

Pranas Gaida, *Undying Mortal: Archbishop Teofilus - Shepherd, Prisoner, Martyr* (Toronto, Canada: Lights of Homeland, 1997), soft cover, illustrated, index of persons, no price given, 176 pages, abridged translation of Rev. Anthony A. Jurgelaitis, O.P., from original Lithuanian, *Nemarus mirtingasis* (Rome, 1981).

"America needs a bishop-martyr," a friend of mine once remarked. Perhaps he had in mind a giant of the caliber of Teofilus Matulionis (1873-1962) who is here introduced to English readers in a swift-moving biographical narrative, loaded with fascinating ingredients.

The high drama allows us to eavesdrop on a dedicated man, trained at the seminary in St. Petersburg, who started his priesthood in a series of Latvian parishes. He then moved on to minister to scattered Lithuanians at Sacred Heart Parish in the Russian city where he had studied. Here he lived through the violence of the revolution in 1917.

Three imprisonments interrupted his pastoral endeavors throughout his life. He first suffered under the Bolsheviks who gave him a three-year jail sentence for objecting to government efforts at confiscating church goods. In 1929 he became a bishop in secret to serve as Apostolic Administrator of the Mogilev archdiocese, but soon after was again seized, questioned for an entire year, and then penalized with a decade of jail in the Solovetskie Islands in the White Sea. The dreadful cold and hunger crippled his health, bringing on an eventual transfer to a Moscow hospital. A prisoner-exchange in 1933 allowed his return to Lithuania, though he was reluctant to abandon his mission in Russia.

By now, his heroic reputation had preceded him. The public gave him an enthusiastic welcome in Kaunas. He was then invited by the Lithuanian Catholic Federation to come to the United States for an extended visit. It is no surprise that the leftist Lithuanian press fired some verbal assaults against his tour. There was opposition from an unexpected source, too. The author, Monsignor Gaida, did not know that several American bishops viewed Matulionis' coming with suspicion and skepticism, initially unwilling to receive him. They regarded his visit as dangerously political, with intent to inflame excessive nationalism among Lithuanian immigrants. Once he hurdled this unexpected obstacle, his lengthy stay proved fruitful. He visited most large Lithuanian settlements, preaching, lecturing, and inspiring.

Yet unknown to him, more jail time lay in store for him. When the Soviets occupied Lithuania in the 1940s, the bishop endured another ten-year sentence, this time in a Vladimir prison and then in a Potma (Mordavia) concentration camp. In this exile he persevered in his heroic resignation, bearing his suffering patiently and calmly. One of his prison mates turned out to be Frank Kelly, a onetime British Air Force pilot. He had been captured in Holland by the Germans while serving as a medic. Later the Russians confined Kelly to Vladimir where he met many Lithuanians, including Bishop Matulionis. In his memoirs, *Private Kelly by Himself* (1954), he wrote glowingly of the bishop's stature and generosity.

Though released in 1956, the bishop was forbidden to exercise authority in his diocese of Kaišiadorys. Instead he was first exiled to Birštonas and later to Šeduva. Despite this restriction of residence, he quietly managed to carry on limited duties from a distance, e.g., by issuing pastoral letters.

A high point in Matulionis' life had occurred on March 24, 1934, when Pope Pius XI received the Lithuanian in a private audience. In a very touching moment, when the visitor knelt for a papal blessing, the Holy Father fell to his knees first to receive the martyr-bishop's benediction. A generation later, Pope John XXIII honored Matulionis with the title of archbishop on February 9, 1962. Despite his lengthy sufferings, the holy man managed to survive beyond his ninetieth year, dying on August 20, 1962.

Two obvious saintly qualities emerge from this brief portrait. Observers constantly pointed out that the sterling man, with a reservoir of patience and forgiveness, expressed no bitterness or enmity toward his captors. Equally striking is his stamina and resilience. Despite the hazards of three imprisonments, his spirit seemed to infuse his haggard body with nearly

limitless physical renewal beyond medical predictability. Astonishingly, he entered the early months of his tenth decade before his demise.

This moving monograph assumes more than a reader's fleeting acquaintance with names, dates, and events in East European history. The book would have profited greatly from explanatory footnotes, since it is intended for the general public. Despite this flaw, the biography deserves a place in the hagiography of this century.

Translation is hardly ever an easy task. The efforts of the learned Dominican, Father Jurgelaitis proved successful. Meanwhile, one can only hope that interested parties will seek out the publisher, *Tėviškės Žiburiai*, at 2185 Stavebank Rd., Mississauga, Ontario, L5C -1T3, Canada. Otherwise like so many worthwhile works, this valuable volume will merely occupy space in a hidden closet of a newspaper office.

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