

70th ANNIVERSARY OF THE PASSING BEYOND OF A ROMANIAN RAISED IN THE LIGHT OF ALTARS OR/AND ABOUT LIMITLESS HUMAN GIVING

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*In this century, which is coming to an end, your country
has known the horrors of harsh totalitarian systems,
sharing the fate of many other countries in Europe through suffering*

John Paul II, Bucharest, May 1999.

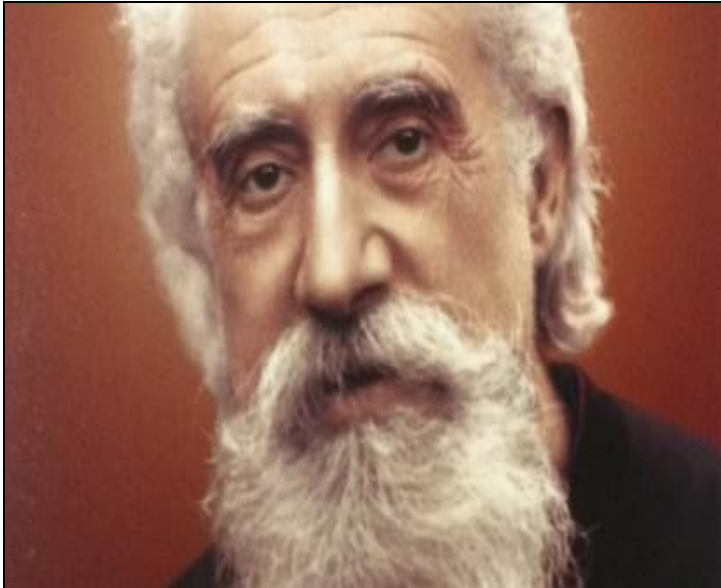
Shortly after the installation in the chapel of St. Peter in Rome, Pope Francis gave the signal for the start of the beatification of 63 Catholics, victims - in the vast majority - of the Spanish Civil War, Nazism and Communism. The decision taken by the Bishop of Rome actually authorized the decision taken by the Congregation for the Cause of Saints at the Vatican, which aimed to implement such an approach. To the joy of the Catholic Christians in our country, but also of the Romanian nation as a whole, the Holy Father thus recognized, on March 27, 2013, the decision of the Congregation that "the martyrdom of the servant of God Vladimir Ghika, Catholic priest and Romanian prince, should be registered in among the saints of the Catholic Church". It is worth emphasizing that, even during his lifetime, his contemporaries remembered with great admiration the luminous figure of this Hierarch, full of dedication and holiness, always helping the afflicted.¹

Queen Marie of Romania tells how, more than a century ago, in 1913, during the Balkan war, she had noticed with particular admiration Vladimir Ghika, who - "by the call from above" -, serving the dying who were in the arms of death, in the "hell" of Zimnicea, with an extraordinary devotion he put his life in danger. Also, also in reference pages, the Queen left posterity an unusual "medallion", in fact a testimony of great feeling, certainly useful

¹ Nicolae Mareș, *Vladimir Ghika – un Sfânt din fire (A Saint by Nature)*, în *Magazin istoric*, sept. 2013; Cf. prof. Costache Florea, www.vladimirghika.ro

in future Congregations, for raising Saint Vladimir Ghika to a higher level. I will return to the words of the Queen.

A Model of Human Giving



Vladimir Ghika

Source: wikipedia.ro

In the history books, Vladimir Ghika remained known as the son of the minister plenipotentiary in office in the capital of the Ottoman Empire, Ioan Ghika, division general, later minister of foreign affairs and the Army (the one who signed the holographic birth certificate of the two sons of him and Alexandrina Moret de Blaremborg, descendant of Henry IV, King of France. Vladimir Ghika was the grandson of the last ruler of Moldavia, Grigore V. Ghika Vodă II (1849-1856). During his historic visit to Bucharest, in May 1999, The Pope John Paul II recognized the "martyrdom of Romanian priests" including Monsignor Ghika. Here, for reference, the saying of the great Pontiff: "every Church or religious community in your country had its martyrs in the 20th century. I want to pay tribute to them all today." He also remembered many of them during the religious services in Bucharest from May 7-9, 1999, kneeling devoutly at the Belu Catholic Cemetery at their graves, and then cordially embracing him, at the threshold of the Roman Catholic Cathedral in Bucharest, to Archbishop

Alexandru Todea, whose beatification the Romanian people are waiting for. For the "Mother of the Wounded", as the soldiers in great suffering named her, after the battles fought by them in Mărăști, Mărășești in 1917, as well as on other battlefields, Queen Marie was amazed by the worthiness of Vladimir Ghika, "who constituted a model of human sacrifice".² "With all his soul, the Queen of Romania wrote at the time, he was part of those who feel the fierce urge to sacrifice his life in the service of his fellow men. Like Sister Pucci, Vladimir was a saint by nature. Together with the nuns with whom he was always in close contact, he had followed my call and offered his services as a simple nurse. He had chosen his field of work in the darkest of all the sick tents (in Zimnicea), the one we nicknamed "hell"; there the most hopeless cases were taken; there death reaped the richest harvest". "Here Vladimir Ghika offered himself to do the night service among the dying, fearless, not admitting that he could get tired, not being repulsed by any horror, a missionary in the highest sense of the word, although he was a pale man, flapping, who seemed bloodless and in frail health. Much later in life we were meant to understand each other in religious matters, but I could never forget that we had shared days of peril and trial together; a bond had been made between us that the difference in religious views could not weaken"³

He converted to Catholicism to be "even more orthodox".

With a biography worthy of a movie devoted to great heroes at the service of humanity and faith, Blessed Vladimir Ghika was born on December 25, 1873⁴. He was baptized and practiced the Orthodox religion, converting to Catholicism in his youth. Through his writings, he established himself as an intellectual of great finesse and depth, becoming a wide-ranging polyglot (he knew 26 foreign languages!), being among the few hierarchs who officiated services in the Catholic and Orthodox rite. Today's diplomats, our senior foreign ministers did not know and do not know that Monsignor Vladimir Ghika worked in the diplomatic service of Pope Pius XI, that he established the first free hospital in Romania, that he has a

² Cf. Nicolae Mareș *Regina Maria și Monseniorul Ghika, cel prin firea lui sfânt (Queen Marie and Monsignor Ghika the Saint)*, „Actualitatea catolică”, octombrie 2011.

³ Cf. Maria, Regina României, *Povestea vieții mele*, pp. 363-365.

⁴ According his birth certificate I found and studied in the official Archives

theological and philosophical work not yet fully researched; it consists of over 40,000 typed pages. He wrote on history, philosophy, theology.

He studied in France, in Toulouse and Paris (Faculty of Political Science), also taking courses in botany, art, letters, philosophy, history, law and medicine. Then, privately, he will continue his studies in Bucharest and, later, in Rome (1898-1905), at the Faculty of Philosophy and Theology of the Dominicans (Angelicum), obtaining a degree in philosophy and a doctorate in theology. Pope Pius X was the one who determined him to dedicate himself to the lay apostolate, being among the pioneers of this field, in which he will carry out an impressive activity, on all meridians, from Bucharest to Paris and Rome, in the Congo, in Tokyo, Sidney, Buenos Aires, etc., being - we would say - a predecessor of Pope John Paul II, including in the ecumenical plan. In October 1923 he was ordained a priest in Paris, where he will carry out his priestly ministry until 1939; The Holy See granted him the right to celebrate in the Byzantine rite as well. He converted to Catholicism, as I said, to be "even more orthodox". On the eve of the Second World War, he returns to Romania, joining the sick and the poor, whom he will not leave even when the allied bombings fell mercilessly on Bucharest, just as, in January 1948, he will not use the train royal to leave the country.

On November 18, 1952, he was imprisoned by the communist regime, which sentenced him to hard years of imprisonment for "high treason", being subjected to brutal tortures, so that he died in Jilava, on May 16, 1954. On March 27, 2013, according to the records, Pope Francis signed the decree by which the Universal Church recognizes "the martyrdom of the servant of God Vladimir Ghika". The prince thus became the second Romanian brought to the light of the altars. The first was Ieremia Valah, who was beatified on October 30, 1983. For history let's remember the words spoken then by the Bishop of Rome in the period 1978-2005, who called our compatriot: "Son of Romania, this noble nation that bears the imprint of Rome in its language and name".

In conclusion, I emphasize that the mission of Prince Vladimir Ghika exceeded the spiritual boundaries of his time. The activity of the tireless missionary was carried out in all environments, including among crowned heads, talking with heads of state, politicians, philosophers, artists, writers, theologians, even with anarchists or political prisoners. He practiced the most diverse professions from nurse, to priest, confessor, spiritual director, lecturer, scientist, diplomat, etc. Today's diplomats are also reminded that

Blessed Vladimir Ghika was the first ambassador of modern Romania to the Vatican. He was the one who created the first ambulance service in Romania, bravely defended the victims of the peasant uprising of 1907. He established the first free dispensary in our country, laid the foundations of the Parhon Hospital in Bucharest. He wanted nothing for himself. All his thoughts and reflections about the history and deeds of the Romanians are still unknown to his descendants. Hopefully not for long. The consideration shown by foreigners to this unsurpassed pilgrim of piety and mercy has not yet been brought to light.⁵

I emphasize that in Japan, as a papal envoy, he visited not only the emperor but also a leprosy, getting to know the Japanese world in depth, establishing cordial relations with the Romanians who lived in those lands. There is even a legend spread by Elisabeth de Miribel⁶ according to which during the discussion, held in French, the Japanese Sovereign would have revealed to him the sorrow of not having a son. Such empathy had grown between the two that the emperor would have accepted his blessing. Nine months later, his son, the future Emperor Akihito, was born, a fact that transcends legend. The above aspects were revealed to the Romanian ambassador in Tokyo, Radu Șerban in conversations with members of the Japanese chancellery.⁷ Moreover, in his relationship with the protocol of the Imperial House, for the first time, he received copies of the official archive documents regarding the reception of Prince Vladimir Ghika to Emperor Hirohito on March 20, 1933.⁸

⁵ Cf. Nicolae Mareș – *Istorie, Diplomatie, Literatură. Spiritualitate, (History, Diplomacy, Literature, Spirituality) Opera Omnia*, TipoMoldova, Iași, 2023 pp.168-170.

⁶ Elisabeth de Miribel – „La mémoire des silences: Vladimir Ghika (1873-1954)”, Fayard, 1987, Paris

⁷ Idem p. 169.

⁸ According to Nicolae Mareș interview– Radu Șerban *România-Japonia pe toate fețele (Romania-Japan all faces)*, in *Portal-Măiastra*, text resumed on Japan Day in *Constelații Diamantine*.

Let's be proud that after Eremia Valahul, contemporaries and posterity still have a blessed one with a Romanian soul.

