

THE NEW MARTYR LYDIA AND THOSE WITH HER

For Thy sake we are killed all
day long; we are accounted
as sheep for the slaughter.
Rom. 8:36

LYDIA, THE DAUGHTER of a priest in the city of Ufa, was born on March 20, 1901. From childhood she was sensitive, affectionate, loved by all, fearing sin and everything forbidden by God. Upon completing girls' school, at nineteen she married and lost her husband in the civil war with the departure of the White Army.

Her father, from the very beginning of the schism of the "Renovators," organized by the Bolsheviks in 1922, joined the schism. The daughter, prostrating herself at her father's feet, said: "Bless me, father, to leave you, so that I will not bind you in the salvation of your soul." The old priest knew his daughter, just as he was aware of the wrongness of his action. He wept and, blessing Lydia for an independent life, prophetically said to her: "See, daughter, when you will win your crown, that you tell the Lord that although I myself proved too weak for battle still I did not restrain you, but blessed you." "I will, Papa," she said, kissing his hand, thus herself also prophetically foreseeing her future.

Lydia succeeded in entering the Forestry Department and in 1926 she was transferred to the Collective Lumber Industry for work with the lowest-paid laborers. Here she immediately came into contact with simple Russian people, whom she warmly loved and who responded in the same fashion.

The lumberjacks and drivers, who had been hardened by the work under difficult conditions, related with amazement that in the office of the Lumber Department, where Lydia met them, a feeling came over them similar to the one, now almost smothered, which they had felt when before the Revolution they had gone to meet a venerated icon of the Mother of God from the village of Bogorodskoye near Ufa. In the office foul language, insults, and quarrels were no longer heard. Evil passions were extinguished, and people became kinder to each other.

This was amazing and was noticed by everybody, including the party chiefs. They kept watch over Lydia, but discovered nothing suspicious: she did not go at all to the churches that had been legalised by the Bolsheviks, and she attended catacomb services rarely and carefully. The G.P.U. (secret police) knew that members of the catacomb church existed in the diocese, but they could find no way of uncovering and arresting them.

With the aim of uncovering those who had not yet been arrested, the G.P.U. suddenly returned from exile Bishop Andrew (Ukhtomsky), who was deeply revered by the people and by all elements of the catacomb church; but at the bishop's direction he was received openly by only one church in Ufa, although secretly the whole diocese came to him. The G.P.U. was mistaken: instead of being uncovered, the catacomb church deepened and spread, remaining as before inaccessible to spies.

The G.P.U., convinced of the failure of its plan, again arrested Bishop Andrew and sent him into exile.

Lydia was arrested on July 9, 1928. The secret-operations department had long been seeking a typist who had been supplying the workers of the Forestry Department with typewritten brochures containing lives of the Saints, prayers, sermons and instructions of ancient and recent Church hierarchs. It had been noticed that on this typist's typewriter the lower stem of the "k" was broken; and thus Lydia was discovered.

The G.P.U. understood that there had fallen into their hands a clue for uncovering the whole catacomb church. Ten days of uninterrupted questioning did not break the martyr; she simply refused to say anything. On July 20 the interrogator, having lost all patience, gave Lydia over to the "special command" for interrogation.

This "special command" worked in a corner room in the cellar of the GPU. A permanent guard was stationed in the cellar corridor; on this day the guard was Cyril Ataev, a 23-year-old private. He saw Lydia as she was brought into the cellar. The preceding ten-days' questioning had drained the strength of the martyr and she could not go down the steps. Private Antae, at the call of his chiefs, held her and led her down to the interrogation chamber.

"May Christ save you," Lydia thanked the guard, sensing in the Red Army guard a spark of compassion for her in the delicate gentleness of his strong arms.

And Christ saved Ataev. The words of the martyr, her eyes full of pain, and perplexity, fell into his heart. Now he could no longer listen with indifference to her uninterrupted screams and cries, as he had previously listened to the same cries from others being interrogated and tortured.

Lydia was tortured for a long time. The tortures of the G. P.U. were usually fashioned so as to leave no particularly noticeable marks on the body of the tortured, but at Lydia's interrogation no attention was paid to this. The screams and cries of Lydia continued almost uninterruptedly for more than an hour and a half.

"But aren't you in pain? You're screaming and crying, that means it's painful?" asked the exhausted torturers in one of the intervals.

"Painful! Lord, how painful!" replied Lydia with a broken moan.

"Then why don't you talk? It will be more painful!" -- said the perplexed torturers.

"I can't talk... I can't... He won't allow..." groaned Lydia.

"Who won't allow?"

"God won't allow !
"

The torturers devised something new for the martyr: sexual assault. There were four of them — one more was needed. They called the guard

to help.

When Ataev entered the room, he saw Lydia, understood the means of her further torture and his own role in this — and there was worked in him a miracle like to the unexpected conversion of the ancient torturers. His whole soul was repelled by the satanic abominableness, and a holy enthusiasm seized him. Totally unaware of what he was doing, the Red Army guard with his own revolver killed on the spot the two torturers who stood before him.

Before even the second shot had echoed the G.P.U. man who had been standing behind hit Cyril on the head with the handle of his gun. Ataev still had strength enough to turn and seize his attacker by the throat, but a shot from the fourth one knocked him to the floor.

Cyril fell with his head toward Lydia, who was stretched out with thongs. The Lord gave him the opportunity of hearing once more from the martyr words of hope. And looking straight into Lydia's eyes, Cyril, blood gushing from him, gasped his union to the Lord:

"Saint, take me with you!"

"I will take you," Lydia smiled, radiant.

The sound and meaning of this conversation as it were opened a door to the other world, and terror darkened the consciousness of the two G.P.U. men who remained alive. With insane shouts they began to shoot the helpless victims who threatened them, and they shot until both their revolvers had been emptied. Those who had come running at the shots led them away, shouting insanely, and themselves fled from the room, seized by an unknown terror.

One of these two G.P.U. men became completely insane. The other soon died of nervous shock. Before his death this second one told every thing to his friend, Sergeant Alexei Ikonnikoff, who turned to God and brought this account to the Church; for his zealous propagation of it he himself suffered a martyr's death.

All three — Lydia, Cyril, and Alexei, -- have been canonized as saints in the religious consciousness of the catacomb church.

By the prayers of Thy martyrs -- Lydia, Cyril, and Alexei, — Lord Jesus Christ our God, save the Russian people!

Sources: Poisky's, *The New Martyrs of Russia*, Vol. II, pp. 249-53.

See also in No 20 of *Russia's Catacomb Saints* by I.M. Andreyev.