

# Today's Martyrs

*Resources for understanding current Christian witness and martyrdom*

## **Meditation – A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Priest**

*Strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered, and I will turn my hand against the little ones. – Zechariah 13:7*



**The former Solovetsky Special Purpose Camp**

During our historical research we sometimes find accounts of people unknown to history which go beyond the basic facts and illuminate a small portion of a Christian's soul. One such story was uncovered recently. It was a thumbnail account of the life and death of a priest in Soviet Russia named Antoni Dziemieszkiewicz, and in it was a later testament to his life by a parishioner which gave a true measure of a man:

In 1992, Adelia Ozharevskaia, a parishioner of Fr. Antoni, recalled: "Fr. Antoni attracted people with his kindness, intellect, artistic giftedness and eloquence. His homilies were interesting, simple and inspired; they awakened in one the very best sentiments. In addition to his concerns with the church, Fr. Antoni always visited the

sick and the poor, helping them with whatever he could. In those difficult years of the 1920s [when he would have been in his early 30's], when the food situation was so dire, Fr. Antoni sought ways to help the poor: for example, being an artist, he made various statuettes from clay and painted them (all this was done at the expense of his time for rest and sleep). Several parishioners would then take the statuettes and sell them, and the money thus earned would go to help the poor. He accepted a martyr's death [shot dead on November 3, 1937] – and why? Because he was a pure soul, because he was devoted to God, to the Church and the people! Blessed be his memory! We, like wandering sheep, were scattered all about and for a long time bore this heavy loss in our hearts”

A meditation on this testament would include a vision of a man up at odd hours, sculpting and painting. His artwork might have hidden Christian themes, since overt religious subjects might already be too dangerous. He would have prayed as he worked, including simple prayers for the benefit of the ultimate owner. Fasting would have been familiar to him, and so he intimately understood the suffering of the drawn faces he saw every day, which stayed in his mind into the night. His thoughts must have also led to the ultimate concerns: how to hold it all together, how to encourage people's faith to stay and grow in the face of a malignant opposition. A final thought: we knew nothing of this man until now. How many more must there be like him?

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