CENTENNIAL SNAPSHOTS

16. Bishop Michael **Rusnak**, CSSR

Michael was born August 21, 1921 in Beaverdale, Pennsylvania, to Slovak immigrants, Andrej and Maria (nee Sotak). During the depression, his family returned to Czechoslovakia. After high school, Michael entered the Redemptorist novitiate and made his religious profession on August 2, 1942, joining the Michalovce Vice-Province of Redemptorists. He pursued his studies at the Slovak University of Bratislava and in the Redemptorist Seminary in Oboriste, Bohemia. On July 4, 1949, he was ordained in Presov, by Blessed Paul Gojdic, OSBM. Soon after his ordination, Father Michael was arrested and sent to a concentration camp along with other Slovak Byzantine and Latin Rite Catholic priests who refused to collaborate with Czechoslovakia's Communist regime. He escaped 14 months later, because as an American citizen by birth, he had obtained an American passport from the American Embassy in Prague. After a short time recovering in the United States and because of the impossibility of returning to his homeland, he joined the Yorkton Province of Redemptorists in North America. He arrived in Toronto in 1951 and began to organize the Slovak Byzantine Catholic Church in the New World. Together with Ludovit Minya, CSSR, he established parishes in Toronto, Hamilton, Oshawa and Welland. In 1953, Fr. Rusnak founded the Slovak Catholic publication, *Maria*. He also published the songbook, *Chvalite Hospoda*: "Praise the Lord."

In 1957, Father Rusnak was named Dean of the Byzantine Slovak parishes in the Ukrainian Catholic Eparchy of Toronto. On October 7, 1964, Pope Paul VI appointed Fr. Rusnak as Toronto's auxiliary bishop and Apostolic Visitator for Canada's Byzantine Slovaks. On October 3, 1965, he was named Exarch for Byzantine rite Slovaks. With the establishment of the Eparchy of SS. Cyril and Methodius by John Paul II, Bishop Michael Rusnak was enthroned on February 28, 1981. John Paul II also blessed the cornerstone of Bishop Rusnak's new Slovak Cathedral of the Transfiguration in Markham, Ontario during the 1984 papal visit. Bishop Rusnak served on the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops' Ad Hoc Committee for Inter-ritual Discipline and the Episcopal Commission for Christian Education. He was also a member of the Vatican's Congregation for Oriental Churches and of the Pontifical Commission for the Reform of the Oriental Code of Canon Law. Bishop Rusnak emphasized catechism and the importance of understanding the fullness of Eastern Catholic spirituality. In 1990, he was able to return to Slovakia for the first time in forty years and acted as a co-consecrator of the new Bishop of Presov. Bishop Michael Rusnak died on January 16, 2003, after a long battle with diabetes. He is entombed at Holy Cross Cemetery, Toronto. He was 82. Vicnaja Pamjat'!

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Ukrainian Redemptorists 100 years