

Today we commemorate the canonization of St. Herman of Alaska.

He was born in either 1751 – 1755.

There is some debate as to when he was born and where he came from. I won't go into this debate, but we do know that he came from a very pious family.

1771 - He entered the Monastery of St. Sergius, near St. Petersburg.

A few years later he was attracted by the spiritual fame of Abbot Nazarios, at the Valaamo Monastery. So, St. Herman entered this ancient Monastery in Russian Finland.

1793 – The Holy Synod of Russia decided to send missionaries to the newly discovered lands in America, which we know as Alaska. St. Herman volunteered to be part of the mission to Russian America.

12/25/1793 – Eight monks volunteered to be part of this mission and left for Kodiak Alaska.

9/24/1794 – They arrived in Kodiak as the first formal Orthodox mission, known as the "Kodiak Mission." Their journey is the longest missionary journey in the history of the Orthodox Church.

After arriving in America, they began to proclaim the gospel and soon over 6,000 natives had accepted Christ and were baptized. A school for the education of newly baptized children was organized, and a church was built at the place where the missionaries lived.

1799 – The head of the Kodiak Mission, Archimandrite Joasaf, returned to Siberia to report on the mission. It was decided to elevate him to be a bishop in order to be able to ordain priests at the mission and so he was consecrated Bishop of Kodiak. Unfortunately, they all perish in a shipwreck during a storm while returning to Kodiak.

Between 1808-1818 – It is uncertain, Father Herman left Kodiak and established himself on Spruce Island, just off the Kodiak coast which he called New Valaam.

Spruce Island is not large and is almost completely covered by a forest. He dug a cave out of the ground with his own hands, and in it he lived his first full summer. For winter there was built for him a cell near the cave, in which he lived until his death. The cave was converted by him into a place for his burial. A wooden chapel, and a wooden house to be used as a schoolhouse and a guest house were built not too distant from his cell. A garden was laid out in front of his cell. For more than forty years Father Herman lived here.

Father Herman, himself, spaded a garden, planted potatoes and cabbage and various vegetables in it.

His clothes were the same for winter as for summer. He did not wear a shirt; instead he wore a smock of deer skin, which he did not take off for several years at a time, nor did he change it, so that the fur in it was completely worn away, and the leather became glossy. He wore boots, and a cassock, which was very old and full of patchwork, and his monastic hat. He went everywhere in these clothes, and at all times; in the rain, in snowstorms, and during the coldest freezing weather.

A small bench covered with a time-worn deerskin served as Father Herman's bed. He used two bricks for a pillow; these were hidden from visitors by a skin or a shirt. There was no blanket. Instead, he covered himself with a wooden board which lay on the stove.

On the occasions when Father Herman was the guest of administrators of the American Company, which ruled the Russian lands in America, and in the course of their soul-saving talks he sat up with them until midnight. He never spent the night with them, but regardless of the weather he always returned to his hermitage. If for some extraordinary reason it was necessary for him to spend the night away from his cell, then in the morning the bed which had been prepared for him would be found untouched; the Elder not having slept at all. The same was true in his hermitage where having spent the night in talks, he never rested.

The Elder ate very little. As a guest, he scarcely tasted the food, and remained without dinner. In his cell his dinner consisted of a very small portion of a small fish

or some vegetables. His body, emaciated as a result of his labors, his vigils, and fasting, was crushed by chains which weighed about sixteen pounds.

1819 – A terrible epidemic came to the island. Father Herman, during this terrible sickness, which lasted a whole month, visited the sick, never tiring. He admonished them in their fear, prayed, brought them to penance, or prepared them for death. He never spared himself.

Herman was concerned in particular for the moral growth of the Aleuts. With this end in mind, a school was built for children—the orphans of the Aleuts. He himself taught them the Law of God and church music. For this same purpose he gathered the Aleuts on Sunday and Holy Days for prayer in the chapel near his cell. Here his disciple read the Hours and the various prayers while the Elder himself read the Epistle and Gospel. He also preached to them. His students sang, and they sang very well. The Aleuts loved to hear his sermons, gathering around him in large numbers. The Elder's talks were captivating, and his listeners were moved by their wondrous power.

Herman dedicated himself fully for the Lord's service; he strove with zeal solely for the glorification of His Most Holy Name. Far from his homeland in the midst of a variety of afflictions and privations Father Herman spent several decades performing the noblest deeds of self-sacrifice. He was privileged to receive many supernatural gifts from God. Here are a few examples of God's miracles through him.

Father Herman fed the birds with dried fish, and they would gather in great numbers around his cell. Underneath his cell there lived an ermine. This little animal cannot be approached when it has had its young, but the Elder fed it from his own hand. "Was not this a miracle that we had seen?" said his disciple. They also saw Father Herman feeding bears. But when Father Herman died the birds and animals left; even the garden would not give any sort of crops even though someone had willingly taken care of it.

On Spruce Island there once occurred a flood. The inhabitants came to the Elder in great fear. Father Herman then took an icon of the Mother of God from the home where his students lived, and placed it on a sandy bank and began to pray. After his

prayer he turned to those present and said, "Have no fear, the water will not go any higher than the place where this holy icon stands." The words of the Elder were fulfilled. After this he promised the same aid from this holy icon in the future, through the intercessions of the Mother of God. He entrusted the icon to a disciple in case of future floods the icon was to be placed on the sandy bank.

Once, the forest on Spruce Island caught fire. The Elder, with a disciple, in a thicket of the forest made a belt about a yard wide in which they turned over the moss. They extended it to the foot of the hill. The Elder said, "Rest assured, the fire will not pass this line." On the next day, there was no hope of salvation from the fire and the fire, pushed by a strong wind, reached the place where the moss had been turned over by the Elder. The fire ran over the moss and halted, leaving untouched the thick forest which was beyond the line.

Now the time of the Elder's passing had come. One day he ordered his disciple to light a candle before the Icons, and to read the Acts of the Holy Apostles (this is the tradition at the falling asleep of someone). After some time, his face glowed brightly and he said in a loud voice, "Glory to Thee, O Lord!" He then ordered the reading to be halted, and he announced that the Lord had willed that his life would now be spared for another week. A week later, again by his orders, candles were lit, and the Acts of the Holy Apostles were read. Quietly, the Elder bowed his head on a disciple's chest; the cell was filled with a sweet-smelling odor; and his face glowed, and Father Herman was no more! Thus, he died in blessedness, he passed away in the sleep of a righteous man in in 1836 or 7.

That evening, above the village Katani (on Afognak) an unusual pillar of light which reached up to heaven was seen above Spruce Island. Astonished by the miraculous appearance, experienced elders said, "It seems that Father Herman has left us," and they began to pray. After a time, they were informed that the Elder had indeed passed away that very night. This same pillar was seen in various places by others.

8/9/1970 – St Herman is canonized in ceremonies at the Church of the Holy Resurrection, Kodiak, Alaska. Since the Antiochian Archdiocese of North America is in communion with the OCA, we accepted Herman's canonization.

Through the prayers of holy Herman, Lord Jesus Christ have mercy on us.