

**Journal of V. Rev Michael Abdelahad on the OCMC Short Term Mission Trip
to Kodiak and Ouzinkie (Spruce Island) Alaska
July 31- August 10, 2006**

Sent: Mon, 31 Jul 2006 10:39 PM

Subject: Greetings from Alaska

Well, it's been quite a day! With thanks to the Almighty God, our team has arrived safely in Kodiak. In addition to 16 hours of travel time, we have put in a pretty full day here already. We were greeted at the airport by Fr. Chad Hatfield, who is the Dean of the Seminary here. Our first stop was the Cathedral in Kodiak, where we were able to venerate the reliquary of St. Herman of Alaska. Fr. Chad asked me if I would like to give a blessing to the team members who were present with St. Herman's blessing Cross, after which I anointed each of them with oil from the lampada that is hanging near his relics.

Then it was off to the Seminary to move into our rooms and grab a quick bite of dinner before Fr. Chad took us out again to see some of the local "sites". The sites are the most beautiful panoramas imaginable. He took us to the top of a mountain where St. Herman went when he was banished from Kodiak. It was from the top of this mountain that he saw Spruce Island and chose to go there.

Then we went across to the other side of that mountaintop to look down on the harbor and the town of Kodiak itself. Quite spectacular! Also at the top of the mountain, Fr. Chad points out "tundra" so now we know what it looks like. It's actually like a carpet, with very small flowers. After I finish this email, we will begin to distribute our camp supplies to members of the Team.

On Tuesday, Fr. Chad will give an orientation to the group and then we are off to Spruce Island. We will be there through Saturday running the Camp. On Sunday, we will return to Kodiak.

That's basically it for now. I will try to catch up with all of you when I can. In the meantime, feel free to forward this email to anyone that you can think of who might be interested. If you send me an email for any reason, please don't take it personally if you don't get an immediate response. I will try to be in touch soon. Please keep us in your God-pleasing prayers and know that you are being prayed for here.

God bless!
Fr. Michael

Sent: Wed, 2 Aug 2006 10:49 AM
Subject: Greetings from Alaska!

I left off my last email as we were in Kodiak. An interesting little tidbit about the view from the mountaintop overlooking Kodiak - Fr. Chad began to point out some of the neighboring islands. I was expecting to hear these exotic Alaskan names, but that wasn't the case. The islands were actually named in a very practical and descriptive manner. Near Island is the closest one to Kodiak; Long Island is a long island; Crooked Island...well, you get the idea.

On Tuesday, we had a wonderful breakfast at a small restaurant near the Seminary. Fr. Chad recommended it because the owner was a very good pastry chef. He told us that it was a great place for a good cup of coffee, a nice homemade muffin and a great view of the waterfront (Very accurate description). The restaurant is located near the docks, so we watched the fishing boats leave while we were having our coffee. Then Fr. Chad gave an orientation talk, starting with the Orthodox history of Alaska and concluding with an overview of the situation that exists now for the people and Church of Alaska. After shopping for the Camp supplies, we were transported by boat from Kodiak to Spruce Island. We are now in the village on Ouzinkie on Spruce Island.

We have settled into a building called the Ouzinkie Tribal Center for the Camp. Initially, it was the 7 counselors and 9 campers from Kodiak. After dinner, we gained two more campers from Ouzinkie. Tuesday night was spent settling in and getting to know each other. Before evening prayers, and lights out, we were visited by a gentleman named Herman, who is one of the Readers in the local church. He had brought a snack of two salmon that he had freshly smoked. Yum! Thankfully, the evening was uneventful, but nevertheless a very full and gratifying day.

This morning, we started the day with morning prayers in the Church of the Nativity here in Ouzinkie. We have gained 11 more campers of all different ages. We decided not to restrict our efforts to the local teens, so there is now a group of 8-12 year olds as a part of the Camp. Seeing all of these kids in their navy blue St. Peter the Aleut Camp T-shirts is quite a sight! I pray that what begins as curiosity will develop into something fulfilling for all of these kids.

That's it for now! As I have time during the week, I will try to send updates! Please keep us in your prayers.

Through the prayers of our Holy Fathers, Herman of Alaska and Peter the Aleut, O Lord Jesus Christ our God, have mercy on us and save us!

God bless!
Fr. Michael

Sent: Fri, 4 Aug 2006 12:26 PM
Subject: Greetings from Alaska!

It is now Friday, and the weather has been rather uncooperative. It rained all day yesterday and it is drizzling this morning, but it is supposed to stop this afternoon. When I say "rain", I mean rain like most people have never experienced. For those of you from the Northeast, think of a nor'easter where the precipitation is almost completely horizontal. The winds were so strong yesterday that 40 foot trees were swaying like they were twigs. In spite of the weather, or perhaps because of it, the number of campers continues to grow. We came prepared for 28 kids...yesterday, we were at 38 (10 from Kodiak and 28 from Ouzinkie)! What makes that all the more impressive is the knowledge that the local school has 36 kids. We have been listening to the kids themselves spreading the word about the Camp...they have been telling their friends and relatives that it's cool, that you will learn so much, etc. St. Herman is really very active here in his "home" and we thank God for that.

Yesterday, we were supposed to be taking a "field trip" of sorts...going by boat to the other end of the island (to Monk's Lagoon) and to the island that houses the monastic community of St. Nilus. We were going to spend the afternoon working on preparing that end of the island for the Pilgrimage, visit the nuns for Vespers and then return to Monk's Lagoon to pray the Akathist for St. Herman. Well, as I said, the weather didn't cooperate, but where nature closed a door, God opened a window. The local residents began to spread the word that we might pray the Akathist in the Church, and they were very excited. There is a lot of momentum that is building up with this camp, and I pray that St. Herman will help to continue that momentum through the very fine efforts of Fr. Chad and the Seminary. In the afternoon, Herman, who is one of the local readers, took a few people out fishing to catch our dinner (can you imagine?). They returned with enough fish for Thursday's dinner (a delicious fish soup) and Friday's dinner (fish pie). Before dinner, however, we went to the Church and prayed the Akathist. It was wonderful! For those of you who are St. Vladimir's alumni, and remember singing the Troparion for St. Herman every day, imagine singing it here on Spruce Island. It was so emotional. Everyone sang joyfully, and the service was truly Spirit-filled. In my comments after the Service, I talked to the adults about how hard the kids had been working on their singing and that they sounded like angels. This morning, a couple of the adults mentioned that they heard voices last night that they had never heard in the Church before. They believed that the angels were singing with us! I think that they are correct. After Akathist, we came back to the Center and prepared the fish soup. It was delicious. I will spare you all the gory details about how much of the fish actually got used, but you can use your imaginations on that one!

People here are very excited about our presence. Prior to our arrival, we were only supposed to be praying morning and evening prayers with the kids. Well, that has certainly changed. Last night was the Akathist, tonight is Vespers and tomorrow we will close the Camp with Liturgy that is open to the entire Village. What a blessing! The transformation that we have witnessed with these kids is nothing short of miraculous. There are no cliques, no separation between ages, kids opening up and speaking and interacting with us (and each other) that just wasn't happening on Tuesday. It's something to watch. Every day, more kids...adults stopping in to be with us...praying together...all in the spirit of St. Herman. We have finished the "educational" component of Christian Ed this morning. The last session, scheduled for after lunch is going to be an "Ask Abouna" session with the kids...I will be doing another one with the adults of the Village tonight...they have been invited to have dinner with us after Vespers. If weather permits, tonight will conclude with a campfire (on the beach) and Smore's!

After this morning's Christian Ed session, Joan Farha took some of the younger kids berry picking. The berries are going to be used for a snack that they eat locally...something about smashing the berries together, but I didn't get the whole picture...and blueberry muffins for breakfast tomorrow.

That's it for now. Please continue to pray for the members of our Team, and the Campers and residents of this wonderful Village. God willing, I will be in contact with all of you soon. As always, please feel free to forward this to anyone that might be interested.

Through the prayers of our Holy Fathers, Herman of Alaska and Peter the Aleut, O Lord Jesus Christ our God, have mercy on us and save us!

God bless!
Fr. Michael

Sent: Fri, 7 Aug 2006 12:54 PM
Subject: Greetings from Alaska!

Friday evening...another Spirit inspired evening! We celebrated Vespers with anyone from the Village who wanted to attend. The Church was full! After Vespers, I heard Confessions. They have a very interesting custom here...when the young children came up to have their Confession heard, they brought an unlit candle. When we finished, the child would give me the candle, with the expectation being that I would light the candle for them in the morning prior to the Liturgy. I thought about bringing the candles home and lighting them in Worcester, but that didn't seem right, so I decided to light them in Ouzinkie...in OUR Church, as we have come now to call it. (No, I am not planning to move to Alaska). Before dinner, we had the Ouzinkie equivalent of Skit Night. The Campers had learned the Troparion for St. Peter the Aleut, and the Tone 3 Holy God that everyone in our Archdiocese knows by heart. The parents in attendance were amazed. Then they asked the Counselors to sing...we sang the first and last verse of "O Pure Virgin..." and we sang the Troparion for St. Raphael of Brooklyn. Then we had the youngest campers singing a couple of songs from Gigi Shadid's CD. It concluded with the local kids performing native dances, in their costumes. During the final number, the lady in charge invited any the counselors to join in the dance. It was quite a sight! Dinner was fish pie (or pa-rak') as it is called here with chee-taq for dessert. Chee-taq is the berry dessert that I referred to in my last email. If you are ever interested in trying it, it's pretty good stuff! You mash up whatever kind of berries you can get (here, it was salmonberries and blueberries) and mix them up with evaporated milk, sugar and a little Cool Whip. After dinner, the President of the local Tribal Council presented the group with a gift to thank them for all the work that went into this camp. In addition, Angeline (on behalf of all the parents and grandparents of the Campers) presented each of us with an Ouzinkie T-shirt. We looked like a rainbow when we put them on. The evening concluded with an "indoor campfire". It was raining again, so we couldn't have one on the beach. We stayed in the center, sat in a circle and asked everyone to share their impressions of the Camp. Every child and counselor talked a little about their favorite thing. "Meeting new friends...singing...arts and crafts..."the usual responses were there. A couple of the kids mentioned praying together and one girl, named Dorian, said that she was already looking forward to next year's Camp...with all of the same people (pretty subtle hint, wouldn't you say?).

On Saturday, we started the day with Liturgy to close the Camp. The kids were very interested to see how a Priest vests for Liturgy, so I reversed the usual order of preparation and vested immediately prior to the beginning of Liturgy. So, while the Hours were being chanted by the Reader, I took the kids to the back of the Church and explained the symbolism of the Vestments while I put them on. Some of the local residents were there also. Liturgy was very nice, but also emotional because we knew that our departure was imminent. The Gospel reading was so appropriate, thank God, for what we were trying to accomplish in the Village. The reading was from St. Matthew's Gospel about a tree being known by its fruit. After Liturgy it was back to the Center for breakfast, packing and clean up. One of the local men stopped me on the way to the Center and very tearfully put an envelope in my hand and thanked me. It contained a beautiful letter that thanked us for what we had done for the children of the Village. What they fail to realize is how much more this trip has done for us, than we could ever do for the people of that wonderful Village. The breakfast, and the time after the breakfast, was interesting. On the one hand, you had the usual hugging that comes with the end of any Camp. What made it incredibly bittersweet was the knowledge that we may never see these kids after the Pilgrimage on Tuesday. We hope and pray that it is God's will to see them again, but who knows? On the other side of the coin, there were a number of kids who were visibly absent. This is one of those cultures where there is no word for goodbye...in addition, it had to be very difficult for some of them to come to grips with the fact that we were leaving. But, we leave with the knowledge that God has worked some incredible miracles in this Village in a short amount of time. Another one of the girls (Martha Ann) said that she hasn't been to the Pilgrimage in years, but she would see us on Tuesday. Gift bags were given to the kids at the conclusion of the breakfast that contained a prayer rope, an icon of St. Peter the Aleut, a prayer book, a cross on a chain and an explanation of what a prayer rope is, and how to use one. We noticed that most of the kids were wearing the prayer ropes and the crosses before we left for the dock. We asked the local adults to do two things for us. First, we left the copies of the Troparion for St. Peter with Angeline. We asked her to sing the Troparion with the kids regularly, so that they would memorize it by next summer's camp. Second, we left the ingredients for the Smore's with Herman. We asked them to wait a week or two and have a "camp reunion" with the kids. On a good night, have a campfire, ask the kids to wear their camp T-shirts and make Smore's on the beach. After we tearfully said goodbye, we boarded the boats and returned to Kodiak.

When we got back to Kodiak, we dumped our luggage and had our wrap-up meeting and debriefing at the Chowder House (the local restaurant with the good coffee and the pastry chef!). Then it was off to Vigil. For those of you who are familiar with Vigil, you know what I am talking about. For those of you who are unfamiliar with Vigil, it is Vespers, Matins and the First Hour, all rolled into one. In addition, it was Hierarchical (the Bishop served), and there were Old Testament readings and the blessing of the 5 loaves for the Feast of St. Panteleimon (they are on the Old Calendar here...and they transfer the Feasts to Sunday). So...it was a doozy! I noticed during the Service that a couple of the members of our team disappeared for a while...either fresh air, or a seat...I discovered later that it was both! At the conclusion of Vigil, His Grace asked me if I would give the sermon at Liturgy in the morning. Oh well, so much for a relaxing evening. After we ate, we did have a little bit of free time, and we really hadn't had a chance to unwind, so we hooked up with the OCF group that has been working in Kodiak...we invaded the local supermarket and bought the ingredients for Root Beer Floats...about 15 of us to purchase two bottles of soda and two half gallons of vanilla ice cream...we returned to the refectory and enjoyed each other's company before calling it a night.

An interesting thing happened on Sunday morning. Here we were in Kodiak...Hierarchical Divine Liturgy, with a nice choir and wonderful Clergy, in the presence of the relics of St. Herman of Alaska...and all any of us could think of was finding a way to go back to the Village. We were told afterward, by some of the locals, that this is a very common experience. They had a very nice reception for us after Liturgy. While sitting at the Head Table, I was thinking that one of the Priests who was present looked awfully familiar. It was announced at the end of Liturgy that they were celebrating their 55th Anniversary, so obviously, we sang Many Years for them. While we sat together at the reception, they said that I also looked very familiar to them. So...we began to narrow things down. They are retired in Arizona, so we determined that I had seen them in Phoenix, when I was the speaker at the Western Region Conference a couple of years ago, but then they said something that made it all click. It was Protospesbyter Joseph and Marie Kreta, parents of John Kreta, who was at St. Vladimir's with us. Talk about feeling nostalgic.

Since it was Sunday, His Grace would not give a blessing for anyone to work. Fr. Chad arranged for us to be taken to Fort Abercrombie State Park. It is located (obviously) on the site of the former Fort...high on a bluff, overlooking the water, directly at Monk's Lagoon on Spruce Island. One of the local residents brought a good pair of binoculars. With the binoculars, we could see all the way to Ouzinkie (7 miles away) and, in fact, we were able to see the Church of the Nativity with the binoculars. The reason that Fr. Chad brought us up here (besides the scenery) was because it is a great place to see whales. We saw some Humpbacks and Grays, mostly feeding, but then a couple of the whales decided to put on a show and started to breach off in the distance. They were also rolling on their sides and slapping the water with their fins. We stayed there for a couple of hours. There were also hiking trails, and we saw a fox along one of the trails. We returned to Kodiak for dinner because the Bishop wanted to meet with us at 9 PM.

His Grace spent a good deal of time with us, telling us about life in Alaska and the condition of the Church during his tenure. Thank God, things are rebuilding...they have a long way to go, but they have also made great strides. It is so interesting being in a place where the majority of people are Orthodox. I actually had a guy who stopped his car in order to ask for a blessing while we were walking. On Saturday night, we also had a little boy call to us from the window of his home..."hello Church people. I'll see you tomorrow in Church"...and he did. Before we wrapped things up with His Grace, he gave each of us a gift bag. It contained the latest copy of the North Star magazine, a CD that was made by the local Clergy who were singing the hymns from the Akathist for the wonder-working Sitka Icon of the Theotokos and finally a beautiful Icon of St. Herman of Alaska and St. Innocent. In the background you see the Church on Spruce Island and the 4 Alaskan Cathedrals. His Grace said that we could get the Icons blessed on Monday evening at the conclusion of the Akathist for St. Herman when his reliquary is opened. That's the latest news from Kodiak. I am off...today's project is painting the exterior of the Cathedral before the pilgrims begin to arrive tonight. I will check in with Fr. Innocent to see what needs to be done within the Cathedral itself.

Stay tuned for the next episode.

Through the prayers of our Holy Fathers, Herman of Alaska and Peter the Aleut, O Lord Jesus Christ our God, have mercy on us and save us!

God bless!
Fr. Michael

Sent: Fri, 11 Aug 2006 4:43 PM
Subject: Greetings from Alaska!

With thanks to the Almighty God, I type this today from my own computer in my own home. I must admit, however, that there really is someplace else that I would rather be.

My last email left off with the Bishop's meeting on Sunday evening. As I indicated, Monday was a work day, with last minute preparations for the Pilgrimage. His Grace, Bishop THOMAS was scheduled to arrive some time on Monday. Some of us were asked to make up a poster about the events of the St. Peter the Aleut Camp in Ouzinkie. What we thought would be a very quick task turned into a much longer undertaking because we wanted to find exactly the right pictures and we spent time reminiscing about the Camp. Finally, the poster was completed, and Fr. Innocent hung it in the Narthex of the Holy Resurrection Cathedral for all to see.

On Monday evening, we served the Akathist for St. Herman. It was wonderful. We had been told about how strong the smell of myrrh would be when the reliquary was opened, but apparently God chose not to wait. The beautiful fragrance filled the Church almost immediately and remained strong throughout. Bishop THOMAS, because of various problems with flights, arrived toward the end of the Service. When the Service was concluded, the reliquary was opened, and everyone present was able to venerate the relics of St. Herman. After a while, I asked Fr. Isidore if we should relieve Fr. Chad and Fr. Innocent, who were holding the reliquary open. He told me to put my stole back on, and out we went. While the smell of myrrh was present all the time, every now and then, it would get stronger and seem to almost envelop you. All of our team members (and many of the pilgrims) brought icons, prayer ropes and crosses to be blessed. As the people were venerating the relics, Fr. Isidore would take the items to be blessed, cross them over the relics and then touch them to the relics, before returning them. At one point, he did a very beautiful thing. A young mother was carrying her baby up to the reliquary and she was really struggling. Fr. Isidore took the child so that she could venerate St. Herman and then lowered the baby enough so that his body came in contact with the holy relics. After the last person had venerated the relics, the reliquary was closed and we finally left...reluctantly. There was a reception for everyone after the Service at the High School.

On Tuesday morning, we prepared ourselves to return to Spruce Island. We met on the docks at 8 AM to be transported. The clergy were transported in the first boat to leave. Also being transported in that boat was an Icon of the Mother of God. This icon is reportedly the miraculous icon that St. Herman used to stop the flood waters from destroying the island. Again, it was a real blessing to be able to venerate it, in addition to holding her and transferring her into another boat. The weather was good, but the winds were not favorable, so the water was choppy. In addition, the tide was low so many of the boats could not make it into the dock on Spruce Island, so smaller boats were used to tender the pilgrims. Now picture this...a boatload of clergy, in their cassocks and jibbehs, carrying their vestments and trying to move from one boat into another on choppy water. It was a sight, to say the least. Thank God, nobody "wound up in the drink". While the tender boat was approaching the dock, I noticed some of the people from Ouzinkie waiting for us. It was like having your family waiting for you when you return home from a trip; very heartwarming to say the least. As we walked from the beach to the Chapel, Fr. Chad told me to pay attention to how still the island is. In spite of the fact that it is covered with vegetation and there are many animals on the island, there was very little sound...an occasional bird chirping or the sound of insects, but it was very faint. The Chapel, which was built over the grave of St. Herman, was used as the Sanctuary for the Liturgy and the people stood outside on the deck and on the hillside. Prior to the beginning of the Divine Liturgy, there was a service of blessing for the new bells that had been installed. As the events of the morning progressed, we began to see more and more of the elders and children from Ouzinkie. When it came time for His Grace, Bishop NIKOLAI to preach, the island was completely silent. It was as if everything on the island had stopped to listen. It wasn't an eerie silence, however. It seemed very fitting. After the Liturgy, we processed back toward the beach. Bishop NIKOLAI went to the graves of Archmandrite Gerasim and Fr. Peter Kreta, in order to pray the Trisagion, while Bishop THOMAS went to the wonder-working spring. The Clergy and Pilgrims chose, on their own, where they would go. After a picnic lunch on the beach, we returned to Kodiak. Essentially, we had enough time for a quick cup of coffee, and then it was back to the Cathedral for Vigil. Imagine...I hadn't been to a Vigil since I graduated from Seminary and now, I was serving at two of them within four days. Talk about making up for lost time!

During his meeting with us, His Grace warned everyone that they would be exhausted during the course of the Pilgrimage...perhaps more tired than they have ever been in their lives. Those of us who were at Ouzinkie wondered how we could be more exhausted...well, His Grace was right. You could see the exhaustion etched on the faces of everyone gathered, from the Bishops on down. God, however, found a way to boost our energy levels. During Vespers, some of the Clergy were instructed by Archbishop NIKOLAI to remove the articles that cover the reliquary. On the extreme right of the top of the reliquary is St. Herman's klobuk (the hat worn by monastics)...in the center is an icon of St. Herman with his arms outstretched and his blessing cross in his right hand (the same cross that I used to bless some of the members of our team upon our arrival...on the extreme left is the Cross and chains that he wore and which is visible in so many icons of St. Herman. During Matins, at the chanting of the Polyeleos, the reliquary was opened while Bishop NIKOLAI censed. After the Matins Gospel was read, instead of venerating the Gospel, we were blessed to venerate the relics again and to be anointed by the Bishop. Once again, the smell of myrrh was everywhere, and once again, I was blessed to stand at the reliquary and hold the cover open. By now, no one remembered their exhaustion and as I looked around in the Church, I noticed that people's faces looked different. It is very hard to explain, but it seemed that being in the presence of that which is holy caused the faces of the people to look different. You still recognized who they were (obviously) but somehow they just didn't look the same.

After Vigil ended, we invited the Hierarchs to join us for dinner. Surprisingly enough (understanding how tired they were) and happily they agreed. We had a wonderful gathering with the two Bishops and the members of the three teams (Ouzinkie Camp, Kodiak Vacation Bible School and OCF). The refectory was full; so are our hearts!

Through the prayers of our Holy Fathers, Herman of Alaska and Peter the Aleut, O Lord Jesus Christ our God, have mercy on us and save us!

God bless!
Fr. Michael

Sent: Fri, 11 Aug 2006 5:11 PM
Subject: Greetings from Alaska!

The Pilgrimage officially concludes with Divine Liturgy on August 9th (Wednesday). If we thought that everyone was tired on Tuesday evening, you should see everyone today. His Grace, Bishop NIKOLAI informs us that one of the Chalices being used at the Divine Liturgy was brought to Alaska by the Missionaries in the 18th Century. St. Herman, himself, probably received Communion from that Chalice; he probably kissed the base of that Chalice after receiving...another blessing for all of us! Bishop NIKOLAI gave Communion with that Chalice and, after a while, it was like the other Chalices were not even there; so we returned with them to the Sanctuary and His Grace gave communion to His flock. After Liturgy, Bishop NIKOLAI gave Bishop THOMAS a hand-written icon of St. Herman with a relic embedded in the base of it.

After the Liturgy, the Grand Banquet was held at the High School. Imagine a meal that consisted of freshly caught wild salmon and halibut. It was superb. Entertainment was provided by the students of St. Innocent Academy, along with parishioners who worship at their Chapel. St. Innocent's is a school for boys who are at high-risk. Some are referred by their families; some are referred by the courts. If you didn't learn about their history, you would have no idea of the lives that these boys had led. After the Banquet, we went back to the Seminary to help prepare a reception that His Grace was hosting. It was an interesting invitation...you are cordially invited, and by the way, I need you to help Fr. Isidore get everything together. But, it was our pleasure. In addition to the preparations, a group went to visit Fr. Paisius and St. Innocent's Academy. It was a very informative and eye-opening visit. May the Almighty God continue to bless Fr. Paisius and the work that he is doing. An interesting aside about Fr. Paisius. We met in the boat on the way to Spruce Island. One of the first questions that is always asked in these kinds of situations is "And where is your Parish, Father?" When I told him that I was from Central Massachusetts, he wanted to know what city I was from. Naturally, I informed him that I was at the Cathedral in Worcester. His eyes gleamed and he said "Woosta!" emphasizing the proper mispronunciation. It was then that he told me that he was from Boston. That was before we changed boats, by the way.

Then it was back to the Seminary to pack and to attend Bishop NIKOLAI's reception. God bless Fr. Isidore and the members of the team who prepared such a wonderful gathering in a short amount of time. After the reception, a few of us returned to the Cathedral to venerate St. Herman's reliquary one last time, in addition to blessing the remainder of the team's icons. Then we went to Monk's Rock, which is the bookstore, coffee shop and reading room that is run by St. Innocent's Academy. This was the night of their 2nd Annual Block Party. The kids played their instruments (there is a lot of talent and versatility in the group) and people were dancing all over the place. Then it was time for final goodbyes. The OCF group from UConn promised to come to Worcester and visit. Fr. Paisius led everyone in singing "God grant you many years!" before we left. Fr. Chad, Anastasia and a few others brought Joan, Robyn and me to the airport. More tears and hugs. Our plane left Kodiak at 11 PM on Wednesday and we flew for much of Thursday to reach our respective destinations. The three of us flew together from Kodiak to Anchorage (leaving at 11 PM) and from Anchorage to Phoenix (leaving at 1:15 AM) before we went our separate ways. The time on the plane was spent between silent reflection, quiet reminiscences and dozing off from time to time. Mostly, it was spent thanking God for blessing us with this remarkable trip, while thanking St. Herman of Alaska and St. Peter the Aleut for inviting us into their world.

While many of you have indicated that you have been enjoying this little (little?) travelogue, one of the OCF Students aptly described our time in this Holy Land of America with the following quote from the Sacrament of Baptism and the Service of the blessing of water...

"Great art Thou, O Lord, and marvelous are Thy works and *there is no word which is sufficient to hymn Thy wonders!*" My words truly fall short of describing the miraculous events of the past 11 days. I pray that you all might experience this yourselves someday.

Through the prayers of our Holy Fathers, Herman of Alaska and Peter the Aleut, O Lord Jesus Christ our God, have mercy on us and save us!

God bless!
Fr. Michael