

Contemporary Virtuous Romanians: Father Ilarion Felea

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Father Ilarion Felea (March 21, 1903 - September 18, 1961)

How I love Your law, O Lord; It is my meditation all day long. (Psalm 118:97)

The son of a priest from Hunedoara, Father Ilarion Felea was a profound theologian and a practitioner of incessant prayer. Through a life of hardship, he climbed the road to Tabor, where he found the bright and uncreated light of Christ.



Father Ilarion held undergraduate degrees in theology from the University of Sibiu and in literature and philosophy from Cluj, and a Ph.D. in theology from Bucharest. He diligently put his talents to use as a teacher of dogmatics and apologetics, as a rector of the Theological Academy of Arad, and as a father confessor at the

cathedral from Arad, which he turned into a real center of religious culture and practice.

His scholastic activity was impressive – he authored hundreds of articles, theological studies, and homiletic and hagiographic writings, as well as the series *Towards Tabor*, which are veritable *Philokalia*.

Hundreds of faithful, especially young people with a hunger for the treasures of Orthodoxy, were drawn by the Father's love for others, by his living example of faith and sacrifice, and by his eloquence – all of which also made him a target for the Security. He was first arrested in 1949 and locked up for a year in Aiud Prison. When he was released and came back among the faithful, he resumed his missionary work with the same passion, confessing the true faith in sermons and articles.

In September 1958, he was arrested once again and subjected to a violent investigation. He was sentenced to twenty years of forced labor for “activities against the working class” and was imprisoned first in Gherla Prison and then again in Aiud. Here, together with Father Dumitru Stăniloae, he kept the fire of prayer burning, secretly serving the Divine Liturgy in his cell, whenever possible, for the convicts.

In fact, prayer was his greatest support throughout the trials of his life, the only way to be closer to Christ. Father Ilarion wrote that “sin is what separates us from God and stains our souls; prayer is what cleanses us, sanctifies us, and re-opens the way to God's love and light. Whoever progresses in prayer gets closer to God. A man who sits among flowers for a long time will bear their fragrance. The same thing happens with the man who spends a lot of time praying: his soul will bear the fragrance of divine life.”

As is the case with all who follow Christ, Father Ilarion Felea did not fear those who kill the body, but he took care to keep the hands of the unfaithful away from his blameless soul. Refusing any sort of compromise with the atheist regime, he carried his cross with dignity, remaining an apostle of Christ behind the prison bars until the end.

The cold, the hunger, and all the tortures to which he was subjected hastened his death, a death that shone with the halo of martyrdom. Without a cross and a name, his body was thrown in *Râpa Robilor* (The Slaves' Ravine) at Aiud, the resting place of the spiritual elite of post-war Romania.