

# THE PORTRAIT/ICON OF ST. SERAPHIM OF SAROV



This original portrait of the saint, painted during the holy man's lifetime, is in the Novo-Diveevo Convent near New York. The Venerable one is depicted in full stature in his declining years. He is leaning on a staff in his right hand, and in his left hand he holds a prayer-rope. As those who have seen this portrait state – “the wondrous face of the Venerable one has remained completely undamaged by time. From the Venerable one's face, pale and emaciated by ascetic struggles, the holy Elder's blue, amazingly communicative eyes gaze. It is impossible to tear oneself away from this gaze. He looks directly at your soul, and it seems that the saint's glance--at times kindly, at times sternly--penetrates into all the corners of your soul.”

During the days of the saint's glorification in 1905, the whole Royal Family prayed fervently before this image. During the destruction of the Convent by the Bolsheviks, the image was taken to Kiev, where it was situated in the Neberezhno-Nikol'sky Church, and in 1945 it was transferred to the Protection Church, newly opened under the Germans, in Podol. During the retreat of the Germans from Kiev, the image was taken out by one of the translators (a Russian Orthodox Christian) to Lodz', and then handed over to Protopresbyter Adrian Rymarenko, who was then the rector of the Russian Cathedral in Berlin. During one of the brutal nighttime air-raids against Berlin, those returning from shelter saw that an incendiary bomb, having pierced the cupola of the Cathedral, had fallen into its left side-chapel. The Shroud situated there and the image of the Venerable one that lay upon it were enveloped in fire; next to it, the stand for the Cross and the nearby image of Saints Gurias, Samonas, Abibas were burning. The fire was quickly extinguished, and remarkably, the flame did not at all touch either the Shroud or the image of St. Seraphim, even though everything round about was scorched.

The night passed. The morning divine service began, but the smell of burning did not disappear; on the contrary, it became all the more intense. They rushed again to seek the cause, and in the Cathedral's attic they discovered a second, smouldering incendiary bomb. They had hardly touched it, when a huge shaft of flame leapt up from it. Thus, the fire smouldered for twelve hours but did not flare up. From that moment, the Cathedral did not suffer from fire any more, although everything around it was burnt and destroyed.

In accordance with God's inscrutable ways, the flow of Russian people surged to America, and with them also arrived the Diveevo holy object – the image of the Venerable one – as well a particle of his holy relics and a piece of his mantia.