



# His Beatitude Metropolitan Theodosius (Lazor)

SYOSSET, NY [OCA]

On Monday morning, October 19, 2020, [His Beatitude Metropolitan Theodosius \(Lazor\)](#), former Archbishop of Washington, Metropolitan of All-America and Canada, fell asleep in the Lord in Canonsburg, PA after an extended illness. He was the Primate of the Orthodox Church in America from 1977 until his retirement in 2002.

On October 27, 1933, Metropolitan Theodosius [Lazor] was born Frank Lazor to John and Mary Lazor, immigrants from Galicia (what is today the southeastern corner of Poland), in Canonsburg, PA. He was raised as a son of the Orthodox Church, a devout member of Saint John the Baptist Orthodox Church in Canonsburg, PA where he served as an altar server and then as a reader. He attended Canonsburg High School, where he was Student Council President, graduating in 1953.

He enrolled in undergraduate studies at Washington and Jefferson College in Washington, PA. During his time there, he served as the Recording Secretary of the Alpha Tau Omega fraternity, which focuses on Leadership Development. After his graduation in 1957 from Washington and Jefferson College, he enrolled in Saint Vladimir's Orthodox Theological Seminary, at that time in New York City. He was awarded a Master of Divinity degree in 1960. He spent the next year pursuing additional studies at the Ecumenical Institute in Bossey, Switzerland, touring the Holy Land, and visiting Orthodox Christian centers throughout Europe and the Middle East.

Upon returning to the US in 1961, he took monastic vows and was tonsured as a monk on October 10 at Saint Sergius Chapel in Oyster Bay Cove, NY by Archbishop Ireney of Boston and New England and given the name Theodosius. His heavenly patron was Saint Theodosius of Chernigov. On October 14, 1961 he was ordained to the Holy Diaconate at Holy Virgin Protection Cathedral in New York City by Bishop Kiprian of Washington (DC). On October 22, 1961, the Hierodeacon Theodosius was ordained to the Holy Priesthood at Saint Gregory Orthodox Church in Homestead, PA by Archbishop Benjamin of Pittsburgh and West Virginia.

From 1961 through 1966, he served as rector of Nativity of the Virgin Mary Church in Madison, IL, and as an assistant military chaplain. While at Holy Virgin, he instituted a building program, purchasing property and building a new church next to their existing edifice. Their altar was consecrated in 1965 by Archbishop John (Garklavs) of Chicago, where Father Alexander Schmemmann was the guest speaker during the celebration. In 1966-67, he served as the personal secretary to Metropolitan Ireney.

At the Spring 1967 Session of the Great Council of Bishops, he was elected to the episcopacy to serve as Auxiliary to the Metropolitan and Bishop of Washington DC and as administrator of the Diocese of Alaska, effective June 1, 1967. He was consecrated a Bishop on May 6, 1967, Bright Saturday at Holy Virgin Protection Cathedral in NYC by Metropolitan Ireney, Archbishop of New York, Metropolitan of All America and Canada; Archbishop Nikon of Brooklyn; Archbishop Sylvester of Montreal and Canada; Bishop Kiprian of Philadelphia and Pennsylvania; Bishop Silas of Amphipolis (GOA); Bishop Mark (Lipa) of Levka, ruling bishop of the Albanian Orthodox Diocese of America under the Patriarchate of Constantinople. On November 17, 1967, the Great Council of Bishops elected him as the diocesan Bishop of Sitka and Alaska.

During his tenure in Alaska, he oversaw the rebuilding of historic Archangel Michael Cathedral in Sitka, AK, which had been destroyed by fire. He also initiated regional conferences throughout the diocese and encouraged the establishment of a variety of educational programs. He oversaw the renovation of the Bishop's House which had been originally built by Saint Innocent (Veniaminov). It is now listed as an official historic site. During his tenure as Bishop of Alaska, the Alaskan people adopted him into an indigineous clan, marking their admiration for his Christian humility and love for them.

In May 1970, as Bishop of Alaska, he headed the OCA's delegation which traveled to Moscow to receive the Tomos of Autocephaly, marking the beginning of the Orthodox Church in America. The Tomos was signed by Patriarch Aleksy I and the Holy Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church, and Bishop Theodosius received it from the hands of Metropolitan Pimen (Izvekov), the locum tenens of the Moscow Patriarchate. The Tomos guaranteed the right of self-governance for the Orthodox Church in America. Shortly thereafter, he hosted ceremonies in Alaska marking the glorification of one of the original Orthodox missionaries to Alaska, the Elder Herman. The event was significant in that it marked the first time a North American had been entered into the Orthodox calendar of saints. Bishop Theodosius initiated the effort to consider the Elder Herman for glorification.

In 1972, he was reassigned by the Holy Synod of Bishops of the Orthodox Church in America to the Diocese of Pittsburgh and Western Pennsylvania. During his five-year tenure in his home region, he instituted a highly successful program to train permanent deacons, which was eventually copied by other dioceses throughout the country; fostered educational programs for all ages; and worked diligently to strengthen the life of the diocese on all levels. One of his most significant accomplishments was to secure a new property for the archdiocesan headquarters in Cranberry Township, PA, which included a home with offices and a large wooded area.

On October 25, 1977, he was elected Archbishop of New York, Metropolitan of All America and Canada during the 5th All-American Council [AAC] in Montreal, Quebec. As Primate of the Orthodox Church in America, Metropolitan Theodosius assumed leadership of one of the world's 15 self-governing, or autocephalous, Orthodox churches. In addition, he often provided archpastoral care for dioceses temporarily without a bishop - for example as the *locum tenens* of Ottawa and Canada for nearly a decade.

During Metropolitan Theodosius' tenure, the OCA's ministry units were established and charged with making an impact on Church life at the grassroots level. These ministries inspired parishes to expand their outreach and impact for continued growth. The OCA also expanded their communication efforts onto the burgeoning internet. During the years of his leadership, many new parishes were established and the Church increasingly adopted the English language to become more mission-oriented, reaching out to the North American community. Among the reforms enacted by All-American Councils during his tenure was the possibility for women to be delegates at these Councils. This statute amendment was enacted by the 6th AAC in 1980.

He traveled tirelessly throughout the continent to preside at parish and diocesan celebrations. He was known for his kindness and love for the faithful. While he held the lofty title of Primate, he was widely admired for his ability to be down-to-earth and approachable. He genuinely enjoyed fellowship with clergy and laity alike, and greeted everyone with a warm smile. He would remember people personally by name, even if he had not seen them for years.

In 1981, the Holy Synod of Bishops established a new diocese of Washington, DC as the seat of the Primate of the Orthodox Church in America. As Archbishop of Washington, Metropolitan Theodosius presided over this diocese, in addition to his duties as Primate.

Throughout his tenure, Metropolitan Theodosius met with numerous world religious leaders, including the primates of the various autocephalous churches. In 1990, he was the first Orthodox primate to be officially invited by the newly-enthroned Patriarch Aleksy II of Moscow, and in 1992, he was also invited to participate in the 600th Anniversary of the repose of Saint Sergius of Radonezh. In 1991 and 1993, he hosted the North American visits of Patriarch Aleksy. He hosted the Primate of the Orthodox Church of Georgia, Patriarch-Catholicos Ilia in 1998 and His Beatitude, Sawa, Metropolitan of Warsaw and All Poland in 2000.

As a guest of many national and foreign religious leaders, Metropolitan Theodosius traveled to Israel, Egypt, Turkey, Greece, Georgia, Ukraine, Russia, and elsewhere. He took part in official dialogues with His All-Holiness, Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I of Constantinople, at the Patriarchal headquarters in Istanbul, Turkey.

Metropolitan Theodosius played an active role in inter-Orthodox gatherings, consultations, and bodies, including the Standing Conference of Canonical Orthodox Bishops in the Americas [SCOBA], of which the OCA is a member. He continued to be a strong supporter of various inter-Orthodox ministries, including International Orthodox Christian Charities [IOCC] and the Orthodox Christian Missions Center [OCMC]. He was also a vocal advocate for Orthodox unity in North America. Together with the members of the Holy Synod of Bishops of the Orthodox Church in America, he participated in the December 1994 SCOBA-sponsored gathering of North American hierarchs in Ligonier, PA.

Metropolitan Theodosius was a frequent guest at the White House in Washington, DC, having been called upon by Presidents Bush and Clinton for advice on religious and political affairs in various parts of the world, especially after the fall of communism in the late 1980s and early 1990s. During the crisis in Kosovo, he boldly defended the rights of all peoples in the region while calling upon President Clinton to end the NATO air campaign.

On September 28, 1994, Metropolitan Theodosius was the guest of Dr. James Billington at the Library of Congress for the opening of an historic display highlighting the contribution of the Orthodox Church and native Alaskan cultures to North America. During the ceremony, Metropolitan Theodosius was greeted by US President Clinton and Russian President Boris Yeltsin.

On May 1, 2001, Metropolitan Theodosius, requested that he be granted a four-month medical leave of absence from his archpastoral and primatial duties by the Holy Synod of Bishops, a request they granted. However, he continued to suffer the residual effects of strokes he had suffered in late 2000 and early 2001. Despite a four-month medical leave of absence from May 1 until September 1, 2001, which he took at the recommendation of his physicians, he found the ever-increasing burdens of his office too demanding. On April 2, 2002, Metropolitan Theodosius shared with members of the Holy Synod of Bishops his desire to retire from the office of Metropolitan of All America and Canada. The members of the Holy Synod of Bishops granted Metropolitan Theodosius' request effective July 22, 2002.

On July 22, 2002, His Beatitude Metropolitan Theodosius opened the 13th AAC and presented his report on the last triennium. At the conclusion, he retired as Metropolitan of All America and Canada.

During his retirement, Metropolitan Theodosius lived in Washington, PA. He actively attended the Divine Services at Saint John the Baptist Orthodox Church in Canonsburg, PA and became a beloved presence once again in his home community. As his health continued to fail, he was cared for by Protodeacon John and Matushka Myra Olyenik, along with parishioner Richard Blaha and other clergy and parishioners in the area. He entered an assisted living facility during the last years of his life and then a nursing facility as his health failed.

May Metropolitan Theodosius' memory be eternal!