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Forty years have passed since Metropolitan Leonty, the Primate of the Russian Orthodox Greek Catholic Church in North America, fell asleep in the Lord.

Forty is a symbolic number for Orthodox Christians. It signifies an accomplished action and a completed event. The time, therefore, has come for the Orthodox Church in America to consider if God wants to glorify Metropolitan Leonty among the Church's canonized saints.

The son of a priest, Leonid Turkevich was born in Kremenez, Russia, in 1876. He studied at the Theological Seminary in Wolyn and graduated from the Kiev Theological Academy in 1900. He came to America as a young married priest in 1906 to serve as rector of the theological seminary in Minneapolis, MN. In 1912, he moved with the seminary to Tenafly, NJ, and remained its head until 1915. He also served as rector of Saint Nicholas Cathedral, New York, NY, until 1924. He worked closely with the Church's recently glorified saints, Archbishop Tikhon [Belavin], the future Patriarch; Bishop Raphael [Hawaweeny]; and the Archpriests Alexis Toth, Alexander Hotovitzky, and John Kochurov.

After the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia, the communist government was determined to destroy the Church's North American diocese. It confiscated many church properties in America, including Father Turkevich's cathedral and seminary. At this crucial moment, the distinguished archpriest emerged even more strongly as the Church's leading cleric. He was called the "soul of the council" at the 1924 Detroit *Sobor* [as the All-American councils were known at the time] that declared the North American missionary diocese a "self-governing metropolia," according to Patriarch Tikhon's instructions for ecclesiastical regions cut off from the central Church administration.

In 1933, after the death of his wife, Father Turkevich became Bishop of Chicago, taking the monastic name Leonty. He held this position until his election as Archbishop of New York and Metropolitan at the Eighth All-American *Sobor* in New York in December 1950.

Metropolitan Leonty's vision for Orthodoxy in the "new world" was that of Saints Innocent and Tikhon, his friend and mentor. He clearly presented this vision in his opening address at the Eighth All-American *Sobor*, at which he was elected unanimously as primate and successor to Metropolitan Theophilus. In this address, he declared that, while the original missionary diocese – now called "the Metropolia" – loves its mother Russian Orthodox Church and its "grandmother Church" of the "Greek East," it can never again be governed from abroad. He firmly insisted that, despite all obstacles, this humiliated Church, now but one of several "jurisdictions" in various states of communion and disunion, would never stop working to fulfill its providential destiny as God's instrument for establishing one Orthodox Church in North America for all Orthodox Christians. His prophetic words were partially fulfilled five years after his death, when the "mother Church" of Russia granted complete self-governance to the "Metropolia" as the autocephalous Orthodox Church in America. It remains to be seen if his words will be more perfectly fulfilled as Orthodox Christians in North America, especially the hierarchs, continue to debate their calling and destiny. Indeed, the destiny of North American Orthodoxy will not be decided in the "old world," but in North America. The decision is ours to make, as it was in the past, is now, and always will be.

In this same address, Metropolitan Leonty spoke about the Russian Synodal Church in Exile (known now as the Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia) that had just established its headquarters in New York City. He declared that this ecclesiastical body was not "in exile," but was "at home in our America." He predicted that, in due time, it would join with all Orthodox to form a "new Orthodox Zion" in the "new world." When pressured to condemn the Synodal Church for the uncanonical action of establishing itself where the Russian Orthodox Church's original "mission, and later diocese, and now metropolia" had existed since 1794, he simply stated that "there can be no discus-

sion of canons when people are fleeing from Sodom."

Metropolitan Leonty always acted in the wisest, most peaceful, and most generous way, both before and after becoming a bishop and the Church's Primate. He consistently worked for harmony and unity, calmly and kindly, yet with awesome strength and undaunted courage. In the face of the most violent and virulent denunciations that labeled and libeled his beloved Church as "schismatic" and "uncanonical" – and even, at times, "graceless" and "heretical" – the saintly Metropolitan's face always beamed with a forgiving smile, filled with light and peace. He never wavered. He never slandered. He never accused. He never condemned. And he surely never returned evil for evil. But he did hold fast to his personal, priestly, and archpastoral calling, and to the calling of the Church that he faithfully loved and served until his very last breath.

Metropolitan Leonty died on May 14, 1965, after having been retired for a few years from his position as the Church's Primate. Many agreed with the late Archbishop Iakovos of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese who, a few years before Metropolitan Leonty's death, publicly called him a "living saint." In eulogizing his beloved archpastor and protector, Protopresbyter Alexander Schmemmann said that Metropolitan Leonty was the personal and hierarchal embodiment of the Church of Christ in its earthly aspect as God's humiliated and self-emptied "suffering servant" in a mad and wicked world.

There can be no doubt that Metropolitan Leonty is with the Lord. If he is not saved, nobody is. The question remains, however, as to whether he should be formally recognized as a saint of the Church, with a feast day, liturgical services, and icons. I believe that he should be so recognized, not only because he was a co-worker and leader among those who are already canonized saints, but because he was a saint whose service to Christ and the Church during a most ugly, confusing, and conflicting period of history displayed the greatest of all signs of sanctity: co-suffering love in and with Christ, by the Holy Spirit's power, "on behalf of all and for all," and in absolute obedience to God and with total mercy for his adversaries.

Metropolitan Leonty, perhaps more than any of his co-workers, combined personal holiness in prayer, especially intercession for everyone and everything, with personal asceticism and "folly for Christ's sake." Some say that they saw him praying "a foot off the ground." Others told of his care for the "bowery bums," whom he fed and housed. Others testified to his secret gifts of money to the poor. Many read and even made a bit of fun over the countless poems, essays, and letters he wrote on many subjects: the Bible, the Faith, the liturgical feasts, the saints, and numerous ecclesiastical events and occasions, such as the repose of great hierarchs, like the founder of ROCOR, Metropolitan Anthony [Khrapovitsky], simple parish priests, totally unknown *matushki*, and humble Church workers. And all of these things went together with his astute practical wisdom and his patient and sober direction of the everyday affairs of a church in indescribably tragic conditions.

Although worthy of such titles as "apostle," "founder," and "defender of Orthodoxy in America," Metropolitan Leonty, in my opinion, deserves above all to be honored as American Orthodoxy's pre-eminent "protector," "preserver," and "guardian." This is so because he almost single-handedly held together the original mission as a diocese and metropolia while maintaining positive relations, as he was able, with the "jurisdictions" that emerged in North America after the Russian Revolution. And it is also so, perhaps even more amazingly and importantly, because he steadfastly upheld his Church's original vision, spirit, and "reason for being" in the midst of tragic turmoil. In a word, from his first service as priest, pastor, and professor until his final service as hierarch, archpastor, and primate, Metropolitan Leonty never wavered from his conviction that there should be one fully united Orthodox Church in North America for all Orthodox Christians, and that his Church's sole calling was to serve this end, whatever the cost to itself in prestige, possessions and power.

METROPOLITAN LEONTY to 14



METROPOLITAN LEONTY from 6

'With the saints give rest'

As we contemplate the life and work of Metropolitan Leonty, our prayer to God through his intercession might be something like this.

"O God of our fathers, Creator of heaven and earth and of all things visible and invisible! You sent Your only-begotten Son to the world for its salvation. We praise and glorify You with thanksgiving for blessing Your Church in America with Your inspired servant, Metropolitan Leonty.

"Through his weakness, Your divine strength has established the Church in this land. Through his folly, Your divine wisdom has guided her destiny. Through his humility, You have exalted her with divine glory. Through his poverty, You have filled her with the riches of Your divinity. Through his obedience, You have granted her freedom from the powers of this world. Through his fidelity, You have counted her worthy to remain faithful to her calling to be the Kingdom of Heaven in the midst of the earth.

"We praise You, Lord, and give You thanks, blessing Your Holy Name by the intercessions of Your chosen vessel, Metropolitan Leonty. For in him has Your transcendent power been revealed in our midst. Like Your chosen apostle Paul, he was afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always bearing in his body the death of Jesus so that the life of Jesus might be manifested in us, Your unworthy servants.

"Help us, O Lord, by the prayers and intercessions of Metropolitan Leonty. Where there is division, grant unity. Where there is strife, bring peace. Where sin abounds, let Your grace abound all the more. Where people despair, let hope be victorious. Where contempt has captured people's hearts, let love be triumphant. Where men and women doubt, let faith and trust in You be restored and renewed.

"Grant us forgiveness of our sins with the strength to persevere to the end in fidelity to Your Word, that trampling down all carnal desires we may attain to the unity of the faith and to the comprehension of Your ineffable glory. Grant us the communion of Your Holy Spirit, so that we may be of one mind and one heart in the one Body of Your Son, which is Your Holy Church, against which the gates of hades cannot prevail, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.

"Count us worthy, O Merciful God, to be forever faithful to the life and work of Your saintly servant and our holy protector, Metropolitan Leonty. For to You we send up glory, O God and Father, together with Your only-begotten Son, our Lord and God and Savior Jesus Christ, and Your most-holy, good and life-creating Spirit, now and ever, and unto ages of ages. Amen." ■