

A DOCUMENTARY (2007)

The title: “A Holy Treasure Rediscovered”
«But there is a God in heaven that revealeth secrets...”
(Daniel 2:28)

Script by: M. Dmitry Khafizov
Kazan, Russia.

Everything you will see in this film has been kept secret by the highest-ranking clergy of the Catholic and Orthodox Churches for many years. However, even they did not know the largest part of this amazing story.

In the beginning of the 20th century, the most important sacred object of the Orthodox Church, the icon of Our Lady of Kazan disappeared without a trace.

A miracle happened nearly a hundred years later when long-awaited news came to Russia concerning the possible discovery of the icon and that it was safely kept in the Vatican.

After long negotiations, a Russian delegation went to the Vatican.

Specialists from the Vatican and Russia carefully examined the icon in the Apostolic Palace.

This important event took place without much publicity.

How did this wonderful icon get to the Vatican?

Is it really the original one?

If it is not, then in what cathedral was it kept in Russia?

Several copies were made of the icon found in Kazan in the beginning of the 16th century.

When the Bolsheviks came to power, many of these copies disappeared in the whirlpool of their shameless revolution.

A Holy Treasure Rediscovered

A well-known jeweler and diamond-trader, Norman Weitz from London, came to Moscow in 1920 to purchase antique precious objects that were confiscated and sold by the Bolsheviks. He was doing errands for the Hatton Garden Diamond Merchant syndicate which was supported by a millionaire from South Africa, Solly Joel, who spent millions of Sterling Pounds buying Russian jewelry.

In the first years of the Soviet power many valuable art objects and antiques including the icon of Kazan were taken from Russia abroad.

These were stolen from believers and from the Church.

An Englishman, Norman Weitz, saw it among other worthless objects of art displayed for sale by the Bolsheviks. He was not able to buy it then, but tried to remember it to the best he could.

He was destined to meet it again though, but this time in England.

The sale of this icon was not an accidental fact and was not for the “*collecting of money to support the Bolshevik revolution*” as was later often indicated in immigrants’ documents.

It was a purposeful policy of the Communist government.

“Anything that is not needed by the people must go out of revolutionary Russia.”

The Bolsheviks were building a new society totally detached from its past.

They were drunk with permissiveness and were dizzy from the winds of changes.

It was not only the Bolsheviks who knew about the forthcoming revolution.

On **13 May 1917**, in the small Portuguese village of Fatima, the Virgin Mary appeared to three children-shepherds, foretelling coming events both of their own lives and of world history.

The Virgin Mary’s prophecy mainly concerned the future of Russia: the revolution, the establishment of a power struggle against God, and Christian martyrdom.

The Virgin Mary said that Russia must be converted and then the whole world would be saved.

That summer Russian Emperor Nikolay II was in custody of the temporary government in Tobolsk and learned about the Fatima miracle from newspapers. The emperor was stunned. He was surprised by the fact that illiterate peasant children Jacinta, Francisco and Lucia – the eldest - knew something about Russia even though they were from a remote Portuguese village.

When Charles Gibbs, a teacher of the Tsar’s children said that Nikolay should not attach any special importance to these reports, the emperor answered:

“None of the Portuguese reporters would have thought about attributing the prophecy about Russia to this girl. There in Portugal it is not only this illiterate girl but also the majority of the newspaper media who know very little about Russia as we do about Portugal - if not less. Then who could have told the girl, who will surely become a saint, facts about Russia?”

The manifestations of the Virgin Mary which were witnessed by thousands of people, happened in Portugal on the 13th of every month until October 1917, when the Bolsheviks coup took place in Russia.

Since then, any information about the prophecies at Fatima did not reach Russia.

Most of the Russian newspapers were closed and foreign ones were not allowed into the perishing country...

Nobody thought at that time that it was here in Fatima that the icon of Our Lady of Kazan would be eventually found years later.

It is very difficult now to trace the way of the icon from the then godless Russia.

It cannot be ruled out that it was taken out of Russia illegally.

There is indirect information that in 1928 the icon appeared in Poland.

More truthful information indicates that in 1935 a Polish refugee might have carried the holy Image to England via Berlin.

Over the course of time the icon changed hands among a number of commercial dealers in Britain.

They all considered it, especially its casing, as a great investment.

Some jewels were removed from the icon overlay and sold, but luckily no substantial losses happened.

When the icon appeared in England some specialists doubted its authenticity. Cyril Bunt, who had worked as the Byzantine Arts expert in the Victoria and Albert Museum for 48 years, carried out the first official examination of the Icon.

In 1946 he published the photo of the icon in his book *“Russian Art from Scyths to Soviets”* and gave the following description of the image:

“An ancient picture covered with gold and gilt, semi-precious stones, emeralds, diamonds and Oriental rubies. The icon was painted in the 17th century; metallic decorations and jewel inlay were made later.”

Information soon became public that Norman Weisz recognized in the icon the image he saw in Soviet Russia in 1920 and which he considered to be an original of the Kazan Icon.

In the long-run, fate brought the holy icon to a man, who was responsible for its recovery.

Frederick Albert Mitchell-Hedges had one of the most extraordinary personalities in Britain: he was a broker, antiquary, researcher, archeologist, shark hunter, lecturer, writer and poet.

His motto was: *“Life lived without adventures is not life at all.”*

His most serious hobby was collecting unique art pieces.

On **15 April 1953** he received a letter from his business partner who was carrying out negotiations to purchase a collection of objects having substantial historic and artistic value and the Kazan icon was the best of them.

Many businessmen and high-ranking politicians, unknown to each other, wanted to see this remarkable treasure and to ensure themselves that the icon was original.

Very often they had only one motive – to get convinced that the purchase was a possible good investment and the guarantee of getting serious political benefits later!

Those potential buyers discussed even the sacrilegious idea of removing the jewels from the Icon.

On **25 September 1953**, by an ingenious commercial operation, Frederick bought the Icon, having outstripped all his competitors (including his step-daughter Anna - who was his true friend, companion and only heiress) and became the owner of the Miraculous Icon.

Grand Princess Kseniya Aleksandrovna – the elder sister of Nikolay II, as well as many other high-ranking people, including many Russian immigrants, desperately tried to see the sacred object right after its acquisition.

In fact they, in the form of an ultimatum, demanded that Frederick bring the icon to the Hampton Court Palace in London.

He gave his consent expecting a confidential and unofficial meeting.

However, he was surprised to see a large crowd of Russian clergy, nuns and noble persons gathered in a small room.

This little house was given to the Romanovs by their close relative King George of Great Britain who sheltered the last representatives of the imperial family from the terror of the new shameless Russian power.

Anna Mitchell-Hedges recalls:

“I will never forget how it all happened. Seeing the holy Image, Grand Princess Kseniya Aleksandrovna fell on her knees crying. She remembered those far away times when she

was a little girl praying in front of this icon in Russia.”

The family of Mitchell-Hedges constantly got proposals for acquiring the icon from private Russian immigrants.

Sometimes they even offered to sell only the icon and to leave its outlay.

Frederick firmly declined all proposals saying that the icon would not be sold at any price.

Numerous hardships seriously affected the health of Mr. Mitchell-Hedges and soon he and Anna settled down far away from hustle and bustle in Farley Castle not far from the English city of Reading.

It was also an ideal place for safeguarding the unique Icon.

It was here that they received a large number of pilgrims who strived to see and pray in front of the icon miraculously rescued from blasphemous hell.

Many miracles were attributed to the Holy Image.

In England they started to call the icon the “Black Virgin of Farley Castle” because of Mary’s dark face.

Having understood the meaning of the icon for the Christian world, Frederick contacted the Soviet Embassy in Britain and made a proposition that they acquire the Icon.

Unfortunately, the negotiations reached a dead-end very quickly.

We do not know what the form of the refusal was, but it did affect Frederick seriously.

He became obsessed of being persecuted.

Until the end of his life, according to his daughter and neighbors’ words, he slept with “a gun under his pillow”, as he was afraid that Soviet special services would try to steal and destroy the sacred object.

It was then that he offered the Archbishop of San Francisco and North American John Shakhovskiy, who is closely connected to the establishment of the autocephalous Orthodox Church in America, the opportunity to buy the Icon.

Frederick set the price of the icon at 92,000 Sterling Pounds, but it was only for the precious outlay.

Archbishop John wrote to Russian immigrant professor Nikolay Yefremovich Andreyev, one of the best specialists in ancient icon painting, who lived in England and asked him to examine the icon on site.

Later on, Andreyev recalled his meeting with Mr. Hedges as follows:

“The owner of the icon insisted that it was “one-thousand years old and was brought from Kazanskiy Cathedral in St Petersburg, while the outlay stones were from jewels of King Solomon.”

When asked how the icon arrived in England, the owner decisively refused to give the name of a person who brought it, but said *“only a miraculous icon can have such a rich outlay.”*

After having examined the Icon, Andreyev came to the following conclusion:

“The icon of Our Lady of Kazan, which appeared in England, mainly corresponds to the preserved descriptions of the icon which disappeared from Kazan, but its dimensions are a little different... Even if it is not the original Icon, it is an excellent copy of it which has striking images and colors and which has not been described so far even though it had been painted nearly at the same time as the Kazan Icon.”

Bant, the expert from the London museum also changed his opinion about the Icon.

In 1956 in the second edition of his book, he wrote:

“Experts share the opinion that the icon was painted by an outstanding icon painter of the sixteenth century and that it is a remarkable example of the Greek-Russian style of that period.

Exceptionally rich decoration of the icon is enough evidence indicating that the icon was deeply worshipped and must have belonged to one of the main churches in Russia... I am sure that we deal with the miraculous icon highly worshipped by the Russian Orthodox from the Kazanskiy Cathedral in Moscow.”

In 1958 Frederick sold the castle and the family moved to another city.

Not once has Farley Castle changed owners, but the memory about Mitchell-Hedges having lived here is still alive even half-a century later.

The Woolley’s who have been living there for 11 years saved the ancient castle from demolition.

[16:30 lady speaks] ...

More than fifty years have passed since the icon was with Anna Mitchell-Hedges.

She is still alive thanks to the protection of the Holy Virgin whose image she has kept for many difficult years.

She moved to America and lives in a small quiet town near Chicago (USA) far from her father’s motherland.

Aged 99, Anna is rather active and tremulously recalls the time when she was lucky enough to be the owner of the holy icon from Russia.

[18:39]

The time when Anna and her father lived in the ancient English castle is very dear to her, as only a year after they moved from Farley Castle, her beloved father died.

[19:38]

There was an important and difficult element in the realization of Frederick’s will.

He wanted the icon to become accessible to the Russian Orthodox Church without getting into the hands of the Communists.

Anna found a simple and a reasonable way out.

Following her father’s example, she decided to sell the icon to the Russian Orthodox Church in America. She thus offered the church the opportunity to purchase the icon at the value of the jewels on its outlay.

The middlemen-art historians, whom she asked to represent the icon in the US, valued the price of the outlay to be 500,000 dollars.

Thus in 1961 Archbishop John Shakhovskiy was again proposed to purchase the Icon, but

he could not afford it.

At that time he did not even think that he would have the honor to become the keeper of the Russian sacred object in America.

Later he would give a detailed description of these events in his memoirs.

“Once in San Francisco, I got a call from London; a male voice on behalf of the family of the late icon owner proposing me its acquisition.

Again I had to say that it was impossible for me...”

Two years later the icon was found in San Francisco. It was stored in the underground vault of one of the largest banks in California...

And it was there, underground, that the Orthodox people started praying to the Holy Virgin in front of her Kazan Icon.

Later the icon reappeared and for the first time in the history of the American Orthodox congregations.

Pastors of both church jurisdictions including those from abroad presented a sermon in front of it in the Russian Center before a large number of praying people.

Some more time passed and two noted American men from San Francisco approached me.

They offered to head the case of redeeming the icon from private ownership, bringing it back to the Church and building an old Russian-style cathedral in San Francisco to house it. I must confess that I was overcome with fear and a desire to evade the proposed project.

However after many long days of contemplation and doubt, I suppressed the desire for the third time to decline the proposal of buying this ancient Russian sacred object, the Kazan icon of Virgin in front of which prayed all Russian people. I decided to do my best and with God’s blessing to return this icon to the Church. ”

There is a unique photo album kept in the Russian Orthodox Trinity Cathedral in San Francisco, the oldest parish church in America. The album contains materials from newspapers and journals published at the time when the icon of Our Lady of Kazan was in America.

[23.10 archbishop...]

Archbishop John said that if the project was successful, the holy icon in the hands of the Orthodox Church of America would be safe until its return to Russia.

He also said:

«I officially delegate a well-known San Francisco public figure, Mr. John Hennessy to be my representative and middleman between me and those whom the owners of the icon passed it.»

It was decided that John Hennessy would present the icon to any parishes in America and Canada which would be interested in hosting it.

The plan was also to collect the necessary money required in order to acquire the Icon.

For several months the icon traveled across American and Canadian cities protected by bodyguards and escorted by clergy.

This tour was called “*A crusade for the liberation of the holy icon of Our Lady of Kazan*”. Priests and believers of many Orthodox churches of America still remember that time.

[24:21 Russian priest ...]

Father Leonid was told that the icon was also brought to the Church of Our Lady of Kazan, which is situated in the city of Sea Cliff near New York.

People also remembered the visit of the icon of Our Lady of Kazan at the settlement of Gary not far from Chicago.

Sisters Sonya and Olya went together to have a look at it in the small church near their house.

[25:27]

The icon was constantly under the protection of the American secret service. John Hennessy personally carried a portable vault designed as a special attaché-case, which he cuffed to his wrist. Every parish where the icon was displayed provided a priest who escorted it to the next parish.

The Russian Orthodox Cathedral in New York also hosted it and many people came to worship the miraculous object.

[26:29 ...]

The arrival of the Kazan icon attracted large number of believers into churches and was a real festival of belief.

Father John wrote: “*There were often cases of miraculous healing of hopeless patients who strongly believed and I have enough evidence of such cases from our priests at different locations*”.

[27:19 ...narrator]

[27:52]

The money collected was not enough to buy the Icon.

Moreover, according to some sources, the largest part of it was cynically stolen from the church.

Soon the management of “Our Lady of Kazan Fund” came up with another possibility to collect the money needed for purchasing the Icon.

[28:12]

In 1964, the International World Fair was hosted in New York.

Among its symbols, a huge globe still serves as decorations of the recreation park. During the exhibition, the park was occupied by huge pavilions which were equipped with modern technology.

It was here also that a special pavilion for the Kazan icon was built in the form of a full-scale copy of the Russian Orthodox Chapel in Fort Ross, which was erected in 1828 and is considered to be a state historical monument.

[29.14 protestant priest]

The organizers thought that selling many paper copies of the Kazan icon would cover the cost of chapel construction and its maintenance back.

However, the small Orthodox pavilion found itself in a very difficult situation.

The effort to buy the icon was in vain.

Twenty years later Father John wrote the following bitter words about those hard days:

“The icon will return to Russia when the persecution of faith will stop there and when the Church will have the right to own its sacred property. At the moment it cannot get back to Russia, there are practically no ways to do this. We entrust this case to God’s will.”

In memory of the Christ the Savior Cathedral destroyed in Moscow, a cathedral with the same name was erected in San Francisco with the money collected for building it in the name of the icon of Our Lady of Kazan. Today Father Vasiliy serves at the cathedral and follows the footsteps of its founder: Father John.

[32.56]

Two highly worshipped copies of the Kazan Icon, which Father John dreamed to redeem so much, are kept in the Christ the Savior Cathedral.

In the beginning of 1970, representatives of the Mitchell-Hedges family displayed the icon at an auction.

Karl Patzel, the rector of the Catholic Centre of Fatima Virgin in San Francisco learned about this.

He decided not to let the icon “go” from believers to private hands and urgently communicated with the Catholic organization named the Blue Army headquartered in Fatima.

A new world-wide campaign was initiated in order to collect the required money to redeem the icon whose official price was three million dollars at that time.

Thanks to the help of the “Blue Army”, it remained in the Portuguese town of Fatima, the town where in 1917 the Virgin Mary appeared to three children-shepherds.

The prophecy of the Virgin Mary came true: godless communism seized Russia and evil was spreading all over the world.

It was at that time that the international organization named the Blue Army – a spiritual

army of the Virgin Mary -- appeared.

[35.49]

Millions of the Blue Army members all over the world came to Portugal in response to the requests of the Virgin Mary. The Blue Army headquarters are located in Fatima. Pilgrims from all over the world come here at the site of the Apparitions.

[36.23]

People of many religions visit this holy site of the Apparitions.

Many pilgrims crawl the last meters to the site on their knees and God will definitely hear their prayers.

Everything related to the miraculous manifestations of the Virgin Mary is preciously kept in Fatima. Thousands of pilgrims visit the small house of a girl named Lucia, who conveyed the Virgin's Messages to the world.

No wonder that the Kazan icon from far-away Russia, whom the Virgin spoke about in Fatima, found itself here.

On **21 June 1970**, the anniversary day of the icon of Our Lady of Kazan, it was ceremonially placed in Domus Pacis (House of Peace), the only Byzantine chapel in Portugal.

Father John Mowatt, a Byzantine-ritual priest, undertook the responsibility of caring after the Holy Image. Not only did he organize the constant reception of numerous pilgrims, including those from Russia, but he also built a special chapel for the icon of Our Lady of Kazan inside the Byzantine church in Domus Pacis.

It was thanks to him that much new jewelry was given by pilgrims to the icon as a gesture of gratitude for help and protection which believers received through the intercession of the Icon.

When he had to return to his home in the USA, a new director **at Domus Pacis**, Mr. Antonio Pereira became responsible for the Icon.

"When I received the icon of Our Lady of Kazan, based on what I heard from the representatives of the international committee, I understood that it will stay here until it is safe to return it to a church in Russia."

The Blue Army was afraid that heathens could steal the icon because the chapel in Fatima could not provide adequate protection.

During the first several years the icon was kept in an armored bank vault in Lisbon and it was brought to Domus Pacis only during important holidays.

When Father Yevgeniy started his work in Domus Pacis, the icon had already been transferred to the Vatican; however, a copy of it was left in the chapel.

[40.25]...

While the icon from Russia was kept in Fatima, the Blue Army was collecting money for its acquisition.

By 1975, a substantial amount had been collected.

The following are recollections of John Haffert, former administrator of the Blue Army:

“We are not the owners of this Icon; we are only a tool in God’s hands for its acquisition so that it can return to the Russian people.”

After the revolution of 1974 in Portugal, the management of the Blue Army started worrying about the future of the Holy Image and decided to send it to America.

For several years it had been taken for veneration in many churches in America, including Catholic ones, and once again was kept in the Byzantine-Catholic Church of Our Lady of Fatima in San Francisco.

The icon had visited many churches where both Catholics and Orthodox organized special services on the occasion of its arrival.

Having safely spent several difficult years of revolutionary unrest out of Portugal, the icon was brought back to Fatima on **9 May 1982**.

While the sacred object is kept in Fatima, a crucial event which will define its future takes place on the other continent.

In 1988 the United States decided to celebrate the *“Millennium of Adoption of Christianity in Russia”*. Russian clergy were also invited to the celebrations.

[42.44]

In its turn, a delegation from Seattle went to Leningrad on invitation of Holy Patriarch Alexy II, who was Metropolitan of Leningrad and Novgorod at that time.

[43.22]

A year later, the Metropolitan of Leningrad and Novgorod accepted an invitation to come to Seattle.

Peter Anderson was preparing an important meeting to take place at the highest geographic point of the city in Seattle – the Space Needle restaurant - upon the Metropolitan’s arrival.

He also invites the head of the Blue Army who possessed the icon at the time and organizes his meeting with Metropolitan Alexy so that they can discuss the question of the return of the icon to Russia.

[44.22 Peter Anderson]

Trying to find as much information as possible about the icon which was kept in Fatima, untiring Peter Anderson spoke to Father Vadim Pogrebniak, a priest of St Spiridon Cathedral in Seattle.

During its journeys across America, the Kazan icon visited St Spiridon Cathedral and Father

Vadim personally took part in the Icon's redeeming campaign organized by Archbishop Shakhovskiy, whom as a teenager had heard from his father that an ancient Russian icon was brought to the USA.

[45.57] ...

Father Vadim recommended Peter Anderson to speak to Alexis Liberovsky, chief archives keeper of the American Orthodox Church.

The residence of the Metropolitan of all America and Canada is located in the small city of Syosset near New York.

It is here that all of the archives of the Russian Orthodox Church are kept.

At Peter Anderson's request, he sent him very detailed and important information which was gathered at the time the icon was in America.

[47.06] ...

A preliminary agreement about a place the icon will be kept in, namely in the Kazan Cathedral in Leningrad was mutually beneficial.

Communists turned the cathedral, which was the pride of the Russian Orthodox, into a museum of religion and atheism. The State did not want to return it to the believers.

Everything could radically change if the icon were kept there.

The fact that the Kazan Cathedral, where the icon was to be returned, was built using the St Peter's Basilica in the Vatican as a model was very important for Catholics.

Bringing the icon to this very cathedral would be an act of reconciliation between the Roman Catholic and Russian Orthodox Churches through the intercession of the Virgin Mary who is worshipped by both Churches.

[48.30]...

Already in his letter, Cardinal Cassidy wrote: *"Such an initiative could be an important contribution into healing old wounds."*

In June 1990 Metropolitan Alexy became Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia. It was very important that one of the first projects of the new Patriarch would be the restoration of the Kazan Cathedral on Red Square in Moscow. No doubt it was reconstructed hoping that the icon would soon come back from Fatima to Russia.

In May 1991 Pope John Paul II visited Fatima for the first time.

Ten years before this visit Ali Agca shot the Pope from a distance of several meters and it was a miracle that he was not killed.

The Pope attributes his miraculous rescue to Our Lady of Fatima.

What saved him was the fact that he bent downwards –just prior to the shot- in order to take a closer look at a medallion which was on the neck of a small girl.

The medallion depicted three children-shepherds who saw the Apparition of the Virgin

Mary in Fatima in 1917!

In the tenth anniversary of the attempt on his life, the Holy Father saw the Kazan icon for the first time and he prayed and thanked Her for Her intercession.

This evident interrelation between the Fatima miracle and the Kazan icon also in Fatima really stunned him. That was why he wholeheartedly supported the subsequent events, as he was sure that this miraculous coincidence was God's....

[51.34 Peter Anderson]...

The plan which was stated in the letter was as follows: first the icon will be brought from Fatima to Rome and then to St Petersburg *“following the agreement with the Moscow Patriarchate”*.

On **28 February 1993** all documents related to the transfer of the Miraculous Kazan icon to the Holy Throne in Russia were already in the Vatican.

On **1 March 1993** Antonio Pereira in the presence of several officials handed the icon to the Pope's envoy in Portugal.

The holy icon was taken from Fatima to Lisbon. Later it was sent to the Vatican and was kept in the Pope's private chamber.

At the same time the Vatican started negotiations with the Moscow patriarchate about a procedure for returning the icon to Russia.

An Orthodox expert is urgently sent to the Vatican.

He is the first one to carry out an official examination of the miraculous image.

“From all known copies of the Miraculous icon which was kept in Our Lady of Kazan Monastery, where it was worshipped as the original one found in 1579, it has most resemblance to the given Icon. The resemblance reveals itself in proportions of faces, forms of eyes and the nose...”

After the examination, everyone in the Vatican is sure that the icon kept in the Pope's chamber is exactly the icon found by Matrona - the ten-year old girl- in Kazan in the middle of the 16th century.

Despite numerous efforts, an agreement about a meeting of John Paul II and Alexy II never materialized.

The Russian Ministry of Culture organizes an expert commission to examine the copy of the icon of Our Lady of Kazan kept in the Vatican.

On **1 April 2003** with the blessing and permission of His Holiness John Paul II, two delegations from Russia and the Vatican met and examined the icon of Our Lady of Kazan.

All parts of the icon – its case, outlay and the icon itself- were carefully examined.

The case was opened and restorer-technologists from the Vatican museums removed the outlay.

The examination enabled the two delegations to agree on the following points:

-the icon is painted on a lime board and there are marked traces of wax, which testifies that

it was used for prayers and sermons;
-the painting is an original;
-the outlay must have been made especially for the icon soon after it was painted.

The commission concluded that the icon was authentic and was painted no later than the first half of the 18th century. Its precious outlay, which might have been made as a result of some special event (possibly a miracle), allows us to say that the icon was an object of special admiration and was used for sermons.

The President of Russia, M. Vladimir Putin, made the next important step. In November 2003, he brought a picture of Madonna Litta painted by the great Italian artist, Leonardo da Vinci, to Rome to show it to the public. The Pope in his turn showed him the icon of Our Lady of Kazan which he was planning to return to Russia. M. Putin kissed the Kazan Icon, which was next to him during the meeting.

Meanwhile in Kazan they were waiting for the return of the Icon. During religious holidays believers go to religious processions around the former Virgin Mary's monastery, which was erected at the site where the icon was found. They really hope that next time they will take this pilgrimage route, it will be under the protection of the holy Icon.

At the same time, the architects of the city develop designs of a pilgrimage centre to be built at the site where the icon was found. Earl Petr Petrovich Sheremetyev came from Paris to help in this endeavour. He is president of the world's largest Russian immigrants' organization: "Compatriots Abroad".

[58.22]...

Every year the religious processions gather more and more people. Believers ask God to return the Icon. They say that the sacred day is getting closer and closer... The topic of the Icon's return from the Vatican to Kazan is very popular with the mass media, especially since Kamil Iskhakov handed a letter on behalf of Tatarstan's President Mintimer Shaymiyev to John Paul II at his personal audience. The letter contained a proposal to give the icon directly to Kazan. Another letter from Shaymiyev addressed to Patriarch Alexy II told him about the cherish desire of Kazan's citizens of bringing back the icon to its motherland.

Thousands of believers came to the Vatican on **25 August 2004**.

The public worshipping the Holy Kazan icon was carried out in the main Catholic Cathedral during the public audience.

Pope John Paul II had kept the icon in his private chamber.

With special tremor he entrusted it to Cardinal Walter Kasper, chairman of the Pope's council for promoting Christian unity, who will take the sacred image to Russia. He would also be accompanied by a rather imposing official delegation from the Roman-Catholic Church.

[1:04.04 ... mayor of Kazan]

On **26 August 2004**, after the special ceremony, the icon was displayed to the public in St Peter's Basilica. That was the last public exhibition of the Kazan icon in the Vatican. Everybody could have a last look at it prior to its departure.

[1.05.45. msgr ...]

Thanks to complex diplomacy and given the spiritual surge of many Orthodox and Catholic believers, it became possible to reach an agreement about the terms and the date of returning the icon to Russia.

During his meeting with Vladimir Putin, the Patriarch said that the icon would be brought to Russia by two cardinals and they would hand it to him on the Feast of the Assumption holiday at the Assumption Cathedral in the Moscow Kremlin.

On **28 August 2004**, Feast of the Assumption, a special homily was given in the Cathedral. A delegation from the Vatican handed the icon of Our Lady of Kazan to the Patriarch of Moscow and all Russia, Alexy II.

Some words of the Patriarch:

"This common admiration of the Holy Virgin which goes back to the sources of Christianity, reminds us about the times of ancient united church."

It was up to the Patriarch to decide upon the return date and location of the sacred Icon.

[patriarch]

During the whole following year, the city of Kazan was preparing for its millennium celebrations.

The return of the icon would be the greatest event at these celebrations.

Hoping that the sacred image would come back to its native place, the administration of the city started the construction of the Exaltation of the Cross Church of the Virgin Monastery, at the site where the icon was found in the 16th century.

The solemn moment came in July 2005 when Patriarch Alexy II came to Kazan.

He brought the icon of Our Lady of Kazan with him.

Believers froze in anticipation: will the sacred image be left in Kazan?

During these days, one would meet many of the people from all over the world who participated actively in the realization of the return of the icon to Russia.

On the anniversary day of Our Lady of Kazan, the Patriarch presided a holy liturgy with the Kazan icon in the restored Annunciation Cathedral in the Kazan Kremlin.

It was on this day in 1579 that Matrona found the sacred icon which began doing wonders in Kazan.

When the icon disappeared from Kazan calamities struck Russia and believers connected the revival of the country with the return of the Kazan Icon.

[1.13.09]

Some words from the Patriarch:

“I want to bless you all with this image of the Heavenly Tsarina, who is returning to the Kazan eparchy.

May the Virgin Mary protect all of you with Her mantle and grant you peace, health and joy about God the Saviour.”

Everybody was waiting for this day and hoped for a miracle.

The whole world was watching the events related to this small Icon.

Pope John Paul II died before witnessing this miraculous event, but his wish and spiritual will were fulfilled.

The icon returned to the place where it was found.

Stolen in Russia, disappeared and sold in America, kept by rich collectors, being a consolation for monarchs who lost their throne, admired by Russian immigrants and becoming a banner of the Blue Army in its march against godless communists in Russia, the icon of Our Lady of Kazan had returned to its original homeland!

[1.16.26]

All of Russia admired the sacred Icon.

Thousands of believers, the Holy Patriarch of all Russia and the highest state officials kissed the miraculous countenance with a prayer.

The Kazan icon has been ceremonially placed near the site of the miraculous manifestation of the Virgin Mary and the place where the original icon was found – in the revived Exaltation of the Cross Church of the Virgin Mary Monastery.

[1.18.10. priest]

The miraculous icon is decorated with thousands of diamonds, Oriental rubies, emeralds, sapphires and pearls. The exceptional wealth of the outlay indicates the highest imperial rank of those who had ordered it and the special importance of this icon in pre-Revolutionary Russia.

Even though the price of these gems is rather high, their main meaning is to show how people have admired the icon for centuries.

Each and every one of these thousands of gems is a personal gift from a believer whose prayers were acquiesced by the Virgin Mary.

At holidays associated with the Kazan Icon, it would be carried in a religious procession from the Exaltation of the Cross Church to the Annunciation Cathedral in the Kremlin.

On 4 November, the newly established state holiday in Russia, people celebrate the day of concord and reconciliation in memory of having saved the country from Polish conquerors and unrest in 1612 thanks to the protection of the Virgin Mary through Her holy Image – the Kazan Icon.

The holiday was established in Russia when the Kazan icon returned to the city where the original was found more than 400 years ago.

On this day people come to the Annunciation Cathedral from all the churches of the city in a religious procession under the protection of the newly-discovered Icon.

It cannot be ruled out that the return of Our Lady of Kazan icon will mark a point of resurrection for Russia after nearly a century of unrest and oppression.

Are we really ready to have it back again?

We will see.... With a prayer.

O Virgin Mary, save us!

[1.20.48. credits...]

About Our Lady of Kazan:

In 1579, in the city of Kazan, Russia, a young girl by the name of Matrona was instructed in a dream from the Theotokos to unearth the Holy icon from her garden. Matrona told this dream to Archbishop Jeremiah of Kazan and on July 8, the icon was found as prophesied and carried in solemn procession to St. Nicholas Church. The icon was moved to the Cathedral Church in the Moscow Kremlin on October 22, 1612. The Kazan icon was instrumental in the miraculous intervention of the Mother of God to save the city from the Poles. The original is believed to have been burned in the fire that consumed the St. Petersburg Cathedral of the Mother of God of Kazan. The first copy of it was then considered the 'original' and accompanied the Russian troops fighting Napoleon in 1812. During the Russian Revolution of 1917 it was sold into the collection of a private individual in Great Britain and later reappeared in the United States. In the 1960's it was purchased by the Blue Army, a Catholic organization of devotion to the Virgin of Fatima, which gave it to the Pope in 1993. John Paul II kept the icon in the chapel of his apartment. The sacred icon was returned to the Russia on 28 August 2004.