands, “and come visit with me. I want you to tell me all about the wondrous news I hear coming from the regions of the north. We have an hour now, and dinner tonight, and as much time as you wish in the days to come.”

Father Herald had been present at hundreds of private papal audiences, and did not recall ever hearing such an open-ended offer of papal time and attention. Truly, this was historic. In front of the Pope’s desk, there was an informal seating area with upholstered chairs and ottoman footstools, and side tables with lamps. Father Herald, knowing the routine, assisted Filaret to settle into a chair at a right angle to the Pope’s chair, directly across from Father Herald’s chair. The photographer departed just as a nun in full habit entered and brought a tray with tea, coffee, and cookies.

“Please tell me what is happening in Russia, and what the Pope in Rome can do to help.”

The trim and energetic Holy Father then reached forward to the center coffee table, poured a cup of tea with three spoonfuls of sugar, and took four cookies off the tray. Then he settled back in his chair, put his feet in the red shoes up on the Ottoman, and smiled at Filaret as he sipped his tea and took a first bite of his first cookie.

“Your Holiness, I hardly know how to behave at such a time as this.”

“Please be at ease, Your Excellency. We are brothers, and this is my home, and you are my honored guest. My job is to help you in any way I can. Please relax.”

Filaret was astounded. He realized that he still struggled inwardly against lifelong conditioning to be wary of “The Pope of Rome.” He had to remind himself that this was now a new world, 2015, post-consecration, in which Russia was miraculously converting to the Catholic Faith at breathtaking speed.

“Holy Father, today I have come to Rome, the first time in a millennium that any Orthodox leader has demonstrated his submission to the successor of Peter. I find that it is good to be here. In Russia, most of the common people are returning to church, with long lines for confession, and a growing national consensus that our government and economy must be re-designed in conformity with the Social Kingship of Christ. The people are realizing that for a thousand years they have been like sheep without their real shepherd, and now they want to remake Russia as a Catholic Confessional State.”

“And what do they mean by ‘Catholic’?” asked Nicholas.

“We Orthodox have always used the word ‘catholic’ to mean the universal or worldwide Church. The bone of contention always was whether the Pope of Rome was part of that Church, or whether he was in schism. But now people realize that it is we Orthodox who have been in schism from the Pope, and they want to be back in union with the true

Catholic Church. They are grasping that it is being in union with the Pope that truly defines Orthodoxy.”

“And what about the liturgy?”

“There is no thought of changing the liturgy, because there is actually nothing in the Orthodox Mass of Saint John Chrysostom that is contrary to Roman Catholic doctrine.”

“So the Russians want to keep their liturgy, but come back in union with the Pope?”

“Exactly, Your Holiness.”

“I can’t see any real problem with that. It makes perfect sense, just as it did for the Anglicans.”

“May I be blunt, Holiness?”

“Please. That is how we arrive at truth, which is the purpose of all we do.”

The Pope bit into his third cookie, and smiled.

“Ever since the liturgical revolution which followed Vatican II, and the growing laxity of catechesis which went with it, we Orthodox have lived with the fear that we alone were left holding the line of resistance against the modern world. In the Nineteenth Century and before, our caesaropapism and stubborn determination to shut any foreign influence out of our Eastern Orthodox nations, caused us to reject the authority of the Pope in Rome. But by the latter half of the Twentieth Century, two things had changed: First, much of the Orthodox world had come under the dark night of atheistic communism, and had to concentrate on preserving what could be preserved. Second, the Catholic Church in the ‘free’ West seemed to be self-destructing through what Pope Pius XII had foreseen and feared: ‘The suicide of altering the Faith in her liturgy.’”¹¹⁴

“So, by adamantly refusing to reconcile with Rome, the Orthodox felt they were preserving their doctrinally sound tradition?”

“Exactly. And we were – except in those bogus doctrinal disputes which had long been used to justify our separation.”

“And now things have changed again.”

“Yes. The Holy Mother of God has obtained for us Orthodox the grace to convert, to change our minds, and to see things according to the complete Catholic truth.”

“And the young people in Russia, who are returning to church, are not all clamoring for modern music in church, and for Mass in modern Russian instead of Old Slavonic?”

“No, Holiness. The whole nation seems to realize that in the past Russia had a rich tradition of high Christian culture, not only in the ancient liturgy and the ancient traditions of ecclesiastical art and architecture. We also had rich Christian tradition in our government, schools, and mainstream culture. Right up until the godless Bolsheviks enslaved us in darkness.”

“Well, how can I help?”

¹¹⁴ Pope Pius XII, quoted in Kramer, Fr. Paul, *The Suicide of Altering the Faith in the Liturgy*, page i. See Bibliography.

“The Russian people will need you to come to Russia soon, Holy Father. They will need to experience the thrill of having the chief shepherd of all Christians come to bless our nation and our people.”

“Two or three of my predecessors long desired to go to Russia,” said Nicholas. “And they were not welcome there.”

“But now all that has changed. Now people see that to be truly Orthodox means to be Catholic.”

“And when do you think the Pope of Rome should plan to come?” asked Nicholas, smiling.

“Now it is early September. I would think that by next spring arrangements could be made. Everyone knows a papal trip cannot possibly be made on short notice.”

Not unless Father Herald should happen to arrange one again on less than two days’ notice, thought Pope Nicholas.

“I will make it a priority, and will assign Father Herald to work with you on finalizing the details. Father Herald is a master at getting things done even with a dozen modernist Curial Cardinals always seeking to obstruct his every move.”

“Holy Father,” interjected Father Herald, “the photos and press release from today’s meeting, as well as tomorrow’s ceremony when you place the Catholic *pallium* on Patriarch Filaret, will begin to help the Russians feel their unity with the Pope. We should try to issue an apostolic constitution for the Russian Orthodox Church, modeled on the autonomous particular Churches. There are twenty-two Eastern Catholic Churches, each having their own rites and their own canon laws, but in full union with Rome. The Orthodox Church will become number twenty-three, and by far the largest, of those Churches. Before Vatican II they were called ‘Eastern Rite’ Churches. But now they are simply called Eastern Catholic Churches. They have their own autonomous liturgical practices and disciplinary rules, which date back many centuries and which have a history of organic development. But all these Churches accept all the doctrine that the Catholic Church holds and teaches.”

“So what would you call us?” asked Filaret.

“It would seem logical,” said Father Herald, “that the Russian Orthodox Church, under its new name, will simply be called ‘The Russian Orthodox Catholic Church.’”

“Not ‘The Orthodox Rite in the Catholic Church’?” asked Nicholas.

“No,” replied Father Herald. “Historically, the Russian Orthodox Church has long been a completely separate Church, not just a liturgical variation that has always been within the sphere of Roman Catholicism. That will not change. The Russian Orthodox Church will continue to be an autonomous particular Church. What will change is that the Russian Orthodox Church will become Catholic, by formally accepting every doctrine of the Catholic Church, and by acknowledging the supreme authority of the Bishop of Rome.”

“I think that will be very much to the liking of the Russian people,” said

Filaret. "Once they realize the Vatican will not try to alter the Orthodox Faith in her liturgy, they will be most happy to come under the spiritual protection of the Pope in Rome."

"I suppose there is a precedent for that," said Nicholas, "in the story of Blessed Leonid Feodorov. Recently I have been studying his life. He was born in Saint Petersburg in 1879, and privately studied the Church Fathers while in the seminary of St. Aleksandr Nevsky, an elite preparatory school from which very few boys actually pursued religious vocations. Young Leonid's private study convinced him of the need to be in union with Rome. After befriending Father Jan Stitslavsky, a Catholic priest who quietly ministered to Catholics in Russia, Leonid left for Rome in 1902, at age twenty-two. He was formally received into the Catholic Church that summer at the Gesu in Rome, and as a unique Russian Orthodox convert was granted a private audience with Pope Leo XIII, who agreed to finance his studies for the Catholic priesthood. Leonid soon noted the egocentric arrogance of the Latin Rite Catholics toward the Eastern Rites, as he began to feel his soul drawn back to Holy Mother Russia and to the beauty of the Byzantine Rite. The Pope supported his desire to remain a Catholic but return to the Russian Rite and traditions. And in 1907 Pope Pius X, the future saint, accepted Leonid as a Roman Catholic in the Byzantine Rite. Before the revolution of 1905, to be a Catholic in the Byzantine Rite in Russia had been considered high treason. But after 1905, Russian Rite Catholics in Saint Petersburg were free to offer the divine liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom, and they were quietly protected by the Tsar's Interior Minister, Pyotr Stolypin."

"Stolypin was a just man, but in 1911 he was shot by rogue members of the Russian secret police," said Filaret. "Ultra-conservative monarchists disliked his efforts to push reforms to better the lot of the common man. He was shot at the Kiev opera house, where Tsar Nicholas II was also present. As Stolypin fell to his knees, having been shot in the stomach at close range, he turned and blessed his sovereign with the sign of the cross, and shouted that he was happy to die for the Tsar. The next day Tsar Nicholas knelt at his hospital bedside and wept, knowing Stolypin was a good man who fell victim to evil forces within the upper ranks of the nobility. The Tsar begged his forgiveness on behalf of the Romanov's, but within a few days Stolypin died of his wounds and Russian Catholics lost a benevolent protector."

"Meanwhile, Leonid continued his 'treasonous' studies for the Catholic priesthood in Switzerland," continued Pope Nicholas. "He used a pseudonym to hide from the Russian secret police, and was ordained to the Roman Catholic priesthood in the Bulgarian Greek-Catholic Church in Constantinople in 1911. In 1914 he returned to Saint Petersburg to find his mother terminally ill. His status as a Catholic priest saying the Byzantine Rite officially made him a traitor to the Russian Empire, a rebel against the established Russian Orthodox Church. Tsar Nicholas II was the *de facto* head of the Russian Orthodox Church, but, being no

theologian, usually followed the advice of his bishops in religious matters. The bishops wanted Father Feodorov sent to the infamous Lubyanka prison in Moscow, but Tsar Nicholas feared to raise his hand so harshly against an anointed priest of God, and so sent him into a gentle internal exile in a pleasant town in Siberia. This sort of exile was more like a reading holiday than a punishment. The Tsar wanted to protect his Russian Orthodox flock against the dangers of any ‘schismatic’ influence. Father Feodorov received a monthly allowance from the Tsar, had to report to the local police station once a month to verify his obedience to the Tsar’s orders, and was respectfully treated as an honored guest by the locals. He spent much of his time studying the ancient Church fathers in the library of the local Russian Orthodox monastery. Such was the ‘tyranny’ of Tsar Nicholas II.

“When Nicholas abdicated in 1917, Father Feodorov was free to return to Saint Petersburg, and may have been made a Roman Catholic bishop. He remained free during the short rule of the socialist Provisional Government of Alexander Kerensky, but once Vladimir Lenin and the Communist Bolsheviks staged their violent *coup d’etat*, the practice and teaching of the Christian religion in any form became illegal. By 1923, Father Feodorov was put through a show trial, imprisoned in Moscow, and then in 1926 was transferred to Solovki, a former monastery on an island in the far north that had been converted into a prison camp, part of the infamous ‘Gulag Archipelago’ documented by Alexander Solzhenitsyn. In 1933, after he fell ill, the wife of Maxim Gorky intervened with Stalin and obtained Father Feodorov’s release into internal exile. But he was so debilitated that by 1935 he died, in a private home, of an untreated cough and fever. In 2001 he was beatified by my predecessor.”¹¹⁵

“So both Pope Leo XIII, and the future saint Pope Pius X, personally approved of a Roman Catholic priest from Russia adopting the Russian Orthodox Rite and the divine liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom,” noted Father Herald. “Given that history, I have been thinking that perhaps the Holy Father should automatically allow bi-ritual faculties for Russian Orthodox priests,” said Father Herald. “The Vatican already sometimes authorizes certain priests to celebrate Mass in more than one rite, where circumstances so require. It is rarely necessary, but I believe that will gradually change in the case of the Russians.”

“Please continue,” said Nicholas, as he bit into his fourth and final cookie.

“Well, think how the Irish, living on an island off the coast of Protestant England, responded to the intense persecutions imposed on them by the British penal laws. They sent tens of thousands of their sons and daughters as religious missionaries to every corner of the world. Whether you went to India, or the Americas, or the Far East, or Australia, you would find Irish priests leading parishes, and you would find Irish nuns and religious

¹¹⁵ King, Brendan, “A Heart for Russia: The Life of Blessed Leonid Feodorov (1879-1935), Bishop and Confessor,” *Catholic Family News*, Vol. 16, Nos. 7 and 8, July & August, 2009.

brothers teaching in Catholic schools or providing nursing care in Catholic hospitals. Ireland became a blessing to the world by becoming so fervently Catholic, in response to persecution, that she helped the Faith to blossom and grow globally. Well, I think that is just what Russia is going to do in the next fifty years. Out of the dark night of Communist persecution, aided by the special graces now obtained by the Immaculate Heart of Mary, Russia will spread the renewal of the Faith over all the world.”

“Please, God, may it be so!” said Nicholas.

As Nicholas swallowed the last bite of his cookie, and reached for two more, he pondered how often Father Herald seemed to see things afar off, sensing what would be in the future, as if the saints and angels who could see things from the perspective of eternity were whispering hints about the future into his ear.

“Yes, and if I am right,” Father Herald continued, “innumerable Russian religious will spread out across the world, rebuilding the Catholic Faith upon the ruins of Western Christendom, which now lies spiritually desolate and in shambles. But they will be spreading the Catholic or universal Faith, not one particular ritual. In formerly Catholic nations, many of them will need to provide the sacraments in the Roman Rite. So the time will come when they will need to be allowed bi-ritual faculties.”

“That will be no problem,” said Nicholas. “Obviously, we will do whatever is for the good of souls. That is the ultimate law of the Church.”

“But I cannot imagine good Russian Orthodox Catholics wanting anything to do with the *novus ordo* liturgy,” said Filaret. “That ecclesiastical disaster has been one of the reasons the Orthodox so strongly resisted the ecumenical advances of the Catholic Church in the late Twentieth Century. We could see that the fruits of the new Mass in the West were mostly bad: declining Mass attendance; loss of faith in the Real Presence; emasculation of the priestly vocation as women took over the sanctuary; loss of the sense of sin resulting in infrequent use of sacramental Confession; and, ultimately, loss of insight into why one ought to be Catholic rather than settling for the much easier Protestant religion.”

“His Holiness knows that I can’t argue with what you have said,” replied Father Herald. “Therefore, I would think that if Orthodox religious were someday going to help re-evangelize the West, they would need to function bi-ritually – the Russian Orthodox rite at home, and the Roman Rite in the missions. But for them the Western rite would have to be the Tridentine Mass, and not the New Mass.”

“Absolutely right,” said Filaret. “The Orthodox will have no interest in a dumbed-down, half-Protestant ritual, artificially concocted in the 1960’s. It was forced upon the Catholic faithful using the same totalitarian methods by which the Communists pretended to allow freedom of religion while punishing everyone who dared to exercise that ‘freedom.’ Anyone who objected to the Communist rules in Russia was called a ‘refusenik.’ And in the Catholic Church, those few who dared to resist the unprecedented liturgical revolution were disparaged and marginalized as ‘disobedient

traditionalists.”

“Of course one cannot openly speak this way in the West,” said Father Herald. “Most Catholic people will not hear it, even if it is true.”

“But we are looking into the distant future, I think,” said Nicholas, finishing off his fifth cookie. “First we have to finish with the conversion of Russia. That will take some doing, and will probably keep all three of us busy for whatever years we have left on this earth.”

“Another difficult issue in reconciling our two Churches will be divorce,” said Father Herald. “The Catholic position has always been, and remains, that divorce is impossible. A marriage validly contracted before the altar of God cannot be undone by man. Couples may legitimately separate under certain limited and very unfortunate conditions, but they are not then free to remarry if they wish to remain in a state of grace. The only way a couple could separate and then remarry is if the Church finds that their marriage was never valid in the first place, due to certain impediments which had not been disclosed at the time of the wedding. This latter possibility has, of course, been scandalously abused in the West, and particularly in the United States, in recent decades. Critics of the Church have come to call it ‘Catholic divorce.’ One simply hires a canon lawyer, finds some psychological ‘experts’ to testify that one or both parties were psychologically immature or afflicted, and a liberal bishop’s marriage tribunal will find that an annulment is warranted. About seventy-five percent of the annulments issued in the world each year take place in the United States. But this does not mean that Americans abuse the rules of the Church more than other nations, and it may well prove the opposite. American Catholics care about being right with the Church, about being in a state of grace. In Europe, people have simply stopped practicing the Faith and so get civil divorces and remarriages, ignoring Church rules.”

“We Orthodox have also struggled mightily with divorce,” said Filaret. “In Russia the divorce rate is said to be sixty-five percent, versus forty-five percent in the United States. In Russia, about eighty percent of people self-identify as Russian Orthodox, but until the consecration only ten percent of those attended services as often as once a month, and only about three percent were actively involved in parish life.”

“So Russia was quite similar to Western Europe,” observed Father Herald.

“Sadly, yes. And so most people neither married in the Church, nor did they seek divorce through the Church. But of course now, in Russia, the general failure to practice the Faith is changing, almost overnight.”

“But the Orthodox have permitted divorce,” said Father Herald. “This will be a stumbling block to reconciliation, since Catholic doctrine holds divorce from a sacramental marriage to be impossible.”

“Our position has been that the Lord Himself, in Matthew’s gospel, allowed divorce in cases of unfaithfulness.¹¹⁶ We have viewed divorce as a tragedy, and as a concession to fallen man’s sinfulness and to the

¹¹⁶ Matthew 19:9.

broken world in which people must live. Likewise, we have permitted remarriage for the same reasons. But we have always discouraged divorce and remarriage.”

“One could argue that the Orthodox practice has not been fundamentally different from the liberal marriage tribunals in the United States,” said Nicholas. “You have attempted to help souls to Heaven by acknowledging that keeping Christ’s law is exceedingly difficult when one must live under a godless government and in a social system that is anti-Christian.”

“The problem for people is that when society is not structured according to Catholic social principles, then following the laws of Christ becomes increasingly difficult,” said Father Herald. “We can hope that the new Christian Russia will show us how things work out in a Catholic Confessional State. I recall that Portugal, after 1930, passed laws to stipulate that when persons were married sacramentally in the Catholic Church, the couple explicitly acknowledged – before they proceeded with the sacramental marriage – that they legally forfeited any right to a civil divorce. The result was that by the 1950’s, ninety percent of couples marrying chose a sacramental marriage, and the numbers of divorces plummeted.”

“May it prove to be so in Catholic Russia!” proclaimed Filaret. “Then, in practice, our Churches will have little difficulty reconciling our differences in our approach to divorce.”

“How will the Russian government adapt to the new reality of a converted people?” asked Nicholas.

“Have you heard of Mikhail Romanov?” asked Filaret. “People in Russia are beginning to ask about him.”

“I have met him, once,” said Nicholas. “Why, is there active talk of restoring the monarchy?”

“Very much so. Russians love autocracy, and have always viewed it as a reflection of the government of Heaven. What is your impression of Dr. Romanov?” asked Filaret.

“He is a remarkable man. Recently I heard him play the organ masterfully in a concert on short notice, and also heard him sing the bass solo parts in a difficult Haydn Mass. And I have become well-acquainted with his brother Kiril, who is a Catholic priest in Detroit.”

“The Romanov’s are a solidly Catholic family,” said Father Herald. “I spend half my time at Father Kiril Romanov’s parish in Detroit, and I can vouch for them.”

“Mikhail’s credentials seem unimpeachable,” said Filaret. “But he is an American, and Russians are suspicious of Americans.”

“The future will not be with America,” said Father Herald. “America is fast going the way of the British Empire, and in truth her people will be better off concentrating on getting their own house in order at home. The new Christian empire that changes the world will be Russia, and her main antagonists are likely to be atheistic Red China, and the Muslim Arab bloc.”

“Are you suggesting that Mikhail’s being an American won’t seem important for long?”

“Exactly. Mikhail Romanov has been proven legitimately to be the first man in line for any restoration of the Romanov throne. He was Orthodox until age sixteen, and now is Roman Catholic, and is very devout. He is completely fluent in both English and Russian. He is a decorated American war hero, a physician and medical school professor in America, and a respected visiting medical professor and medical missionary in Russia. Few men in the world could bridge the gap between the Catholic and Orthodox traditions as well as he can. He will easily fill a critical role as Russia reunites with – and in time helps to lead – the Catholic world. I have little doubt that he is Heaven-sent for just such a time as this.”

“In Russia, miracles almost seem to be routine of late,” quipped Filaret.

“How do you plan to introduce Mikhail Romanov to the Russian people?” asked Nicholas.

“Well, the Romanov family has already begun the process, through the news coverage which followed the latest Romanov Nobility Ball in New York City. Now our government is planning to host a repeat Romanov Nobility Ball, on Russian Unity Day, November fourth, in the Alexander Palace in Tsarskoe Selo, just outside Saint Petersburg.”

“So that would bring the Romanov heir home to the palace where Nicholas and Alexandra lived up until the revolution,” noted Father Herald. “There is excellent symbolism in that: Christian Russia picking up right where she left off in 1917. Mikhail looks so much like Nicholas II that people will intuitively feel the lost world of pre-revolutionary Christian Russia is once again within their grasp.”

“Yes, and Russian Unity Day is a popular national holiday that celebrates a time when all classes of Russian society strove together to save Russia from a common external threat. We think there could be no better date for the ball.”

“But how will you determine if it is the will of the Russian people to restore the monarchy?” asked Nicholas. “As you know, the Church does not have an official position on the best form of government. She merely insists that justice must be done and that Catholic Social teaching must be implemented.”

“And of course, neither requirement is ever met in modern secular democracies,” said Father Herald. “Catholic policies have not been implemented since the end of the last Catholic Confessional States.”

“Well, to answer the Holy Father,” said Filaret, “we plan to hold a national referendum, asking the people outright whether they wish to restore the monarchy; whether they wish the monarchy to be autocratic or constitutional; and whether they wish to have Mikhail Romanov as Tsar. For each of the three questions, they will have the opportunity to either vote for the suggested choice, or to write in any alternative they wish to suggest. We think the people will overwhelmingly opt for hereditary Christian autocracy with Mikhail Romanov as the next Tsar.”

“That seems amazing,” said Nicholas. “Or rather, it would have seemed so prior to the consecration, and all that has happened since.”

“When do you plan to hold the referendum?” asked Father Herald.

“We are thinking of December eighth, the Feast of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Providing the Holy Father would not object, of course. That has never before been a feast day in the Russian Orthodox calendar, and by declaring it a national holiday we can emphasize Russia’s new devotion to the Immaculate Conception of Mary, and to Her Immaculate Heart. We are thinking of not opening the polls until one o’clock in the afternoon, so that most people would be able to go to church in the morning and pray before they cast their vote.”

“Extraordinary,” said Nicholas. “It is beautiful to contemplate even one modern nation beginning to operate according to Catholic principles. Of course I would approve of a national referendum for the stated purposes on this new Russian holy day. But only this once, mind you, under these special circumstances.”

There being no cookies remaining, Nicholas noted that fifty-five minutes of the hour allotted for their meeting had elapsed, and suggested that they could adjourn until dinner. The dinner would be reserved for discussion of topics of personal interest, such as history, music, and philosophy, but no Church business.

Nicholas requested that the next morning they would have a conference to begin going through the Russian Orthodox Mass and catechism, to determine if there were actually any major conflicts or deficiencies in terms of universal Catholic doctrine.

In the afternoon, Nicholas would accompany Filaret to the Confessio, with the Vatican photographer to record the historic event. Both Pope Nicholas and Patriarch Filaret would be attired in their full liturgical robes with mitres and staffs. There, at the tomb of the Apostle Peter, Filaret would receive the *pallium* from Pope Nicholas, signifying Filaret’s office as a Catholic Archbishop.

On the following two days Pope Nicholas, Patriarch Filaret, and Father Herald would work together on solving any remaining doctrinal or disciplinary conflicts between the Russian Orthodox and Catholic Churches. Plans would be developed for the Pope to become properly prepared to celebrate Mass in the Russian Byzantine Liturgy by the time he would visit Russia, and for Filaret to celebrate the Tridentine Mass, as a way of showing to the world the complete unity of faith shared by the two Churches.

Then when Filaret returned to Moscow, a joint press release would be issued to the world, together with photos of their historic visit, announcing the joyful reunion of the two Churches, and announcing that plans for a Papal visit to Russia within a few months had been agreed.