

Archimandrite Vasily (Permiakov)
A Brief Autobiography

I was born in Rīga, Latvia (then a republic within the USSR) in a family of Russian and Ukrainian origin. My native language and culture is Russian, although living in Latvia I learned the Latvian language and became familiar with the native culture of my homeland. I was not raised in the Orthodox faith, as the Soviet regime and the Soviet system of education discouraged conversation about religion, and considered religious practices laughable and obsolete. At the same time, regular conversations with my late grandfather (who helped raise me), a retired professor of military history, instilled in me the love of learning, the value of tradition, and great interest in history. From my early conversations with him I learned the stories concerning my family history which involved his service during WWII, the deaths of most of his immediate family in Holodomor in 1933, and the imprisonment (and subsequent execution) of his uncle who was the village priest.

At the end of 1980s, when, concurrent with more openness and freedom in Soviet Union and with the growing independence movement in Latvia, vast quantity of religious literature became available, I became keenly interested in learning more about religion, Christianity, and specifically Orthodoxy. I was baptized at the age of 14 on September 20, 1991 in the basement chapel of the Dormition Cathedral in Rīga, together with my father, my sister and about 30-40 other candidates. At no point before my baptism I was instructed in the basics of the Orthodox faith – thus, the next several years were dedicated to voracious reading and gradual discovery of Orthodox teaching and worship, while in the process of finishing high school and entering college (Latvian Academy of Culture) where my main focus was the study of Russian culture, religion, philosophy, and literature. I visited the church occasionally, but it did not occur to me at the time that church attendance was in any way ‘necessary’.

Much was to change in the summer of 1996 when I tried to follow up on some reading I set aside during the academic year, and read through Vladimir Lossky’s *Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church* (in Russian). The deep impression that was created by this work led to my first conscious visit to the Orthodox liturgy on the feast of Protection, 1996, where the words of the priest’s sermon (who spoke directly and lively, as if speaking to me

personally) made me feel the need to come back to the church again. I became a regular Sunday parishioner and in a couple of months experienced my first serious confession and communion. The priest whom I heard preaching in church, Hegumen Alexei, became my father confessor for the next two years. In spring 1998 due to the influence of Orthodox friends whom I met in college, I started attending the Holy Ascension Latvian Orthodox parish in Rīga – the only one with services in Latvian. There I met about a number of young Latvian and Russian parishioners, some of whom were college students, who were actively engaged in the parish life, sang in the choir, and on their own initiative tried to start a catechetical program among the newcomers. Through these Orthodox friends I met Archimandrite Victor (Mamontov) (d. 2016), a saintly, charismatic and highly educated priest who served a small parish in the town of Kārsava. Fr Victor became my father confessor until I left Latvia for the United States, and I periodically made pilgrimage to his parish, where the full cycle of daily services was maintained through the efforts of female choir members. At the same time as I was finishing college in Riga, I read broadly in Orthodox theology and liturgy, with Fr Alexander Schmemmann's *The Eucharist* and Fr John Meyendorff's *Lectures in Patristics* (his lectures at St Vladimir's translated into Russian) being the most helpful books at that time, serving for me as an introduction to the greater array of Orthodox patristic and spiritual literature. During my college studies in Rīga, the instruction that I received from amazing scholars and teachers, such as late Prof. Alexander Gavrilin, Prof. Jeļena Celma and others, laid the foundation for my growth as a student and a future scholar.

In the summer of 1998 I visited my father who already lived and worked in the area of Dallas, TX. As a result of my conversation with the local OCA priest, Fr Basil Zebrun (St Barbara's Church in Fort Worth), I received a copy of the academic catalog of St Vladimir's Orthodox Theological Seminary, which strengthened my resolve: to move to the US after finishing college in Riga and eventually to study Orthodox theology at St Vladimir's Seminary, where some of the authors that influenced my path in Orthodoxy taught and worked. I moved to the US on a student visa in November 1999, and studied for three semesters in a M.A. program in humanities at the University of Texas at Dallas, meanwhile preparing to apply to St Vladimir's Seminary and improving my academic writing skills in English. While attending St Barbara's and St Seraphim's Cathedral in Dallas in 2000-01, I

was introduced to His Eminence Archbishop Dmitri (Royster) of Dallas and received his blessing to apply to St Vladimir's Seminary.

My studies at St Vladimir's began in the fall of 2001. One of the important relationships I established during my three years of study was the mentorship by Fr John Behr, as well as the spiritual and liturgical guidance from Fr Paul Lazor (my confessor in the seminary) – however, I likewise immensely benefited, intellectually and spiritually, from studying under the guidance of such distinguished professors as Paul Meyendorff, Fr John Erickson, Fr Alexander Rentel, Fr Paul Tarazi, Richard Schneider, Peter Bouteneff, and John Barnet. I truly appreciated the sense of brotherhood and community that was perceptible among the students, the respectful and attentive mentorship of the professors, together with the environment of ardent desire for knowledge and communion with Christ, a combination of faithfulness to the Church and critical discernment which became so important for my formation. The chapel, the heart of the seminary's life, was fundamental to my seminary experience, as for many past and future seminarians. At the end of my first year, I was ordained a reader in the Orthodox Church in America by His Beatitude Metropolitan Theodosius.

For me the liturgical experience in the chapel (where I served as chapel sacristan in 2003-04), together with the classroom lectures in liturgical theology, strengthened my intention to pursue doctoral studies in liturgy, focusing on the history of the Byzantine liturgical tradition. I graduated from St Vladimir's in 2004, and in the fall of the same year was admitted to the doctoral studies program in theology (with the focus on liturgical studies) at the University of Notre Dame (Notre Dame, IN) which I completed under the attentive guidance and mentorship of first-rate scholars of Christian theology and liturgy, especially Profs. Max Johnson, Robin Darling Young, Bp Daniel Findikyan and others. While pursuing my studies, I was a regular parishioner (as well as altar server and occasional chanter) at St Andrew's Greek Orthodox Church in South Bend, IN. My dissertation, completed in 2012, examined the Byzantine rite for the consecration of a church – a subject which was not studied before in a systematic manner. In my work, I attempted to uncover the origins of this complex rite and to show its multi-layered character indebted to the liturgical traditions of Jerusalem and Constantinople.

Even before the completion of my dissertation, I sought post-doctoral employment and found it in an unexpected place, when I was invited to take the position of a lecturer in comparative theology and apologetics at Holy Trinity Orthodox Seminary in Jordanville, NY, in the jurisdiction of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia. I began teaching at the Jordanville seminary in August 2011, and continued for nearly nine years, until July 2020. This experience was remarkably different from academic experience at SVS and at Notre Dame, since the Jordanville seminary is situated on the campus of Holy Trinity Monastery and the lives of the two institutions is fully intertwined. In 2011-16 I lived in the monastery dormitory with the brotherhood and around 2013-14 was considering formally joining the brotherhood, at the encouragement of Bishop Luke (who was my confessor). Eventually the plans for my tonsure were delayed, and I focused on my work in the seminary. In 2016 I moved out of the monastery and lived separately, but continued to attend services and occasionally serve as a subdeacon and preach at the monastery's cathedral. The experience of the full cycle of services, mostly in Slavonic, celebrated with love and precision, in a traditional Russian-American monastery, enriched my liturgical knowledge (esp. from the practical side) and provided context for my own growth as a liturgical scholar. At Holy Trinity Seminary I taught dogmatic theology, liturgical theology, comparative theology and apologetics, and served on the faculty committees preparing for the accreditation of its first graduate program and planning the curriculum revision. I made a point to be available to seminary students for academic advice and conversation, and quite enjoyed guiding them and participating in their formation.

In the spring of 2019 I was informed concerning the upcoming opening of the position in liturgical theology at St Vladimir's Seminary. While I considered myself a fully integrated member of the Jordanville community, and found my experience at HTOS quite rewarding, I thought it was providential that this position at SVS was now open, as it would have provided me with the opportunity to focus on the main field of my studies, liturgical history and theology. I applied in the fall of 2019 and, after the search process was complete, I was hired in April 2020, and returned to the SVS campus, now as a faculty member, in the midst of COVID pandemic in August 2020, and from that time until now I taught courses in liturgical theology, liturgical studies and practical liturgics. Prior to applying to the position on the SVS faculty, I had a conversation with His Beatitude

Metropolitan Tikhon and received his blessing to petition for the ordination to the holy diaconate, if I am hired at St Vladimir's. By this point in my life (I was 43) I decided that I am not called for married life, and that I will seek a celibate ordination, with the understanding that I will be open to receiving monastic tonsure when the time comes, with the blessing of my bishop. I was ordained to the subdiaconate on March 25, 2021 by His Grace Bishop Andrei and to the holy diaconate by His Beatitude on September 14 of the same year. In addition to my teaching duties, my research, and my duties as a member of the editorial board for *St Vladimir's Theological Quarterly*, in May 2021 I assumed the duties of the Chapel Ecclesiarch, overseeing the celebration of liturgical services in the Three Hierarchs Chapel in accordance with the Orthodox liturgical tradition and the established practices of the seminary chapel (in July- December 2024 I also served as the chapel administrator). I consider it a great privilege for me to return to St Vladimir's Seminary and to take part in the formation of seminary students – I thoroughly enjoy teaching and guiding the students, as well as engaging in academic conversation and fellowship that is cultivated among faculty colleagues. My teaching duties that include the courses in liturgical studies and in practical liturgics allowed me to develop an integral vision of the seminary's liturgical curriculum, which hopefully encourages the seminarians to see how liturgical history and theology inform our liturgical practice, with the latter contextualizing the former in the ecclesial setting.

In April 2024 His Beatitude conveyed to me his blessing to seek the ordination to the holy priesthood. Even though I greatly benefited, spiritually and practically, from my three-year ministry as a deacon, and consider the diaconal ministry to be of crucial importance for the preservation of our liturgical tradition, I accepted the call for a higher degree with the understanding that I can only fulfill this ministry with the support and prayers of my bishop, the fellow concelebrants at the holy altar, and the community that I try to serve. I was ordained to the holy priesthood by the hand of His Beatitude on September 14, 2024, and from the beginning of my ministry one of the greatest joys in my life now has been celebrating the divine services, especially the Divine Liturgy, of which “no one who is bound with the desires... of the flesh is worthy” but which nevertheless was “committed to us” by our High Priest, Lord Jesus Christ. At the same time, one important aspect of my service – hearing confessions – has been a profoundly instructive and humbling experience. In

addition to my priestly and teaching duties, I am currently working to revise the manuscript of my dissertation on the Byzantine rite for the consecration of churches for publication as a monograph, and reworking a few recent conference papers into articles. Throughout my academic career in the Orthodox seminary context, I continued to be involved in research and scholarship, regularly participating in academic conferences in my field (e.g. Oxford International Patristics Conference, congresses of the Society for Oriental Liturgies, of which I am a member).

On January 17, 2025 I was tonsured into small schema monasticism by Rt Rev. Archimandrite Sergius, abbot of St Tikhon's Monastery (South Canaan, PA), with the blessing of Metropolitan Tikhon. In my monastic tonsure, I was privileged to receive the name "Vasily" after my new patron saint, St Basil the Great, one of the great hierarchs and ecumenical teachers, whose teaching on liturgy, doctrine, canons, and ascetical life always inspired me. Most recently, on Lazarus Saturday 2025, by the decision of the Holy Synod, I was elevated to the rank of archimandrite.

It is a great privilege and honor to be able to serve God and his Church in the Orthodox seminary setting, where – despite the challenges - ecclesiastical service, teaching, and scholarship can intertwine and enrich each other, and I pray to be able to carry out this service faithfully until – if God so wills – I am called to offer a different service to his 'all-honorable and majestic Name.' I am profoundly grateful to all people mentioned above, and those whom I did not mention, who helped, supported, encouraged and assisted me, also suffered with me, for it is by their efforts, support, and prayers, despite my unworthiness, I am where I am now and, by the grace of God, will be able to continue faithfully on the path of the service to the Lord.

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