

Bright memory of the Bishop of Mukachevo Greek Catholic Eparchy Milan Shashik.

On July 14, 2020, Bishop Milan Shashik returned to the Heavenly Father's house. He had a great and charismatic personality within the Mukachevo Greek Catholic Diocese (sui juris) in the 21st century. As a pastor he was extremely gifted spiritually, intellectually, emotionally. He had a sense of humor, with a big and loving heart, and a bright man with a phenomenal memory. He was a tireless fighter for justice and nature conservation in the Carpathian Mountains.

The terrible news of his sudden death came as a great shock to all priests and believers, not only in Transcarpathia and Ukraine, but also abroad, because Bishop Milan was well known in Western and Eastern Europe and America.

He was born on September 17, 1952, in Legota, Slovakia, to a devout Roman Catholic family. The Holy Sacrament of Anointing was received from Bishop Ambróz Lazík, who then held the episcopal title of "Apian." Interestingly, the same title "Apian" was held before him by Blessed Theodore Romzha, who was poisoned and brutally killed by the communist authorities in 1947. This was one of the first signs of God's providence for Bishop Milan and his future mission in Ukraine and Transcarpathia.

In 1971, he was secretly admitted to the missionary monastic community of St. Vincent de Paul (Lazarists). This monastic community has been active for many centuries under the sign of helping the needy, the poor, and the deprived. It was his charisma of service, to the sick and the poor, that became the main business of the life of Bishop Milan. This is evidenced not only by his episcopal credo, "...he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor" (Luke 4:18), but also by all his activities in the Greek Catholic Diocese of Mukachevo and beyond.

After his ordination to the priesthood on June 6, 1976, he worked in various Roman Catholic parishes in Slovakia and, as a young priest, prayed daily, a special prayer, for the freedom and legalization of the Greek Catholic Church, by the Communists, in Ukraine. He often mentioned that the prayer was constantly in his breviary (prayer book), and in 1989, the prayer miraculously disappeared somewhere and he could not find it anywhere.

Bishop Milan was greatly influenced by his studies in Rome (1990-1992), where he received not only a good education and language, but also an important experience of the universality of the Church. He skillfully used this experience and knowledge while working at the Apostolic Nunciature in Kyiv for six years, as an assistant and translator to Nuncio Antonio Franco.

In one of our last correspondence on WhatsApp last week, Bishop Milan wrote about the holiness of the great Pope St. John Paul II, and his own episcopal consecration in 2003. The first meeting of the young Milan Shashik and St. Pope John Paul II (King Wojtyła) took place when Wojtyła was Archbishop of Krakow. There were a few more meetings later.

St. John Paul II, being a very deeply spiritual, believing and holy man, has always been passionate about people's social problems. This combination very likely became an example for the episcopal ministry of Bishop Milan. After all, everyone who met him felt his attention and interest in the social problems of our people and time. He was open to dialogue with dissenters to solve these problems, but on the other hand, he was a man of faith, prayer, and deep

spirituality. His breviary was always in his hands, he sought unity with God. Bishop Milan not only talked a lot about God, but also talked a lot with God. This was the source of his priestly and episcopal ministry. When I once asked him if he had forgotten the breviary in the room, he said, "Never, it's sacred." For me, Bishop Milan is a person who has combined two important points that are very important for the church, Jesus Christ and an individual with their social problems. I think this is his testament to us and his vision of the future of our church, Jesus Christ and an individual. In an interview with M-Studio in 2018, he said, "Let's do good together, love each other, get together, Greek Catholics, Roman Catholics, Protestants, non-believers, let's do something good for our country, for our city...!"

To priests, monks, and nuns, he was more than a bishop, he was a true, loving, and spiritual Father. He lived very modestly. He never worried for himself and did not ask for anything, but for his priests, for the decent conditions of their lives and for the flourishing of monastic spirituality in our region, he thought and worked tirelessly every day. Priests who were educated under his leadership (he personally ordained about 200 priests) now serve not only in his native Mukachevo diocese, but also in many countries in Europe and America.

One of his main tasks as a bishop and pastor, he saw in building peace between people, different denominations, and religions, as well as, between different church identities within the Greek Catholic Diocese of Mukachevo. He fulfilled this task. In 2003, when he began his episcopal ministry, there were about 100 open confrontations and quarrels of various kinds with the Orthodox faith, mostly due to the non-return of our churches. Today, there are no such problems and the situation has stabilized. The tension gradually subsided. His peace plan was to build new churches. In almost 18 years, he had consecrated more than 250 new churches and chapels, a large number of parish houses, and pastoral centers. He officiated at Christmas in the open air, on the street, with parishioners who were not given back their temples. It was his efforts that from the very beginning completed the theological academy in Uzhhorod. Orphans, children, the return and restoration of the Episcopal residence, in Uzhgorod, and raising the spiritual level, was just some of the things that were a part of his work. That is why he had great authority in society and secular power.

Bishop Milan Shashik was born and raised in Slovakia, but fell in love with Ukraine, especially the Transcarpathian region, the Byzantine Rite and its people. As a good shepherd, he gave them not only all his love, health, strength, and abilities, but also, his life. This is a great loss for the Church of Christ on earth, as well as for the Greek Catholic Diocese of Mukachevo. But at the same time, he will be a good and strong protector in heaven for all of us, together with Blessed Theodore Romzha, and other confessors and martyrs of our church.

What can comfort us orphaned today? Perhaps his answer to the question, "What is death?" In an interview with Radio Maria in March 2020, "Death was the best moment for the first Christians because they believed they were really going to meet the Lord. For a Christian today, death must also be the moment when we must meet our Lord. It is joyful for us that we have eternal life before us, the Kingdom of Heaven before us, and before that we enter into eternal life with Jesus Christ, who is present in our lives. So, I would like to say, that we have nothing to fear! Because God, who loved us so much that he gave his Son so that whoever believes in him, would not perish, but have eternal life. This loving God will not allow anything to destroy us. I have confidence in this boundless love and mercy of God."

We are grateful to him for his example of faith and hard work. His name is already engraved in golden letters in our memory and hearts, together with the great Bishops of Mukachevo, Andrii Bachynsky and Blessed Theodore Romzha.