

## **RIGHTEOUS DEATH OF A LAYMAN**

... One of the first deaths of people close to me was the death of the only son of my spiritual father, protopriest of one of the churches in a town where my farm was located by. That was a very young man, who held a job in a court house of the local town and had graduated from Moscow University only two of three years before his death. I used to visit my spiritual father a lot at his home, where I was accepted like a son by this righteous couple, the parents of this young man. I had not have a chance to meet him for a long time. He seemed to be avoiding me. I remember the very first time Someonepointed him out for me while I was in a church, where his father was a priest. He was not handsome at all, short, with a sunken in chest, with a big head on a thin neck, thin beard, in other words, he seemed so unappealing to me so I was not seeking to meet him afterwards at all. And on top of that someone from a court house told me that he was useless at his work and that just strengthen my first opinion. I felt pity on poor parents and was glad that shyness of their son saved me from another boring acquaintance.

One feature in him was very remarkable though is that how much he loved church. Whenever I'd come in the church he'd be there if not at work, standing modestly in some distant corner and praying. And I thought to myself: he's just not from this world, that's why he does not suit his job. And some time later he himself stopped avoiding me too. I came to see his folks one day, tea was served and he came out as well.

"Ah! Here's our Mitrosha the Recluse!" – exclaimed with love his mother. So we met.

Since then Mitrosha did not avoid me any more. And every time when I'd come he would join us at tea. But he would not participate in conversation anyway, rarely answering directed to him questions. After having his cup of tea he's disappear in his room again.

"Our Mitrosha is a complete recluse, – somewhat sadly used to say his mother, – it will be hard for him to live in this world with a character like that!"

Father-protopriest would keep silent, but you could tell that he was not too happy about Mitrosha's future in his heart as well.

"Father! – once I said to o.Protopriest, – ypour son, as I can see, has a monastic kind of soul, doesn't he have a desire to devote himself to serve God?"

"He would not tell me anything. He does not talk much with us at all. As soon as he comes from court, he'd have a snack and rushes to the library of the brotherhood. He'd come back only by the late tea. And if he's at home, he read spiritual books or works at home if he has something from the court to complete... I transferred him from seminary to the university, I thought it would be better, but now I fear if it turns out to the worst!"

We had been seeing each other off and on with Mitrosha for about half a year, but we wid not get closer, despite the fact that I really liked his lonely heart. I could say by the

way he'd greet me that I was not a complete stranger for him as well. But his internal secrets of his spiritual world did not get revealed to me though. I saw them later and how did I see them!..

He had to quit his job in a court house since everyone there got firmly convinced he was not suitable to work there. So he had to leave and find himself something else to do.

The secret prosecutor of Mitrosha's soul did find it for him... at the state licensing department. Mitrosha was sent as a junior license controller to a winery of one of the richest man in the area. That was the last hit on Mitrosha's soul desires. And they figure it out, but too late. When he got this job everyone thought it could not be any better.

After about four months on his new job he got seriously sick that they had to send a telegram to request his father to come and get him to try to save his life. But there was nothing left for the doctors to do. It was enough just to look at him to recognize the worst signs of the hardest case of consumption, which the only medicine for it is a grave.

It was hard to see the sorrows of old parents, while a candle of a precious life of their only son was burning down before their eyes. And my heart was taking it hard too, but deep inside I knew that for Mitrosha's lonely and reclusive soul there was not a better future but this suddenly approaching eternity.

Soon after all the doctors stepped back from his death bed and other doctors approached – Christian faith and Mysteries of the Church, to prepare him for where there's no return from. And then all the grand beauty with its fullness of strong limitless faith of Mitrosha's soul revealed itself. Having realized in his heart that the science was unable to help him, Mitrosha immersed himself into preparation for eternity. Severe pain, labored breathing were not allowing him to stay in bed and they had to put him onto a chair, where he was spending his suffering days and endless nights. He was receiving Holy Communion every day and this Mystery seemed to give him strength to endure the strongest attacks of this horrible disease. Always in prayer, with a small icon of the Heavenly Queen on a table in front of his chair, Mitrosha with was like in heaven with all of his dying being. Prayer and love to Christ, which he was hiding within himself while he was health, manifested themselves with such a power during those two months of his sickness, that even his parents faithful hearts trembled. Even they could not see that burning faith of their beloved son.

"Father! – he'd say when the attacks of cough would cease a little, – father! How do we pray? How do we love our God? Is it how we need to pray, love and believe?.. If your prayer does not burn you, if your heart does not melt like a wax from a flame from the words of your prayer, that are coming from the very depth of your heart and burning all internal being with such a strength that it is about to turn into ashes: then you are not praying, father!.. Father! If your love is not a flame that burns every tribulation of your neighbour and your own being, melting your very soul into the soul of your neighbour: then you don't love, father!"...

And he was saying a lot, a lot of what was making parents' hearts tremble and burst into tears...

"And who could ever imagine what a power our Mitrosha was hiding within? – used to say old priest to me, barely catching a breath, – with love but we were killing that power. Yes, O Lord my God, who could think? He was always quiet, since his childhood quiet; never a word with anyone, never communicated with anyone, was never open with anyone about what was the shrine of his soul. Only while in seminary, he got kind of

close with one old professor, Gabriel Michailovich P. That was a man of a strong faith, and even while in University, he was in correspondence with him. But Gabriel Michailovich was one of those men as well, who weren't communication much with anyone either; but even that man has reposed for over two years already, and the mystery of Mitrosha's heart died with him, since he was the only one who it was revealed to... Or my God! God Almighty! Who could think that Mitrosha's place was not in court, neither in licensing?"...

And poor father was crying in altar by the throne of God, with his hand lifted up to the sky, asking and praying for life for his Mitrosha, his beloved, reclusive and unappreciated son...

And how his mother was weeping and crying – this can be known only to mothers who have ever lost forever their beloved child...

Finally came last, fatal days for Mitrosha. Unceasingly, day after day, he was communing with Christ in the Mystery of Holy Eucharist. Every day after Liturgy his spiritual father would bring Holy Gifts, which the dying one was consuming with deep faith. His sufferings seemed to go down; his breathing and cough were getting easier; that killing and terrifying cough was bothering his beat up and dried up chest much less. "Mitrosha! – joyfully cried out his mother, – are you feeling better, my sunshine?"

Yes, mommy, much better!"

"We will pray you out from God, we will!"

Suddenly the sick one trembled; his eyes, full of fear, were staring at one, only to him visible point behind his mother's shoulder.

"Mitrosha, are you OK? Do you see something?"

"I do!" – whispered the sick one, and horror was heard in that terrible whisper.

"What do you see?" – asked frightened mother, and her heart was beating with unknown fear, sensing some unknown but horrible danger... But Mitrosha was silent, he was still looking at the same invisible spot with the same expression of limitless, cold horror, barely being able to cross himself.

"Mitrosha, Mitrosha! – his scared mother was shaking him – tell me what you see?"

"I see them!" – was the answer, and his face lightened up:

"Now they are gone", – with a sigh of joy and relieve whispered the dying one.

"But how is it possible? – his mother continued, – you are receiving Communion every day: do "they" have access to you anyway?"

"They" don't have access, but still daring!"

That happened several days before Mitrosha's death. Who were "they" in his vision – dying son could see and his mother could guess. I don't know if "they" were trying again, but I know that one time was enough to fill the heart with indescribable horror and get rid of all non-Christian doubts of inevitability of one's soul meeting with that evil, dark powers, that are hidden from our eyes until a certain time.

Two days before his death the sick one was feeling very good. He received Communion after Liturgy again. His mother was as always right by his chair. Suddenly Mitrosha's face got enlightened with some unexpected joy and he cried out:

"Ah!.. Gabriel Michailovich, is that you?"

Astonished by this unexpected exclaiming and seeing no one else in the room his mother froze in expectation...

"It is really you, Gabriel Michailovich!.. My God, I am so glad!.. Yes, yes!.. Speak, speak! Ah, this is so interesting!.."

And he turned into ears. A blessed smile was on his face... Mother was afraid to move, astonished and happy...

This silence lasted for several seconds and was broken by the sick one's exclaiming:

"You are leaving already?.. Oh, well! So, see you soon!"

"Who did you see, Mitroscha? Who were you talking to?"

"With Gabriel Michailovich!"

"But he's dead! Bless you heart, my dear child!"

"No, mother, he's alive and he's been here just now and was just talking to me".

"So what did he say?"

But what his old professor was telling Mitroscha remained a mystery forever. The sick one started coughing again and breathing with great labor. And from that hour on started the last round of his sickness, which kept him unconscious for most of the time, giving him short breaks in-between. Death was coming to claim it's rights.

Two or three hours before his death Mitroscha came to senses, his breathing became easier, mind clear, as if a terrible ghost of death backed away before someone's great power.

"Goodbye my dear! – he said, – we will see each other again where there are no more separation!"

"Mirtosha, are you dying?" – lamented his mother.

"Yes, mama, I am dying!.. Look, look who is here!.. Holy Archangel Michael!.. God, accept my soul in peace!"

This is who he died, the son of a protopriest.

They say, and I have seen it myself, that death puts a mark of decay on people. What death! What people!..

Mitroscha was lying in the coffin like alive. And how handsome he was, the one who always looked so unappealing! I could not keep my eyes off that face filled with a silent, glorified, joyful smile of complete peace and happiness. Not death, but life, eternal life, heavenly, incomprehensible was shining on the pale and beautiful face of a righteous man. Three days his body was staying in a warm room and decay did not touch him. I was reading Psalter by his head for about half an hour on the second day and did not sense even a tiny smell.

This is how the tomb covered Mitroscha-recluse until the day of resurrection of the dead...