

St. Juvenaly of Alaska



St. Juvenaly of Alaska. Ο άγιος Ιουβενάλιος της Αλάσκας.

The holy, glorious, right-victorious hieromartyr Juvenaly of Alaska, Protomartyr of America, was a member of the first group of Orthodox missionaries who came from the monastery of Valaam to preach the Word of God to the native inhabitants of Alaska. He was martyred while evangelizing among the Eskimos on the mainland of Alaska in 1796. His feast day is celebrated on July 2, and he is

also commemorated with all the saints of Alaska (September 24), and with the first martyrs of the American land (December 12).

He was born in 1761 in Ekaterinburg, Russia, and was named Jacob Govouchkin. In his monastic life he was tonsured and given the name Juvenaly in memory of St. Juvenal, fifth century Patriarch of Jerusalem. After becoming a monk he was successively ordained deacon and then priest, becoming a hieromonk. He lived much of his early monastic life in the area around Lake Ladoga in northern Russia near Finland at the Konyavesky and Valaam Monasteries.

In 1793, a missionary group of eight monastics was organized at the Monastery of Valaam, near Lake Ladoga, to preach the Word of God to the natives of Alaska. This group of missionaries was led by Archimandrite Joseph (Bolotov), and included four including Juvenaly and Makary, one, Steven, and two lay including Herman. Their destination was the Russian settlement on Kodiak Island in the Gulf of Alaska, some 8,000 miles away across the length of Asia through Siberia and then the cold Bering Sea of the northern Pacific Ocean. The group arrived on Kodiak Island on September 24[<] 1794, to an unexpected scene. The settlement was primitive beyond what they were told, and violence was commonplace. The promised church was not there, and the promised supplies for three years were absent.

While Archimandrite Joseph dealt with the leadership issues with Baranov, the leader of the settlement, Hieromonk Juvenaly and the others in their party began their missionary work. Within two years their zeal had brought more than 12,000 Alaskans to the Orthodox Christian faith. They did this not by degrading their former shaman based faith but by showing them that Christianity was the fulfillment of that faith.

As the group continued preaching further away from the settlement on Kodiak, Hieromonk Juvenaly began missionary work on the mainland of Alaska 1796. Here he continued the success of the past two years as he baptized hundreds of Chugach Sugpiag and Athabaskan Indians. But as his mission continued along northwest toward the Bering Sea, he disappeared. No material evidence of his disappearance has been found, but among the Alaskan people oral tradition relates of his martyrdom. The tradition is that as he moved into territory inhabited by Eskimos, some Eskimos did not understand some of his gesturing while making the sign of the cross. Disturbed, a Yupiat shaman ordered an attack upon the hieromonk, and he was killed by spears and arrows. Thus, Juvenaly became the first Orthodox martyr in the Americas.

Source: Outreach Alaska