

## **My Family's SLAVA Saint - An American Convert's Journey**

The story of how I came to choosing a SLAVA Saint and choosing St. Innocent of Alaska

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Since I was baptized into the Serbian Orthodox Church our Priest encouraged us to pray about having a SLAVA saint for our family. I struggled with this idea because I already had my patron saint and felt it was unnecessary. My long journey first began questioning the need for this after all I wasn't Serbian, but American. Our Deacon had a SLAVA at his home and in his "toast" he said some meaningful things about what a SLAVA means and how being in the Serbian church and we can add this meaningful sacrament to our lives and bless our families with it.

I realized a SLAVA saint is a saint for your family. However I am single, have no children and no husband. After attending a few SLAVA's and hearing the prayers for the family of both the living and the reposed of all a person's relatives, I could begin to see the meaning and the reason behind it.

Then my question became what saint would fit my family? Thinking on an intellectual level, I began to look at my family's genealogy, because the Serbs had chosen their SLAVA saint based on the first generation that converted to Christian Orthodoxy. I couldn't find answers in my genealogy, even of who was the first Christian. It seemed we had Christians as far back as our genealogies stretched. I began to look at our ethnic heritage. What saint should I choose from: the British Isle's, Bohemia, Germany, or the Netherlands? Nothing really seemed to fit or ring true in my heart. Then I looked at special or significant days: the day of my baptism, the day of my birth, the day of my mother's death, my grandma's death or my brother's death... again, nothing ringed true.

Of course on the practical, physical level, I didn't want the day to fall during a "fasting season", because after all I wanted to have a "normal feast". Of course I was missing what the SLAVA was truly about, it was not about what to eat or not to eat. The most important thing about a SLAVA are the prayers prayed for my family, the SLAVA bread and the Kolyva.

My Godparents, have had SLAVAS and their non-orthodox family participated and I so wanted my non-orthodox family to be a part as well. So I talked with my sister and asked her opinion on the saints, and she suggested I talk with Dad, and he was born and raised Catholic (although now he is a Congregational Pastor). I sent an email to my Dad and tried to explain a SLAVA in the best way I could. His email response was simple, he didn't believe in praying to the saints. Rather than get into long emails back and forth trying to theologize about the Saints, I simply let the discussion go and realized my decision was not going to come from this direction.

I was back on my own with seeking a SLAVA saint. I felt released from my family for their input and yet at the same time feeling very frustrated with the whole thing. Some of the Saints I were considering were not Canonized Saints at this present time, although very holy people and canonized in local regions of their life and place of repose. I kept thinking I would just stay with my own patron saint, but still it didn't give me a peace.

One night before going to bed, after my evening prayers, I prostrated before the icon of my own patron, Saint Kieran of Clonmacnoise, Ireland, and asked him for help, direction and wisdom. Around 2:00 that morning, I was awakened suddenly and I knew instantly that my SLAVA saint was

to be St. Innocent of Alaska, missionary to America. (Of course, I discovered his major feast day falls most of the time in the middle of Great Lent but not always).

I became finally at a complete peace with this decision.

It is interesting to me that my own St. Kieran gave me the direction I needed and pointed me to an American Saint... how appropriate because if you were to look at my family genealogy, we are truly Americans, many settling in this land before the American Revolution.

I look at the life of St. Innocent and he was truly a missionary and I have such a missionary heart.

My immediate family is predominately Californian's and St. Innocent did some of his missionary work along the west coast as far down as California! My dad spent years in Alaska in the Navy and working as an Engineer, he is closely tied to Alaska.

Then shortly after my decision, some people from our church went to Mexico to assist St. Innocent's Orphanage. Then, St. Innocent's Academy from Alaska came down and gave us a concert during their lower 48 tour this year.

Years ago, before my conversion, it was a St. Innocent's Academy concert that was my first "Orthodox" event that I attended that began to minister to my heart and draw me in. Lucy, a volunteer at the Pregnancy Center when I was the Executive Director, was converting to Orthodoxy. At that time she was there so many years ago, she began giving me books on Orthodoxy. She later moved to Alaska and has been part of St. Innocent's Academy ever since. It was because Lucy was coming to Redding with St. Innocent's Academy that I went to their first concert in Redding. Paul Ferrari, our "chimney sweep" came into my life shortly after Lucy had left for Alaska. Then Elena Ellis, (now my godmother), came to volunteer at the Pregnancy Center. Both Paul, his wife, Elena and her husband were integral in my journey into Orthodoxy.

Then there was the funeral for the unborn baby at St. Herman's Monastery, where I met a monk, named Father Innocent and we began our friendship. I began to learn about the life of St. Innocent. I have read the little book from St. Herman's Press about the Life of St. Innocent three times now and still I am being blessed by his life and teachings.

It may appear as if I am grasping at "coincidences" yet, I see it as confirmation of God's unseen hand guiding me along in my journey in Orthodoxy to add another intercessor in the Host of Heavenly Saints to pray for my family and me.

This is one part of my continued journey in the path of Orthodoxy. I pray this blesses and encourages you. I pray God will bless you as you read about my journey and may it help guide you in your own journey wherever He may lead you.

Your sister in Christ,  
Kieranna