



### ***St. Herman of Alaska***

On December 25<sup>th</sup>, we will celebrate the Divine Liturgy in honor of St. Herman, the first Orthodox Saint of America. He was born near Moscow around 1756 to a pious merchant family, and entered monastic life at the age of sixteen, at the Trinity-St. Sergius Lavra near St Petersburg. While there, he was attacked by a cancer of the face, but the Mother of God appeared to him and healed him completely. He was tonsured a monk in 1783 with the name of Herman (a form of Germanos), and was received into Valaam Monastery on Lake Ladoga. After some time, he was allowed to withdraw to the life of a hermit in the forest, and only came to the monastery for feast days.

In 1793, in response to a request by the Russian-American Commercial Company for missionaries to Alaska, Valaam Monastery was told to select a company of its best monks to travel to America. Eight were chosen, of whom the hermit Herman was one. The company crossed all of Siberia and, almost a year later, first saw Kodiak Island in September 1794. The missionaries set about their work, and found the native Aleut people so receptive to the Gospel of Christ that in the first year about 7,000 were baptized and

1,500 marriages performed.

Eventually, St. Herman settled on Spruce Island near Kodiak, living the life of a hermit in a small cabin in the forest. He spent his days in prayer and mission work, and denied himself every fleshly comfort: he fasted often and lived on a diet of blackberries, mushrooms and vegetables (in Alaska!!). Despite these privations, he founded an orphanage and a school for the natives of the island, cared for the sick in epidemics, and built a chapel where he conducted divine services attended by many. (He was not a priest, but God made up the lack in miraculous ways: at Theophany, Angels descended to bless the waters of the bay, and the Saint would use the holy water to heal the sick). Asked if he was ever lonely or dejected in his solitude, and replied: "I am not alone; God is here as everywhere, and the Angels too. There is no better company."

Saint Herman reposed in peace on Spruce Island, at the age of eighty-one, in 1836. At the moment of his departure, his face was radiant with light, and the inhabitants nearby saw a pillar of light rising above his hermitage. His last wish was to be buried on Spruce Island. When some of his well-intended disciples attempted to take his relics back to Kodiak to be buried from the church there, a storm rose up and continued unabated until they had abandoned the plan and buried him as he desired.

The life and miracles of this wonderworking saint are too numerous to include in this brief article, but St. Michael's Lending Library includes a detailed life of St. Herman in *The Little Russian Philokalia* Vol. III. Holy St. Herman of Alaska, pray to God for us!