



The Garland of the Annual Church Calendar

■ On the Occasion of the Commemoration of Her Martyrdom (July 20, 1928)

The Life of the Holy New Russian Martyr Lydia *

ST. **LYDIA** was born in Russia on March 20, 1901. Her father was a Priest in the city of Ufa. From her youth, she was distinguished for her sensitivity, her loving tenderness, and her abhorrence of evil, which is why everyone loved her.

After high school, at nineteen years of age, she was married, but soon lost her husband in the civil war.

In 1922, against his will, her Priest-father joined the “Living Church” schism, which had been organized by the Bolsheviks. The young widow wished to join the martyric Catacomb Church. Falling at the feet of her father, she begged him: “Give me your blessing to depart, father, that my salvation not be impeded.”

The elderly Priest was conscious of sinning by belonging to the “Living Church.” Thus, he tearfully gave her his blessing to live independently, prophetically saying: “My daughter, when you win your crown, tell the Lord that, although I myself proved too weak for battle [*podvig*], nevertheless I did not hinder you, but blessed you.”

Lydia managed to find work as a clerk in the Forestry Department. In this way, she came into contact with the simple Russian people, whom she loved dearly. And the unsophisticated people loved and respected her in turn. The lumberman and drivers, who worked under difficult conditions,



recounted with wonder that, when encountering Lydia at the office, they felt something similar to what they had sensed when they went to venerate a wonderworking Icon of the *Theotokos* near their village, before the 1917 Revolution.

At the office, obscenities, insults, and quarrels were no longer to be heard. Everyone noticed this, and naturally so did the Party leaders. They followed Lydia, but could find nothing suspect. The blessed Lydia never attended the Churches that were legalized by the Bolsheviks, and only rarely and with many precautions did she attend the services at the Catacomb Church.

The secret police knew that there was a network of Catacomb Churches in that region and, in order to discover it, they recalled Bishop Andrew (Ukhtomsky)—who was greatly revered by the people—from exile. By secret order of Bishop Andrew, however, only one Church in Ufa received him officially, whereas all of the inhabitants of the Diocese came into contact with him secretly. The police understood that their plan had failed, and arrested and exiled him anew. Bishop Andrew was martyred on 26 December 1937.

Lydia had the opportunity to speak with the Holy Hieromartyr Andrew for one hour. What was said between them remains unknown; but when a young and zealous Priest criticized Lydia's father before Bishop Andrew, he replied: "That Priest has a great intercessor before God: Saint Lydia," and he brought the conversation to a close.

The Grace-filled Lydia was finally arrested on 9 July 1928, when the secret police discovered that she was behind the circulation of typed booklets containing lives of Saints, prayers, and homilies and teachings of old and new Bishops. They had noticed that the typewriter on which the booklets were typed had a defective letter *K*, and were thereby able to track her down.

The police understood that she held a key in her hand to the discovery of the entire Catacomb Church in the region. For ten days they continually pressured her to confess, but she completely refused to speak. On 20 July 1928, the interrogator lost his patience and sent her to the "special command," located in a basement cell.

Exhausted, the blessed Lydia did not have the strength to go down the steps. The order was then given to the guard on duty in the hallway, Cyril Ataev (23 years old), to help her descend. "May Christ save you!" said Lydia in thanks.

These words and her eyes, filled with grief and helplessness, pro-

foundly moved Cyril. He therefore could not listen indifferently to the uninterrupted screams and crying coming from the cell where they were torturing Lydia for over an hour and a half.

“Don’t you hurt?” asked the exhausted torturers. “You scream and cry. That means it is painful.”

“Painful, Lord, how painful!” groaned Lydia.

“Then why do you not confess? The tortures will become even more painful!”

“I cannot confess... I cannot.... He will not permit it...” she replied.

“Who will not permit it?”

“God will not permit it.”

The torturers finally decided to rape her, and they called in the young guard, Cyril Ataev, to help them. When Cyril entered, he immediately understood their intentions. Overcome by holy indignation, he killed the two torturers on the spot. While he was grabbing a third torturer by the neck, a fourth shot him.

Cyril fell down near Lydia, who was bound by a rope, and, looking her straight in her eyes, he said: “Saint, take me with you!” Then something astonishing happened: a Divine radiance streamed forth from the Holy Martyr Lydia; with a heavenly smile, she answered: “I will take you.”

These words filled the two surviving torturers with horror, and they were overcome by tremendous fear. With frantic screams, they shot all of their bullets on the two helpless Martyrs. Those who had come to assist led them out, while they were still screaming like madmen. In the end, they all left, conquered by an indefinable fear.

One of the two torturers went completely out of his mind. A short while later, the other died of nervous shock. Before his death, he recounted everything that had happened to his friend, Sergeant Alexey Ikonnikov. The latter was brought to God and, for his zealous propagation of this wondrous story, was also arrested and suffered a Martyr’s death.

All three—Lydia, Cyril, and Alexey—have always been Saints in the conscience of the Catacomb Church.



* **Source:** “Άγιος Κυπριανός, No. 193-194 (January-February 1985), pp. 420-421; **Protopresbyter Michael Polsky**, *Noviye Mucheniki Rossijskiye* (Jordanville: 1957); **I. M. Andreyev**, *Russia’s Catacomb Saints* (Platina, Ca: St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, 1982), chapter 20.