

Father Boris Zalivako

ANDREI SINYAVSKY

In 1970 I got to know Father Boris Zalivako in camp No. 3 in Mordovia (the town of Barashevo). By this time I had had extensive personal contact with individuals held in prisons and camps for their faith in God : these included representatives of many different Churches and religions. As a rule they were men endowed with a deep spiritual and moral sense of duty, exceptional purity of heart, and great patience.

In my encounters with Father Boris I experienced a new level of true faith, one which surpassed many others I had witnessed. After coming to our camp Father Boris became the camp priest in the fullest sense of the word. I had not seen such a man before : he fulfilled all the obligations and ritual duties of a priest with complete devotion amid the highly oppressive and sometimes unbearable camp conditions. He would hold services beneath the open sky at night, in rain or snow (religious services are harassed and worshippers are dispersed if found, so the faithful usually gather in secret), and for our entire camp he soon became an outstanding example of Christian service to God and his fellow men.

Father Boris scarcely ever discussed trivial or "worldly" matters and he spoke about himself even less frequently. Every free minute after the exhausting work-day was given over to his mission of camp priest. For this reason we, the camp inmates, knew very little about Father Boris's background. We did know that at one time he had been deprived of the right to conduct church services, and apparently this had impelled him to try to flee the country in 1969. He was caught somewhere in Czechoslovakia and sentenced to eight years of "strict-regime" camp, followed by five years of exile. Knowing as I do the profoundly ascetic and monastic disposition of Father Boris, devoid of all worldly interests, I can affirm that the escape abroad of which he was found guilty could not have stemmed from political motives. Least of all does this act fit the juridical definition of "particularly dangerous crimes against the State", with which he was charged.

In a camp where even the Gospels are prohibited and where handwritten copies of prayers are periodically confiscated during individual and mass searches, Father Boris's prominence as Orthodox priest soon elicited the displeasure of the authorities. Early in 1971 he was sent to the closed prison in Vladimir for three years. Incarceration in this institution is regarded as a harsher measure of punishment than all the camp

“regimes”: the prison differs from the camps by imposing even severer living conditions and still greater deprivations on its inmates.

According to information that has reached me, Father Boris, a physically healthy and rather young man (he was born in 1940, I believe) has been reduced to such a state of physical debility in the Vladimir prison that there is now every reason to fear for his life. After an operation for appendicitis which he underwent in prison, the wound would not heal: to such an extent were the tissues of his body sapped of their vitality.

From the latest available information I have learned that Father Boris, whose physical condition is extremely grave, has asked his recently released co-prisoners to arrange for a priest to be permitted to visit him. But ministers of religion are not admitted to hospitals or prisons in contemporary Russia and all petitions and complaints to this end have remained unanswered.

Action needs to be taken to alleviate Father Boris's lot and to save his life.

(Russian text in *Novoye Russkoye Slovo*, New York, 14 April, 1974.)

Poem

Solzhenitsyn, February 1974

Perhaps more than the speech you did not say
This was the gesture which relieved who knows
How many millions on a Winter day
Who stood aside from violence and chose
To watch you turn away

With unshed tears and no farewells and take
Your soap, a tooth-brush, and go with the men
Who threatened you. Courage and keen heartbreak
Trembled the world to gentleness again.
Yes, still one man can make

Tormenters look at empty hands, the wild
And violent opportunists feel disgraced.
Russia has given one more tragic child
To reach compassion to the wondering West,
Make it, a moment, mild.

ELIZABETH JENNINGS