

I SPY IN MY LITTLE ICON



By Kh. Jocelyn Abyad

St. Herman of Alaska



The icon for this month features St. Herman of Alaska. This wonderworker was born in the late 1700's in Russia. From a young age, he was devoted to Christ and became a monk at the Valaam Monastery. In 1793, ten men from the monastery were selected to go on a special mission to bring the Gospel of Christ to the native people of northwestern America. Saint Herman would spend the rest of his life- more than 40 years- among the Aleut people on their islands.

We see St. Herman with a long white beard and clothed in the simple robes of a monk. He lived a very ascetic life- even though the weather could be extremely cold, he would not put on any additional clothing or coats. He also wore a heavy cross and chains, weighing about 15 pounds around his neck. This made all of his gardening and other chores even harder to do, a sacrifice that he offered to God willingly. He ate very little, even when he was invited over to visit a family.

St. Herman is standing on the shore of Spruce Island, where he built a small cell for himself to live in. Across the waves of the sea on Kodiak island, you see a chapel that he built for his fellow monks and the newly illumined to pray in. The Aleut people loved St. Herman and called him "Apa," which means elder or grandfather in their native language. He cared for both their physical and spiritual needs. He helped them to grow food, build homes for their families and a school for the children, and cared for the people when they were sick.

On his scroll, we see a quote from a story often told about the saint. Once, talking to a group of young people who admitted they were not following God as well as they should, he encouraged them, "For our good, for our happiness, let us make a vow that **from this day forward, from this hour, from this minute, let us love God above all and fulfill His holy will!**" Both during his life and through his intercession from Heaven, many miracles have been attributed to St. Herman. May we also heed the words of this holy man and strive to love God above all else! St. Herman, pray for us!