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“AS WE RECEIVE THE BLESSED GRACE...”

A 1990 film clip featuring Fr. Artemy Vladimirov at
Moscow's Church of the Resurrection of the Word.

View the film clip on YouTube at: www.youtube.com/watch?v=h4tOAL7EDkc

An unexpected treat showed up on YouTube a few months ago – a rediscovered film clip of the young Fr. Artemy Vladimirov pastoring his congregation. Following is an English transcript of the fifteen-minute excerpt from the 1990 Russian film, *“As We Receive the Blessed Grace...”* by the Krasnoyarsk Film Production Group – the first full-length feature film by Russian believers on Orthodox church life, released just months before the dissolution of the Soviet Union.

Here we see Fr. Artemy as a newly-ordained priest at the 17th-century Church of the Resurrection of the Word on Nezhdanova Ulitsa (now Bryusov Pereulok), one of the few parishes in Moscow to serve continuously throughout the Soviet era. A ten-minute walk from the Kremlin, the neighborhood was populated by well-known Russian artists, writers, musicians, actors and filmmakers, whose outspoken advocacy kept the church open.

The filming took place during the first years of Fr. Artemy's priesthood, and won both Second Place and the People's Choice Award at the 1991 Rossia Film Festival, as well as a Special Award at the 1991 International Moscow Film Festival. Below is the English transcript of the original Russian (and at times, delightfully English) excerpt that can be followed on YouTube. Knowing that for many of the early 1990s viewers this would be a first glimpse into Orthodox church life, Fr. Artemy spontaneously highlights his basic themes of repentance, confession, and church marriage with sincerity, warmth and humor.

SCENE 1

Street outside Church of the Resurrection, the camera faces the church door. A few cars are parked by the roadside. Birds chirp. As a car passes by, the camera moves closer to the entrance. We see Fr. Artemy walking toward a

side-entrance to a courtyard. There are several people around and a woman walking next to him. Fr. Artemy's voice off-screen:

Fr. Artemy (in Russian): “Today, we celebrate the memory of the holy youth Artemy [of Verkola]. He is my patron saint and so this is my name-day. What a day of joy! ‘Artemy’ means ‘the healthy one.’ The healthy one? Well, this is very interesting if applied to me ... Lord, have mercy on my ailing soul!”

Fr. Artemy enters the courtyard gate. We see the backs of two women in the foreground.

SCENE 2

Film title across the screen: “As We Receive the Blessed Grace...”

[Ed. Note: The name of the film is from a line of verse by the 19th-century Russian poet, Feodor Tyutchev: *The echo of the word we place / Escapes our best anticipation. / And we receive appreciation / As we receive the blessed grace.*]

Close-up. Fr. Artemy is talking to parishioners in a low voice. He is given a gift.

Fr. Artemy: “Yes, do come again. Congratulations on the feast.”

A number of parishioners gather to greet Fr. Artemy on his name-day. He blesses one and eats something from a jar that she has given him, then talks to a second woman who hands him a wrapped package. Another offers a few roses and we see young people entering the church.

Fr. Artemy: “Oh, to your health!”

A young girl gives Fr. Artemy flowers, and he says something unheard to her.

Girl: “A bow to you from...”

The camera focuses on a toddler looking up at the camera, and then on a bench with gifts that Fr. Artemy has received from his parishioners.

Fr. Artemy: "May the Lord save you. I will surround myself with these flowers and get into paradise."

Fr. Artemy blesses a woman.

Fr. Artemy: "May the Lord save you."

Camera goes to the toddler and his older sister, about seven.

Fr. Artemy (*voice off-screen*): It is great happiness to be baptized and live by God's grace.... Do you know how we do this? With, faith, hope and love for Christ the Savior. And He will call us to the fullness of living with God.

Fr. Artemy speaks to a woman in a red dress and gives a little girl a treat from the jar and a candy bar. Every one approaching him receives from the jar.

Fr. Artemy: "Come again, my dears. We'll be waiting."

Fr. Artemy: "To the ages of ages. (Blessing a man).

Fr. Artemy: "May the Lord save you."

SCENE 3

Inside a room, perhaps for the name-day parish tea. Camera focuses on a young woman; people are talking. Fr. Artemy sits at the head of the table with his wife, Matushka Elena sitting to his right dressed in white.

Fr. Artemy's voice: "Friends, who can do so? Perhaps we can sing in English?"

Fr. Artemy (*in English*): "The house is full of grace... The house, dom ... is full of grace, the house is full of grace ... St. Peter is in it..." Ladies and gentlemen, we will go down in history... [meaning that they are being filmed] ...I ask you not to sing off key. (*Laughter*)

With Fr. Artemy leading, everyone sings a drawn-out verse in Russian: "**The house is full of grace and the Apostle Peter is here, and the Savior is here, because God is with us.** [This is a folk song mentioning the

patron saint of the person whose namesday or birthday it is, and then adding the names of others present as well.]

Fr. Artemy taps the wine glasses with his spoon, creating a tune of several notes to humorously attract attention.

SCENE 4

Camera focuses on the entrance to the church as people enter and leave.

SCENE 5

Fr. Artemy stands with his back to the window, leaning on the sill.

Fr. Artemy (*in Russian*): “The English language helps me very much now, especially because one often meets non-Russian speakers in Nezhdanova Street. The whole world speaks English....

Among my parishioners there is a lady of such beauty that a poet would say: ‘She is the girl of my dreams.’ And so, a Finnish man fell in love with her. He did not speak a word of Russian, but he fell so deeply in love that he was ready to leave his motherland for the sake of this grace. He was not unwilling to have a church wedding – but how to do this? He is a Protestant. So, the possibility of his joining the Orthodox Church was raised and I began converting him – in English. So, I said to him...”

(Humorously, speaking in English):

“Moscow is the capital of the USSR!”

“Moscow is the best city in the world!”

(*In Russian*): “He looks curiously at me. Moscow is the most beautiful city...?? Moscow is the best city...?? But he has to agree because one is to obey a batiushka, is he not? And I continue my psychological attack. (It’s a joke, of course).”

(Speaking English, then translating each new phrase into Russian)





"Moscow streets are the most beautiful streets in the world!"

"Soviet watches are the swiftest watches in the world!"

"Soviet elephants are the most grand elephants in the world!"

(In Russian): **"Finally, I say something that he does not object to..."**

(In English): **"A Russian wife is the most beautiful wife in the world!"**

(In Russian): **"By the time we arrived home, he was like a lamb. He answered all of the questions I put to him about his life, and he repented. Is there an angel among us? Although they say there are more decent people abroad, still everyone has sins ... some have as many as three suitcases of mortal sins and this is when a bati-ushka is needed to help him open his conscience, to repent, and to hear: 'Go and sin no more. Be legally wed. Here is your spouse.'**

(The camera now focuses on another wedding.)

How is a church wedding served? The bride is like a white angel with a candle in her hand, her bridal crown shining with pearls and rubies. She looks at the priest as at Christ. And the bridegroom is in a formal black suit – also with a candle, which symbolizes our life in Christ. Then, I ask the bride: 'Do you have a good, free and unconstrained will, and a firm intention to take as your husband this ...Kirill?' She makes the sign of the cross over herself and says: [Fr. Artemy speaks in a high voice] 'I have, Reverend Father.' (The 'Reverend Father' is me.) 'Have you promised yourself to any other man?' 'I have not promised myself, Reverend Father.' And then I ask him: [speaking English] 'Have you a strong will and are you full of decision to take this flower as your wife?' He says: 'Oh yes, yes, forever!' 'Have you ever promised this to any other wife?' 'Oh, never!'

Such an angel he was... He had not promised, yes? Whatever he had done before, he had repented of, hadn't he? They are like this..."

SCENE 6

Outside the church entrance. The bride and her wedding party are waiting outside the church. The camera slowly moves up to the roof-top cross, and then into the church. An old woman attends to the candle stand.

Fr. Artemy's voice off-screen:

“As a priest I can see such a mystery: the soul never stays where it is. Never. The soul either ascends the ladder leading to paradise where there is hope, love, meekness, humility, purity, joy, prayer, wisdom ...no end to the heavenly virtues. Or, bit by bit it descends, sometimes with seven-mile steps into the demons’ embrace of pride, irritation, envy, despondency, impurity of the flesh, despair, blasphemy, suicidal thoughts.

I do not feel like going on with the list. I remember that perhaps the strongest shock of my life was my very first confession when I came to church as a young man, a student, and saw Christ the Savior, His eyes looking into the depths of my heart – and He is still before my eyes.... ‘Here Christ stands invisibly, child, accepting your confession.’ This is how a priest begins the prayers preceding confession.”

As Fr. Artemy speaks, the camera focuses on people praying in the church before confession and himself listening to confessions.

SCENE 7

Rain in the street in front of the church door, then we see the entrance to the church.

Fr. Artemy: “When it rains, so many bright thoughts come to one’s mind. See how the earth is being cleansed of dirt and dust. The rain is evidence that the world is weeping, revealing our hardness and malice, reminding us that we are unenlightened.”

Fr. Artemy stands outside untangling the cords of his vestment cuffs before





putting them on. As he puts them on, he speaks directly to those behind the camera:

“See, even priests’ vestments are not easy to untangle.... Everything takes great effort nowadays and he who thinks that he can succeed at once is a naïve dreamer. It seems that we have been dreaming all these seventy years [of Soviet life] instead of repenting and building. Now you are engaged in creative work in the spirit of hope and love, but if you only work and do not pray, you run the risk of going nowhere. The soul has two oars as it sails like a boat towards God’s Kingdom: prayer with trust in the Lord and work with patience and humility. So, I hope that you will combine your arduous labor of filmmaking with prayer.

Through the door, the camera shows the interior of the church, with candles flickering in the dark. Fr. Artemy gives his blessing to the film crew and those nearby.

“Yes, go with God. Here is the blessing, here it is... here: God bless you.”

Fr. Artemy turns and goes inside the church. ✝

Final notes on screen:

Filmmakers: Sergey Knyazev, Martynsh Punans, Valentina Starokozheva,
Lilya Ivanova, Alexander Mikhailov, Ivan Lyashenko

THE END

Sverdlovsk Film Studio, 1990

(Film clip translated by Inna Belov and edited by M. Nectaria McLees)