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# FROM AMERICA TO RUSSIA

## The Myrrh Streaming Icon of Tsar Nicholas II

By Richard (Thomas) Betts

A myrrh-streaming icon of Tsar Nicholas II has appeared in Russia, and it appeared with the same unpretentious simplicity with which the late Tsar abdicated his throne and bore his final months of house arrest. The icon was not painted by a contemporary iconographer in Moscow or St. Petersburg, nor is it the property of one of the old and venerable churches. It is, in fact, an inexpensive paper copy of an American icon, given away in Russia by the thousands by a Russian-American wife and mother, Ija Schmit, the founder of the Society Honoring Russian Nobility.<sup>1</sup>

Shortly after her mother passed away in 1995, Ija began pondering how to spend the small inheritance that she had been left in her mother's will. One night in September she awakened to the thought that she should use it to have an icon painted of Tsar-Martyr Nicholas. The icon would be dedicated to the future canonization of Tsar-Martyr Nicholas in Russia, and in memory of her mother.

After Ija's initial inspiration to have the icon painted, she contacted iconographer Paul Tikhomirov, himself a Russian immigrant, to see if he was interested in her project. Tikhomirov's response was, "This icon will be

<sup>1</sup> The desire of many Russian Christians for the canonization of Tsar Nicholas and his family did not stem from a belief that their personal lives were blameless, although from historical accounts and the family's own letters it is obvious that they were Christians of great integrity. The widespread desire for the family's canonization is based on the fact that Tsar Nicholas and his family were murdered as a result of his position as the sacramentally anointed Orthodox monarch of Russia. In August of 2000 they were canonized by the Russian Orthodox Church as "Passion-Bearers," a designation unique to Orthodox Christianity, which carries the connotation of their both bearing the passion of their murderers and sharing in the passion of Christ. (For further discussion on the role of an anointed monarch and the Royal Family's position as passion-bearers, see "A Gathered Radiance: The Life of Alexandra Romanov, Russia's Last Empress" by Nun Nectaria McLees, Valaam Society of America, 1992.)

*Opposite: The myrrh-streaming icon of Tsar Nicholas II.*

radiant!” They decided to depict Tsar Nicholas in coronation robes, with St. Nicholas, his patron saint, and St. Job, on whose feast the Tsar was born, in the upper right and left hand corners. Below the figures would be printed in Russian, “This Holy Icon is for the Canonization of the Tsar-Martyr in Russia.” Ija received the finished icon on May 12, 1996 and then traveled to Texas, where it was blessed by ROCOR Bishop Constantine (Yesensky), an old family friend. The icon, however, was not intended solely for family veneration. Ija and her husband, Harvey Schmit, had already arranged to have paper copies of the icon printed to commemorate the one-hundredth anniversary of the coronation of Tsar Nicholas II (May 14/27, 1896). The distribution of the icons, printed in three sizes, was handled by Ija’s own non-profit organization, the Society Honoring Russian Nobility, and income from the icons sold in the West purchased food and medicine for needy pensioners and orphans in Russia. A fourth, smaller version of the icon was printed by the thousands and given away in Russia without charge.

Forty-four thousand copies of the icon were printed, most of which were blessed by Archimandrite Anastasy Sagarski at the Society’s annual meeting on September 28, 1996. Several thousand more icons were blessed two days later by Abbot Herman (Podmoshensky), Ija Schmit’s brother. Father Herman further promoted the icon by reproducing it on the cover of his popular Russian- language journal “Russky Palomnik,” (Russian Pilgrim), which is widely read throughout Russia. As word of the icon spread, Christians from Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, and even Serbia, began writing and requesting copies. The Society has met all these requests and distributed more than twenty thousand icons in Russia alone.

On a visit to Russia in late 1996, Abbot Herman presented a number of prints to Fr. Juvenaly, the priest at the St. Nicholas Almshouse in Ryazan. On March 2/15, 1998 (the anniversary of Tsar Nicholas’ abdication and the miraculous appearance of the Reigning Icon of the Mother of God<sup>2</sup>) Fr. Juvenaly blessed Dr. Oleg Belchenko with one of the prints, which the

<sup>2</sup> The Reigning (“Derzhavnaya”) Icon of the Mother of God was found on March 2/15, 1917, in the storeroom of a church in the village of Kolomenskoe (now part of Moscow proper) by an old woman who had been told in a dream where to find it. The icon depicts the Lord of Sabaoth at the center top, and the Mother of God as the central figure seated on a throne with the crown of the Russian tsars on her head. In one hand she holds a scepter and in the other, an orb. The Infant Christ Child is seated on her knees. This royal image of the Mother of God was discovered on the day of the abdication of Tsar Nicholas II and is called the Reigning Icon of the Mother of God. She is considered by many Orthodox to have assumed the royal authority of the tsars over Russia following the abdication. The icon was hidden during the Communist era, and much sought after by Party officials who were aware of its symbolic value and wanted it destroyed. It is now in a church in Kolomenskoe Park, not far from the original church where it was found.

doctor took with him back to Moscow. The paper icon had been given to him in a glass-fronted, three-dimensional wooden a *kiot* (icon case) and Dr. Belchenko set it in a prominent place in his Moscow apartment.

On September 5, Dr. Belchenko noticed that a red spot had appeared over the right eyelid of the Tsar. The following day a second red spot appeared over the left eye. Dr. Belchenko first compared the icon with a smaller print to make sure that he had not simply overlooked the distinctive marks. The smaller icon did not match. Dr. Belchenko then called the Sretensky Monastery of the Meeting of the Lord to ask what he should do. The monks asked him to bring the icon of Tsar Nicholas to the monastery the following morning. Dr. Belchenko arrived early and stood through the liturgy holding the icon in a plastic bag at his side.

At the end of the liturgy a moleben and blessing of the waters was held. The officiating priest recognized Dr. Belchenko, and knowing that he had come with the icon, had the choir sing a troparion for Tsar-Martyr Nicholas. Following the troparion, Dr. Belchenko noticed one of the parishioners staring at him. Finally, the man approached and asked, "What is that fragrance?" Dr. Belchenko replied: "You are probably smelling incense. I am sorry, I can't smell anything myself because I have a cold." The man persisted: "No. I tell you, the fragrance is coming from somewhere around you and the smell is much more refined than incense." Dr. Belchenko replied impatiently, "You should be ashamed of talking such nonsense while the service is going on!" The man moved away embarrassed, but within a few moments other worshippers filtered over, curious about the fragrance and asking what was in the package. "Nothing, only an icon," he replied. "Show it to us." As Dr. Belchenko opened the package and took out the icon, the remarkable scent filled the church.

The icon of Tsar Nicholas II was displayed for veneration in the monastery church for three weeks. After Dr. Belchenko took it home, the fragrance continued to a lesser degree, and as word began to spread, Muscovites increasingly asked to come to his apartment to venerate the icon. Dr. Belchenko felt that his home was too small to accommodate many visitors, so he asked an Orthodox friend, Alla Dyakova, to keep the icon in her flat, where those who wished could venerate it. When asked how he was able to relinquish such a treasure, Dr. Belchenko answered, "The icon is not mine. It belongs to all Russians."

On October 19, Alla Dyakova and Fr. Peter Vlashchenko, a married priest



*Air procession with icon to bless St. Petersburg Region, 1999.*



*150-kilometer procession with icon of Reigning Mother of God  
and myrrh-streaming icon of Tsar Nicholas II, 1999.*

from the Ivanovo region, took the icon to Elder Kirill of St. Sergius Lavra, who was in Peredelkino, outside Moscow. Elder Kirill venerated the icon and blessed Fr. Peter and Alla with the words, "Go. Take the icon to whomever asks for it."

On November 1, the icon was brought to the Martha-Mary Convent in Moscow, founded by Grand Duchess Elizabeth Feodorovna, the sister-in-law of Tsar Nicholas and herself a new-martyr. The day not only marked the birthday of Elizabeth, but the anniversary of Tsar Nicholas' assuming the throne at his father's death in 1894. The icon of Tsar Nicholas was placed on the analogion next to an icon of Grand Duchess Elizabeth. Throughout the Divine Liturgy the icon of the tsar poured forth waves of fragrance, filling the chapel.

On November 7, 1998, the anniversary of the Bolshevik revolution, Alla called the author to say that myrrh had begun flowing down the glass of the icon case. In the upper right-hand corner of the kiot three streams were trickling downward – not straight down, but making their way toward the face of the tsar. A forth stream ran straight to the bottom. On the left side, two parallel streams sped down the glass with such abundance that a saucer was placed under the case to catch the myrrh. I soon joined the small group that had assembled at Alla's apartment: Hieromonk Longinus and Hierodeacon Januarius from Solovki Monastery, Dr. Belchenko, Margarita Degtyareva, and Alla herself. When I arrived, Fr. Longinus was praying in front of the icon, and as he wiped away the myrrh that was still on the case, it immediately reappeared. I felt strongly that this was a response to the prayers of Orthodox Christians everywhere who love the Royal Family. The myrrh flowed for over four hours.

This was only the beginning. Since the fall of 1998, the twelve-by-fifteen inch icon print has streamed myrrh frequently. The myrrh does not appear on the paper icon, however. It generally forms on the top of glass, either as small beads, or flowing down in rivulets. A few times it has appeared under the glass.

Word spread as the icon of Tsar Nicholas continued streaming myrrh, and the patriarch's office blessed the icon to be placed in the seventeenth-century Church of the Ascension on Gorokhovoye Field, near the Kursk train station. The patriarch's office permitted pannikhidas (services for the departed) to be served in front of the icon, but not molebens (services to saints) as the tsar and his family were not yet officially canonized



in Russia. (This directive seems to have been quietly remanded, or was perhaps not fully published, as molebens were spontaneously served almost everywhere. As one priest succinctly explained, “It is a miracle-working icon. Molebens are always served in front of miracle-working icons, never pannikhidas.”) The icon remained in the Church of the Ascension from November 14 to February 27, more than three months. A daily diary was kept of the icon’s changes, and according to Fr. Vassily Golovanov, the church’s priest, the icon gushed myrrh almost every third day. He reported that the fragrance and the myrrh often increased noticeably after services for the Royal Family, particularly on dates associated with the Romanovs. Throughout the winter and spring of 1999, the icon was venerated by thousands of Muscovites, including Olga Nikolaevna Kulikovskiy-Romanov, wife of the late Tikhon Nikolaevich Kulikovskiy-Romanov (nephew of Tsar Nicholas by the tsar’s sister, Grand Duchess Olga Alexandrovna.)

The icon was later taken to many other Moscow churches. One pilgrim recalls, “I saw the icon in August of 1999, the week that it was at the Church of the Dormition on Uspensky Pereulok. There wasn’t any myrrh that day, but the icon was giving off an otherworldly fragrance like that of saints’ relics. I have honored the tsar and his family for years, and read much about their lives, but here, in front of this icon, I was awestruck. I felt that the entire family was there invisibly, their presence more real than that of the people around me. I was deeply humbled and prayed for a long time.”

Ivan Gerasimov, a comparative linguist, recounts: “When the icon came to our church, several of the priests, the two choirs, and many parishioners were lined up to greet it. A moleben was served and afterward the choirs, standing on either side of the icon sang “God Save the Tsar.” It was incredible. Everyone was in tears. As we stood in line to venerate the icon, I felt as if I had gone back a century, and was waiting to greet the tsar himself. His presence was so real that I suddenly understood, in an instant, all that we have lost.”

On days particularly associated with the Royal Family, such as the anniversary of their deaths, or on their namesdays and birthdays, the icon gives off more myrrh, once even rushing down the glass so copiously that it blocked out the view of the paper print. This icon of Tsar-Martyr Nicholas has become a symbol of repentance for thousands of Russians who mourn the regicide of the tsar and his family, and honor them as passion-bearers. Thousands of Orthodox Christians, including hundreds of priests and sev-



*Dr. Belebenko holding icon of Tsar Nicholas II, and Fr. Peter Vlashchenko with icon of the Virgin.*



*Venerating the myrrh-streaming icon of Tsar Nicholas II. Left to right: Priest of the Church of the Ascension on Gorokhovoye Field; Dr. Oleg Belchenko; Olga Nikolaevna Kulikovskiy-Romanov (wife of Tikhon Kulikovskiy-Romanov, the nephew of Tsar Nicholas II). November, 1998.*

eral Russian bishops have venerated the icon, including Archbishop Micah of Yaroslavl and Rostov, Archbishop Ambrose of Ivanovo and Metropolitan Agathangel of Odessa, all of whom received it into their churches and conducted services before it.

The myrrh-streaming icon print of Tsar Nicholas soon became world news. Elena Yugina, a reporter with ITAR-TASS, the Russian news agency, announced that Patriarch Alexis II had given permission for international film crews to cover the story. A Swiss television crew, as well as journalists from CNN, the Associated Press, the Reuters News Agency and a major Spanish paper came to film the icon at the church in Gorokhovoye Field. Accounts appeared in every major Russian newspaper and many magazines. A Russian documentary, "The Return," has been made about the icon, and is currently available in Moscow. A second documentary by Orthodox filmmaker Larissa Tyabus, featuring scenes from services and processions with the icon, will be released in the summer of 2000.

The Associated Press was the first to print an official statement from the Russian Patriarchate concerning the icon. Metropolitan Kirill (Gundyaev) of Smolensk, who heads the Office of External Church Relations stated, "This occurrence, as an indication of God's grace, will be carefully studied and reviewed by the Synodal Commission on the Canonization of Saints to determine whether it is of divine origin." He added that the question of glorification of the Royal Family would be decided at a local council of the Russian Orthodox Church to be held in the year 2000.

The icon has not always remained in Moscow. Along with shorter residences in many Moscow churches, it has been taken to distant parts of Russia. From July 12-17, 1999 the icon was carried 150 kilometers (93 miles) on foot in a procession from St. Tikhon of Lukh Monastery in the Ivanovo diocese to Ipatiev Monastery in Kostroma—the monastery where the first Romanov was chosen as tsar. Twenty-five men, thirty-seven women and five children began the procession, while dozens of others joined it for a few hours or even days enroute. Fourteen clergymen from the Ivanovo and Kostroma regions also walked with the icon. The icon was carried from town to town, and people poured into the streets – old and young lining up behind one another on their knees as the icon was carried past.

Bystanders also knelt in the center of the road so that the icon could be carried over their heads as a blessing. Elderly women limped painfully out to the procession route to venerate the icon. Groups of children ran to keep

ahead as the procession moved through the streets, that they might watch it pass again and again. Everywhere the scenes were repeated. One priest who accompanied the icon remarked, “Although the Royal Martyrs have not yet been officially canonized by the hierarchs of the Russian Orthodox Church, the people are not waiting for such a proclamation. Their veneration pours forth freely, wherever the icon of Tsar-Martyr Nicholas appears.”

Alla Dyakova, one of the participants recalls, “Many people joined the procession along the way and walked with us for a day or two; one woman carried a nursing baby in her arms. Two blind men from St. Petersburg were with us for the entire five days, and one of them was also missing a foot, so he hobbled the whole distance on crutches. Five children walked the one hundred fifty kilometers without complaint. In the countryside, local people came out to meet us. They venerated the myrrh-streaming icon of the Tsar with tears in their eyes and gave us *piroshki*, pickles, tomatoes, bread... whatever they had to eat.”

In Ivanovo, the icon was brought in procession to the home chapel of Archbishop Ambrose of Ivanovo where services were held. Myrrh gushed from the icon in seven streams, and during the services the glass was entirely covered with myrrh. The archbishop placed a copy of the icon against the glass, and his paper copy, too, began to give off myrrh. The following day, Archbishop Ambrose and his clergy received the icon of the tsar, along with his own myrrh-streaming copy, at Transfiguration Cathedral in Ivanovo. Throughout the entire service myrrh gushed from both icons.

On the 16th of July 1999, the procession continued to the women’s Monastery of the Annunciation in Kostroma, where another wonderworking icon traditionally associated with the Romanov family is enshrined. It was with this icon, the Feodorov Mother of God, that Nun Martha blessed her seventeen-year-old son, Michael Feodorovich Romanov, to become the Russian tsar, in 1613, thus founding the Romanov dynasty.<sup>3</sup> Now, 386 years later, the last Russian tsar entered the church once again, in the form of his myrrh-streaming icon. As the icon of the tsar was touched to the Feodorov Mother of God, a broad band of myrrh formed at the top of the glass and eight thick lines streamed down the front.

<sup>3</sup> The Feodorovskaya Icon of the Mother of God is associated with the Holy Great-Martyr Theodore (Feodor) Stratelates, a fourth-century soldier martyred for Christ. St. Theodore, holding this icon, appeared several times to Russian Christians following the Tartar invasions. The original Feodorovskaya Icon of the Mother of God is of Byzantine origin and is located in the women’s Monastery of the Annunciation in Kostroma.

On the morning of July 17 (the anniversary of the Royal Family's murder in 1918 at the Ipatiev House in Ekaterinburg) the icon arrived at the Ipatiev Monastery in Kostroma. As soon as the icon was placed on the analogion in the main cathedral, myrrh began flowing more profusely than ever. This time there were eleven streams and the entire glass was covered with the thick fragrant liquid. Throughout the entire service the icon gave off a strong, otherworldly fragrance. Alla Dyakova continues:

“It is impossible to put into words all that we felt here...we had all come together – people from different regions, yet bound together in our love for the tsar. That is how I would put it. We were bonded in love. Everyone became so close during the procession that we were like a family. As time went on, we began to hope the day would never arrive when the procession would be over and we would have to leave each other. When we reached Ipatiev Monastery, all eighty-six of us gave confession and partook of Holy Communion. At confession we all confessed our personal repentance for the act of regicide committed against the tsar and his family. How can I put this into words? It was a feeling of deep sorrow for everything that had happened, and no one was left unmoved. Yet we also shed tears of joy at the abundance of God's mercy when we saw the extraordinary amount of myrrh that gushed from the Icon of the Tsar-Martyr that day.”

At the end of summer, September 3-14, 1999, the icon was taken to St. Petersburg for veneration in the city's churches. The resident clergy often awaited the icon's arrival holding burning candles and dressed in red vestments – the traditional color for martyrs. During the icon's reception at the Optina Pustyn metochion in St. Petersburg, over nine thousand people passed through the doors in one day. On September 13, the icon was received at the Feodorovsky Cathedral in Tsarskoe Selo, where a copy of the Feodorov Icon of the Mother of God is enshrined and where Tsar Nicholas II and his family worshipped.<sup>4</sup> Ten thousand pilgrims came from St. Petersburg and surrounding areas to venerate.

<sup>4</sup> Feodorovsky Cathedral in Tsarskoe Selo was erected between 1909 and 1912 by Tsar Nicholas II outside the gates of the Alexander Palace in honor of the Feodorovskaya Icon of the Mother of God, an icon traditionally associated with the Romanov Dynasty. As noted above, the original Feodorov Icon is in Kostroma.

One of the pilgrims recounts, “When we were at Tsarskoe Selo we had services at the Royal Family’s church – I remember the priest there showing me the column where the tsar and his family stood during services. I stayed right next to the same column and thought to myself, “I can’t believe I am actually standing in the very place where the royal family used to stand.” I wept through the entire service.”

In Kronstadt, the naval town next to St. Petersburg, the icon was carried to the home of St. John of Kronstadt, who was himself a wonder-worker. When the procession stopped on the street in front of the house, the inside of the glass cover filled with myrrh, obliterating the view of the icon, and taking on the image – in myrrh – of the icon itself. The icon of Tsar Nicholas was then taken up in a helicopter and an attending priest used it to bless the city of St. Petersburg, where it had been so warmly received.

Not everyone greeted the icon with the same enthusiasm, however. Soon after arrangements were made to bring the icon to St. Petersburg, phone calls went out from the diocesan office of Metropolitan Vladimir of St. Petersburg to the three churches where it was to be received, telling them not to accept it. Two of the churches did not receive the icon, but twelve others did. The protopriest of the third forewarned church received the icon and was removed from his position two months later, on ostensibly unrelated grounds.

The most wide-spread attempt to bring the icon to the attention of the Russian people was the organization of an “Air Procession” by Sergei Matveyev, the editor-in-chief of the Orthodox magazine *Russky Vestnik* and Andrei Melanovich, from the publishing department of Sretensky Monastery. With the blessings of Patriarch Alexis II and Elder Nicholas (Guryanov) of Zalit Island near Pskov, a plane containing copies of miraculous icons (the copies often being wonder-working themselves), as well as other original icons set with the relics of saints, flew to the four corners of Russia. The flight’s mission was to bring these spiritual treasures to Orthodox Christians who had never before been able to venerate them. Taking off from Moscow on the morning of June 14, 1999, the flight covered 15,500 miles (25,000 km). It was fortythree hours in the air.

Along with the myrrh-streaming icon of Tsar Nicholas, the walls and the tables of the plane were covered with more than sixty original icons and hundreds of paper prints. There was also a cross from Optina Monastery containing relics of the Optina elders, and holy oil from lampadas and

icons on Mt. Athos. At the moment of take-off, the icon of Tsar Nicholas began giving forth the same otherworldly fragrance that had characterized it throughout the year. The flight's first direction was southward, over Minsk and Kiev, between Simferopol and Sebastopol, towards Yalta and Mineralniye Vodi. From Ukraine and the Crimea the planeload of icons flew to Astrakhan, the first scheduled landing. As the attendants prepared to open the doors to pilgrims who had arrived to venerate, they noticed that the lower half of the glass covering the tsar's icon was beaded with small drops of fragrant myrrh.

After Astrakhan the plane turned northeasterly, flying over Volgograd and Saratov, and landing in Novosibirsk (Novonikolaevsk), Siberia. After Novosibirsk came Khabarovsk, then deeper into Siberia, and over Sakhalin Island on the edge of the Russian Far East. Finally they arrived at the peninsula of Kamchatka on the Bering Sea, where they again landed and served a moleben to the Reigning Mother of God. The next stop was Anadyr on Chukotka Peninsula, the easternmost point of Russia. Although the local churches had been notified of their coming, these isolated Christians are so unaccustomed to such spiritual largesse that they met the plane with reserve, afraid that the flight was a ruse by foreign Baptist missionaries to attract an audience. Once the town's leaders and local clergy were reassured, over a hundred Orthodox faithful came to venerate the icon. Holding the myrrh-streaming icon, Ivonovo's Fr. Peter Vlashchenko addressed the crowd. They listened attentively to its history, and as he finished with, "God willing, there will once again come a time in Russia when we will have a tsar," a voice spoke up from the midst of the crowd. "Yes, it is time to get our house in order!"

From Anadyr, the procession flew to Khatanga in north central Siberia, where they landed on the 18th of June. Father Peter recalled, "We were greeted at the airport by the local authorities and a priest, Fr. Daniel. A television crew filmed the event. Throughout the day fifty to sixty people came to venerate the icon. We gave copies of the icon to almost everyone. I particularly remember one woman who venerated the icons with deep reverence and tears, totally unmindful of the TV cameras and those standing near her."

Flying over Pskov-Pechury, the site of the famous Pskov Caves Monastery, the plane landed in Archangelsk where an akathist was sung to St. Nilus of



Sora. It then flew over Murmansk, Solovki Monastery in the White Sea, and Valaam Monastery on Lake Ladoga, until it finally turned back towards Moscow.

Many Orthodox Christians believe that their prayers have been answered by God through the intercession of the tsar and his family. One of these is Alexander Vytegov, who at age eighty-seven was healed of blindness in front of the myrrh-streaming icon of Tsar Martyr Nicholas II.

In 1984, Alexander was diagnosed with an eye disease in which cells in the center of the retina begin to die off. Doctors could do nothing to help him, and within a few years his correctable vision was reduced to less than thirty percent. Alexander had been an atheist for many decades and had habitually referred to Tsar Nicholas as “Bloody Nicholas,” a period of his life that he now regrets. In his early seventies, he began reading a borrowed bible to round out his grasp of history. “I was caught up in it, and finally started to understand.” After obtaining his own copy of the Gospels, Alexander was further drawn to Christ and the Church. A few years later, he suffered a major heart attack, underwent emergency surgery and recovered. Convinced that he had been saved through the intercession of the Mother of God, Alexander became a practicing Orthodox Christian. Then, in 1999 he heard Fr. Alexander Shargunov speaking on Radio Radonezh about people who had been healed through the intercession of the Tsar-Martyr. Learning that the myrrh-streaming icon was in the Church of the Holy Trinity on Khokhlovsky Lane in Moscow, he went there on June 2 to attend a moleben. After the service, Alexander made his way to the priest, Fr. Alexy Uminsky, asking to be healed of his blindness. Fr. Alexy answered, “If you want to be healed, pray to Tsar-Martyr Nicholas with me. Alexander describes what happened next:

Father Alexy led me over to the icon of Tsar-Martyr Nicholas and placed my face right on the icon, holding my head down with his hand. Then he covered my face with a towel that had myrrh on it from the icon and began to pray. I don’t know what prayer he recited, because my hearing is poor. Then he raised my head and covered my face with the towel containing the myrrh and pressed the towel to my eyes with his fingers three times, while saying another prayer. A few days later I had to write something. It was June 9th.

Before then I had to write from memory, because I couldn't see the lines. I had to write letter by letter, and if I got distracted, I never knew which letter to write next... but then, my Lord – I still can't believe it – I could see! I could see everything! I could see the lines, and the letters. I can't believe it even now, but I really do see. After this healing I know once and for all that the tsar truly prays for those who love him and the Lord helps people through his prayers. The Lord is long-suffering. How long He waited for me – and in the end, He didn't reject me.”

Amen. ✦