

February 20, 2013

Dear Sisters,

We will be praying for all who must be suffering from the snow storm. How exciting, though, to have a beautiful snow! I guess "Minnesota has come to Missouri". Sr. Catherine Marie and I are well.

Yesterday, we had a wonderful encounter. A few weeks ago, we heard that admission to the local history museum, called "Arsenyev," is free on Mondays and that they have an exhibit of paintings from the younger sister of Tsar Nicholas II. Since we've been keeping quite busy, we decided that it would be good to take a few hours yesterday and go to the museum before the exhibit leaves town. We went with Fr. Dan and Sr. Gloris and at the museum met Tamara, a parishioner who runs the parish gift shop. It turns out that the Grand Duchess Olga Nikolaevna (daughter of Tsar Alexander, sister of Tsar Nicholas II) and her husband left Russia around the time of the Revolution, went to Denmark, and then later emigrated to Canada. As a child, she already had a remarkable artistic talent, and so received art lessons from the best artists in Russia at that time. Once they emigrated, she was able to use her art to help support the family.

She and her husband had two sons. The widow of her older son, also named Olga, has organized this exhibit of the paintings of her mother-in-law. Several times a week here in Vladivostok, during the month of this exhibit, she gave presentations and was available for people to meet her. We weren't free any of those times, but yesterday, she happened to come to the museum, and we were pleased to talk to her for about 15 minutes! She gave us a mini tour, and it was very interesting. The exhibit is scheduled in several other places in Russia after it leaves Vladivostok.

The paintings were beautiful--you would have liked them--many landscapes, flowers, children, snow scenes, castles--very well done and attractive, not at all modern in style. There are 200 of her paintings on the exhibit that were selected from the 2000 that she did. She painted icons, too, but never sold them. She gave them away as gifts, so it is very hard to know where they are.

After our visit to the museum, we went to the hospice for the elderly poor, and had several wonderful hours with the residents. We are getting to know Tamara Sergeevna, a former school principal and English teacher, who will be 90 years old in December! She loves the chance to visit and to correct our pronunciation when we read from the bible in Russian. Her two roommates, Elizaveta Igorevna and Yekaterina Ivanovna, are also very sociable women. It is especially inspiring to talk to Katya (Yekaterina) as she has a deep peace about her, even though she is certainly not in the best surroundings. She's grateful for everything, and does not seem to demand anything for herself. This is very unusual, especially when she must not be feeling well.

Today, Tuesday, is our day to work on the parish hymnal with Fr. Dan, and tomorrow, Wednesday, we will be in Romanovka all day. Thursday is the parish Day of Prayer, and Friday and Saturday we'll be in Lesozavodsk with Fr. Myron. You are in our daily prayers several times a day! Hope all is well, and that you keep warm in the storm.

Love in Christ,

Sr. Maria Stella and Sr. Catherine Marie