



Father Gerasim of New Valaam

Hieromonk Gerasim

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In the 1800's, on Alaska's remote and forested Spruce Island, there lived a holy Russian monk and missionary named Herman, who was to become America's first canonized Orthodox Saint. St. Herman prophesied that "a monk like me, fleeing the glory of men, will come and live on Spruce Island." This prophecy was fulfilled 100 years later in the person of Archimandrite Gerasim (+1969), who lived a hermitic way of life on the island for 30 years, guarding the Saint's relics and praying alone for the world. His solid spiritual formation in monasteries in Russia enabled him to withstand incredible obstacles, including concerted attempts to drive him off the island. His heroic witness is a beacon of ascetic Christianity in the 20th century.

Father Gerasim of New Valaam includes a preliminary Life of this righteous confessor, together with selections from his letters and three of his articles, all of which are largely autobiographical. From his words there emerges a warm, loving and endearing man, close to God's creation. At the same time, we see him as a mystic of the holy Optina tradition; a knower of God to who contact with the other world was a common reality. We can only marvel at how he was able to preserve the simplicity of his blessed childhood, with its fresh, guileless reactions to the joys and sorrows of life, and how he managed to preserve, on a wild island so far from his native land, a microcosm of Holy Russia.

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