

Saint John Kochurov

Missionary to America and First Hieromartyr under the Bolshevik Yoke

2 He studied at the Ryazan Seminary and Petersburg Theological Academy.

3 After his graduation in 1895, he arrived in America as a missionary priest.

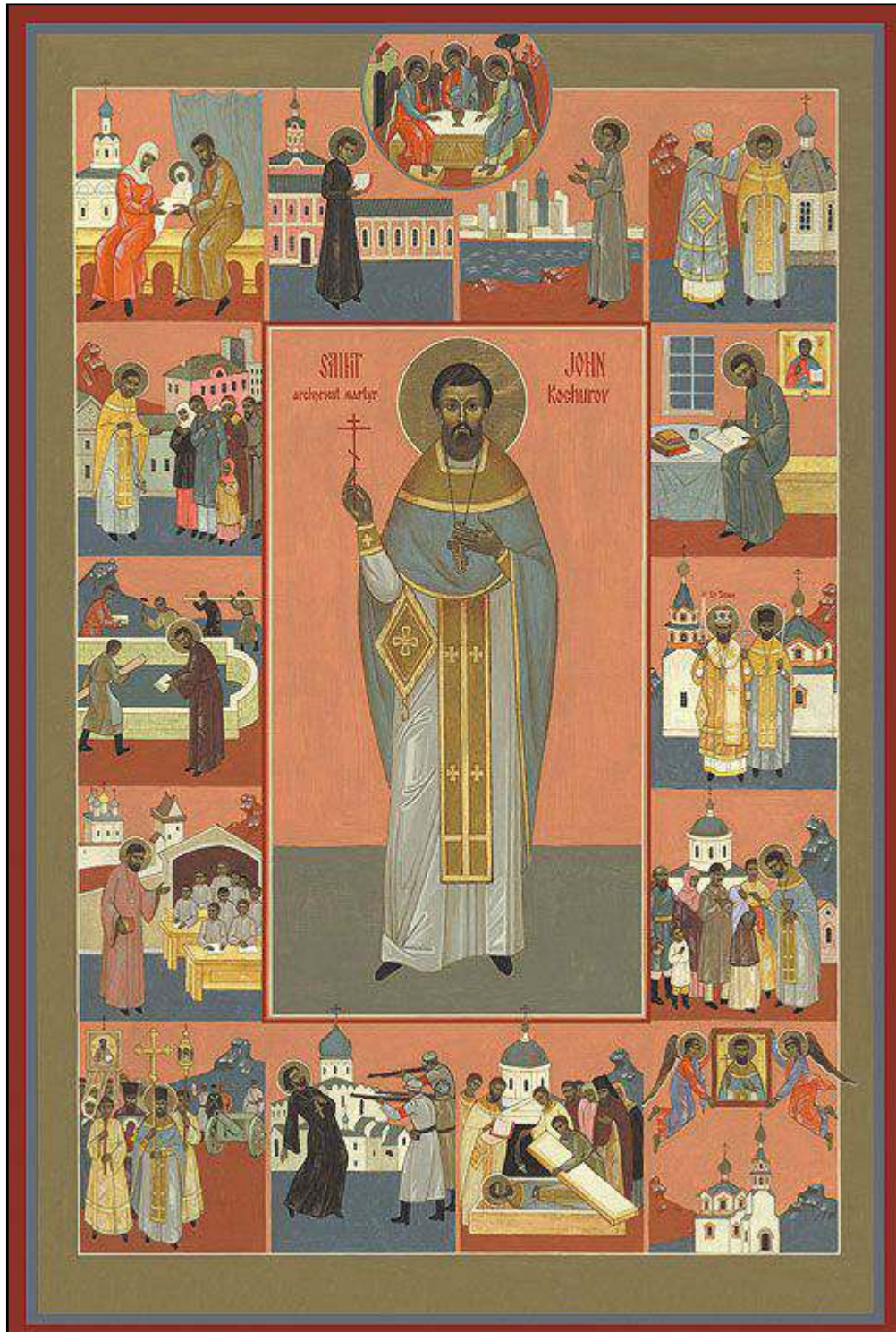
1 St. John was born into the family of a priest on July 13, 1871 in the village of Bigildino-Surka in Russia's Ryazan region.

5 St. John not only ministered to the Chicago faithful, but helped start parishes in rural Illinois towns.

7 With noted architect Louis Sullivan, he tirelessly oversaw the construction of Chicago's Holy Trinity Church.

9 In 1907, he was reassigned to teach catechism in schools of Narva, Estonia.

11 When Bolshevik forces attacked Tsarskoye Selo on October 30, 1917, St. John and the clergy held a prayer service and procession throughout the town, praying for peace.



12 The next day, he was taken to the outskirts of the town, where he was confronted by an angry mob and shot, thus becoming the first clergy martyr of the 1917 Russian Revolution.

13 Several days alter, St. John was buried in the crypt of St. Catherine Cathedral, which later was demolishd by the Soviet regime.

4 Upon his arrival in America, he was assigned as Pastor of the recently established St. Vladimir Church in Chicago.

6 St. John used his gifts for teaching, preaching and writing to share the Orthodox faith.

8 The new church – today a cathedral – was consecrated by Bishop Tikhon in 1903.

10 In 1916, he was assigned to St. Catherine Cathedral, Tsarskoye Selo, Russia.

14 In 1994, St. John was glorified in services concelebrated in Moscow by Patriarch Aleksy II and Metropolitan Theodosius.

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The New Martyr John Kochurov was born in July 1871 in the village of Bigildino-Surky in the Ryazan region of Russia [1]. His parents, Priest Alexander and Anna, gave their several children a healthy experience of being a priestly family, which stayed with John all his life. He was an outstanding student at the Ryazan Theological Academy, from which he graduated in 1891 [2].

He spent the next four years at the Saint Petersburg Theological Academy, where his vision of service in the parish priesthood and missionary work were formed [3]. Soon after his marriage and graduation in 1895, he was ordained to the priesthood, sent to America, and assigned by Bishop Nicholas of Alaska and the Aleutians as Pastor of Saint Vladimir Church in Chicago, Illinois [4].

Father John faced a parish situation that was very different from that in Russia. The Chicago parish and its affiliated missions in Streator, Joliet and other Illinois towns were not well-organized, had little money, and were isolated from the other parishes scattered across the country. Father John described his parishioners as “working people who earn their bread by toiling not far from where they live, on the outskirts of the city” [5].

With his considerable gifts for teaching, preaching and writing, Father John stabilized his existing parish community spiritually, created two church schools and took part in the diocese’s publication activities [6]. He also mentored many new converts. When Bishop [now Saint] Tikhon arrived in the diocese, he recognized Saint John’s administrative abilities and appointed him chair of the Mutual Aid Society.

Father John worked hard to raise funds to erect a new church building to replace the inadequate Saint Vladimir Church. Soon after his return from a 1902 visit to Russia, where he collected additional funds, construction of the new Holy Trinity Church began. Father John worked closely with noted architect Louis Sullivan in designing the cathedral [7], which Bishop Tikhon consecrated in 1903 [8]. After a decade of ministry, which was praised as including “sleepless nights, worn-out nerves and countless woes,” Father John was awarded the right to wear a gold pectoral cross in 1905. He continued working on the pressing issues of diocesan administration.

Homesick for his homeland, Father John received permission to return to Russia in 1907. In recognition of his educational skills he was assigned to teach catechism in Narva, Estonia, where, as in America, Orthodox Christians were a minority [9]. He taught for nine years, in a spiritual atmosphere reminiscent of his childhood, and was further recognized for his exceptional ministry. In 1916, he welcomed the chance to serve Saint Catherine Cathedral in Tsarskoye Selo, near Saint Petersburg, or Petrograd [10], where he became well known for his dedication and his inspiring sermons.

On October 30, 1917, the Bolshevik forces, having seized Petrograd, attacked Tsarskoye Selo. As distraught believers flocked to the churches, the clergy held a procession through the town, praying for peace [11]. The next day, the Bolsheviks arrested Father John and other clergy. He was taken to the outskirts of the town where he was confronted by an angry mob and shot, making him the first clergy martyr of the 1917 Russian Revolution [12]. Father John was buried in the crypt of Saint Catherine Cathedral [13]. Of his martyrdom Archbishop Tikhon said, “We bear in our hearts the sure hope that the deceased pastor, adorned with the wreath of martyrdom, now stands at the Throne of God among the elect of Christ’s true flock.”

On December 4, 1994, Father John was canonized by the Council of Bishops of the Russian Orthodox Church as the first of 20th century Russia’s new martyrs. He is especially remembered in America as a missionary and an inspired preacher of God’s Word [14].

O Holy Father John, pray unto God for us! ■

