

# PETER'S DAY ADDRESS

FRIDAY, JUNE 29, 2018  
DOUKHOBOR PRAYER HOME,  
NATIONAL DOUKHOBOR HERITAGE VILLAGE,  
VEREGIN, SASKATCHEWAN

Greetings Brothers and Sisters,

Today we gather to celebrate *Petrov Den'*, a quintessential holiday of the Doukhobor people in Canada, Russia and across the world. This day of celebration has a deep history with many layers of religious, spiritual and cultural meaning. I would like to share with you some of the rich traditions associated with this day.

## COMMEMORATION OF APOSTLES PETER AND PAUL

While the holiday is commonly known among Doukhobors today by its shortened name – *Petrov Den'* ("Peter's Day") - its actual full name is *Den' Petra i Pavla* ("the Day of Peter and Paul").

It commemorates the apostles Peter and Paul, leaders of the first generation of Christians, founders of the Christian church, and widely considered the two most important people (after Jesus) in the history of Christianity. It memorializes their execution and martyrdom in 64 A.D. – by crucifixion in the case of Peter, and beheading in the case of Paul.

## ANCIENT ORTHODOX FESTIVAL

The holiday was not created or conceived by the Doukhobors. Rather, it owes its origins to a much older tradition inherited from the Orthodox Church.

For centuries, since the introduction of Christianity in Russia in 988 AD, Peter and Paul's Day has been one of the great festivals of the Orthodox Church. Celebrated on June 29<sup>th</sup> under the old Julian calendar (July 12 under today's Gregorian calendar), it was considered a day of mandatory church attendance, where Russian peasants attended an all-night vigil on the eve, and a liturgy service on the morning of the feast. The Orthodox priest offered prayers to the apostles, who were venerated by the church as saints. Afterwards, the people held feasts, while young people assembled to play games, sing and enjoy themselves in the villages.

During the mid to late 1700s, while the Doukhobors were still living among Orthodox Russians, they also celebrated this and other traditional folk festivals. Some Doukhobors went to church for appearances only; others avoided going altogether; nonetheless at home they celebrated Peter and Paul's day with prayer meetings, followed by visits to family and friends.

## A REMEMBRANCE OF SUFFERING

When the Doukhobors settled together at Molochnye Vody ("Milky Waters") in the early 1800s, they ceased to celebrate most Orthodox feast days, as they neither venerated saints nor invoked them in prayers, but simply respected them for their good works. Nonetheless, they continued to commemorate the Day of Peter and Paul, as they held these apostles in particular esteem.

The Doukhobors' admiration for Peter and Paul is reflected in the *Zhivotnaya Kniga* ("Living Book"), where the apostles are mentioned in several *psalmy* (Psalms 6, 144, 302) and *stishki* ("verses") as 'martyrs' who 'hold the keys' that 'unlock the souls' of the righteous and which 'open the gates' to God's heavenly kingdom.

It was the apostles' martyrdom for their faith which the Doukhobors considered worthy of emulation, and which evoked memories of their own suffering at the hands of church and state authorities in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, when they were arrested, imprisoned, tortured and mutilated, had their property and children confiscated, and were banished to the furthest reaches of the Empire. Thus the day became a holiday in memory of those Doukhobors who had been persecuted, having endured extreme trials and tribulations for their faith.

## NAME DAYS

An Orthodox tradition which the Doukhobors retained after breaking away from the church was the practice of naming a child after the saint on whose feast day he or she was born; at least those saints whom the Doukhobors continued to commemorate. Hence, in many cases, when a male Doukhobor child in Russia was born on the Day of Peter and Paul, he received one or the other name. The most famous example is Doukhobor leader Peter Vasil'evich Verigin, who was born on June 29, 1859.

## SEASONAL CHANGES IN NATURE

In addition to its religious significance, the Day of Peter and Paul also coincided with the occurrence of seasonal changes in nature. In particular, it served as a reference point marking the end of spring and the beginning of summer haying. In Russia, the Doukhobors traditionally began haymaking the day after the festival. Mowing the hay with scythes was primarily the men's responsibility, but women also helped. The hay was then gathered into stacks or stored

in haylofts until it was needed in the winter. It was a very important activity for the Doukhobors, who were agriculturalists, as they needed sufficient hay to feed their livestock during the long winters. Hence, this gave the festival additional significance among them.

## SACRED PLACES OF CELEBRATION

In the early 19<sup>th</sup> century on the Molochnaya, the Day of Peter and Paul was typically celebrated in the village of Terpeniye. Doukhobors from surrounding villages gathered there the morning of the festival to hold a large mass *moleniye* ("prayer meeting"). The *moleniye* was held either inside the *Sirotsky Dom* ("Orphan's Home") or, if weather permitted, outside in the courtyard in front of this building. After, they held an outdoor banquet in the scenic park-like grounds of the *Sirotsky Dom*, with its well-tended orchards, beautiful springs and fountains.

During the late 19<sup>th</sup> century in the Caucasus, the Doukhobors chose a central location in each of the districts they settled, where people from the surrounding villages would congregate to commemorate the festival. These were often places of tremendous natural beauty, which over time, came to be viewed as sacred or holy places in their own right.

- in Tiflis *guberniya* ("province") in what is now Georgia, they met on the flat, rocky plateau above the cave-like grotto known as *Peshcherochki* near the village of Orlovka. It was a favorite place of Doukhobor leader Luker'ya 'Lushechka' Kalmykova to spend time in quiet reflection.
- in Elisavetpol *guberniya* in present-day Azerbaijan, they gathered at a sacred grove (*svyashchennaya roshcha*) on the outskirts of Slavyanka village, which had a well-ordered and carefully-tended orchard, a summer pavilion where visiting Doukhobor leaders stayed, and a mineral spring with carbonated, slightly sour water that tasted refreshingly like kvas.
- in Kars oblast ("region") in modern Turkey, they met on a high, wide plateau that overlooked the surrounding plains and villages. Known as *Vozle Verbochek* ("beside the pussy willows") it was situated next to a myriad of small springs that nurtured a grove of trees that, according to Doukhobor tradition, were planted by Christ and the apostles.

In each of these sacred places, the Doukhobors of the Caucasus assembled and held *moleniye*. Afterwards, they would spread about their blankets and have an outdoor picnic.

## ASSOCIATION WITH LEADERS

During the second half of the nineteenth century, the Day of Peter and Paul came to be closely associated with two outstanding Doukhobor leaders, as it was the name day of both.

Peter Ilarionovich Kalmykov led the Doukhobors of the Caucasus from 1856 to 1864. Despite his short rule, he was much-beloved and renowned for his dynamic personality, force of character and feats of bravery, for which he was nicknamed *Khrabryy*, meaning the "Brave".

The second Doukhobor leader by this name was, of course, Peter Vasil'evich Verigin, who after 1886, became the leader of the Doukhobors belonging to the Large Party in the Caucasus. In 1887, Verigin was exiled to Shenkursk in Arkhangel'sk guberniya in the Russian Far North, then in 1890 he was transferred even further north to Kola on the Barents Sea. Later, in 1894, he was transferred to Obdorsk in northwestern Siberia. Throughout his exile, Verigin issued secret teachings and counsel to his followers in the Caucasus, through trusted messengers.

## BURNING OF ARMS

It was through one such communique that, in 1895, Verigin bade his followers to collect all the weapons that were in their possession and on the Day of Peter and Paul, burn them in a large bonfire doused with kerosene as a mass demonstration of the Doukhobor renunciation of violence and militarism. His instructions were carried out simultaneously in each of the three districts of the Caucasus where his followers assembled to celebrate the festival. As their guns burned and melted, the Doukhobors gathered around the bonfire, praying and signing psalms.

In some districts, the event occurred without any government intervention. In other areas, particularly Tiflis guberniya, local officials viewed the burning as an act of rebellion, and the fiercest punishments were at once applied. People of all ages were thrashed, their homes were ravaged, Cossack troops were sent and billeted on them, taking food, smashing furnishings, beating males and raping females without check or rebuke. Whole villages were banished, without supplies, to poor Georgian villages in oppressively hot and unhealthy climates, left to scrape by as best they could, or survive whatever charity the local Georgians and Tatars dared give them under threat of execution. However, the Doukhobors persevered through these circumstances, and with the aid of friends and benefactors who learned about their plight, eventually made their way to Canada in 1899.

The Burning of Arms was a seminal event in the history of the Doukhobor movement; and one that has become indelibly and permanently connected with the celebration of *Petrov Den'* or *Peters Day* by Canadian Doukhobors today.

## CLOSING

Time limitations do not allow me to touch upon the commemoration of Petrov Den' in Canada throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Suffice to say, of all the Doukhobor celebrations, it remains one of the most popular and enduring events to this day.

With this in mind, as we enjoy today's food, fellowship, song and prayer, let us reflect on this rich and vibrant holiday, and how in commemorating it, we are reminded of the enduring faith and courage of the Doukhobor people.

Jonathan J. Kalmakoff