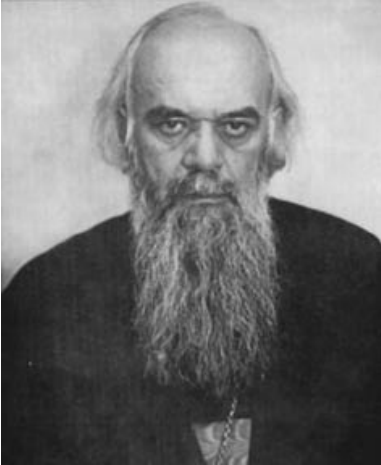


Bless mine enemies, O Lord!*



Bishop Nikolai, with suffering and weariness evident on his face after his seven-month stay (1944-1945) in the terrible concentration camp of Dachau, Germany, in which he was interned by the Nazis for his incomparable ecclesiastical activism in his native land of Serbia during the period of the German occupation. In Dachau he underwent dreadful torments, the marks of which remained impressed on his martyric body until his holy repose (1956), and he was saved through a miracle. Not only did he not complain about this misfortune, but he always remembered with nostalgia his days in the torture chamber of Dachau,

because there he sensed the vivid and immediate presence of God in an inexpressible way! (See photo.)

Bless mine enemies, O Lord. Even I bless them and do not curse them.

Enemies have driven me into Thine embrace more than friends have. Friends have bound me to earth, enemies have loosed me from earth and have demolished all mine aspirations in the world.

Enemies have made me a stranger in worldly realms and an extraneous inhabitant of the world. Just as a hunted animal finds safer shelter than an unhunted animal, so have I, persecuted by enemies, found the safest sanctuary, having esconced myself beneath Thy tabernacle, where neither friends nor enemies can slay my soul. Bless mine enemies, O Lord. Even I bless them and do not curse them.

They, rather than I, have confessed my sins before the world.

They have scourged me, whenever I have hesitated to scourge myself.

They have tormented me, whenever I have tried to flee torments.

They have scolded me, whenever I have flattered myself.

They have spat upon me, whenever I have filled myself with arrogance.

Bless mine enemies, O Lord. Even I bless them and do not curse them.

Whenever I have made myself wise, they have called me foolish.

Whenever I have made myself mighty, they have mocked me as though I were a dwarf.

Whenever I have wanted to lead people, they have shoved me into the background.

Whenever I have rushed to enrich myself, they have prevented me with an iron hand.

Whenever I thought that I would sleep peacefully, they have wakened me from sleep.

Whenever I have tried to build a home for a long and tranquil life, they have demolished it and driven me out.

Truly, enemies have cut me loose from the world and have stretched out mine hands to the hem of Thy garment.

Bless mine enemies, O Lord. Even I bless them and do not curse them.

Bless them and multiply them; multiply them and make them even more bitter against me—

so that my fleeing to Thee may have no return;

so that all hope in men may be scattered like cobwebs;

so that absolute serenity may begin to reign in my soul;

so that my heart may become the grave of my two evil twins: arrogance and anger;

so that I might amass all my treasure in Heaven;

ah, so that I may for once be freed from self-deception, which has entangled me in the dreadful web of illusory life.

Enemies have taught me to know—what hardly anyone knows—that a person has no enemies in the world except himself.

One hates his enemies only when he fails to realize that they are not enemies, but cruel friends.

It is truly difficult for me to say who has done me more good and who has done me more evil in the world: friends or enemies.

Therefore bless, O Lord, both my friends and mine enemies.

* Source: Bishop Nikolai Velimirovich, *Prayers by the Lake*, ch. LXXV, trans. Rt. Rev. Archimandrite Todor Mika and Very Rev. Dr. Stevan Scott (*A Treasury of Serbian Orthodox Spirituality*, Vol. V; Grayslake, IL: Free Serbian Orthodox Diocese of the United States and Canada, n.d.), pp. 142-144.