

## **ST. SOFRONY OF VRATSA, BULGARIA**

(1739 – 1813)

*Feast Day: September 22<sup>nd</sup>*

Saint Sofrony was born in a small town in Bulgaria in 1739, during the centuries when Bulgaria was under Turkish Muslim control. He was named Stoiko at his Baptism, and was orphaned while yet an infant. At the age of nine, he entered the seminary, (the customary age at that time), where he studied for thirteen years. His studies included learning Slavonic and Greek, which he put to good use later on.

In 1762 he graduated, married and was ordained priest. For the rest of his life he dedicated himself to serving God and the people whom God put in his care. Fr. Stoiko poured all his energy into preaching the Word of God to the people, and especially, teaching the children at the seminary.

His legacy to his Bulgarian people includes his translation of the *Lives of the Saints* into Bulgarian from Greek and Church Slavonic. However, his zealous dedication to his pastoral work not only was met with jealousy by some Bulgarian priests, but also brought him trouble from the Turks, who imprisoned and mistreated him. As a result, he had to move to another part of the country. He took refuge in Vidin, where the bishop assigned him a parish. But once again he put his life at risk by protecting a Christian girl from the advances of a Turk.

When his wife died, Father Stoiko was tonsured a monk, and given the monastic name of Sofrony. After having died to himself and his own will and ego by faithfully serving God for 32 years, without regard for his own safety or well-being, he was then consecrated Bishop of Vratsa in 1794, at the age of 61. But immediately he was faced with overwhelming difficulties caused by bands of Turkish brigands who were devastating the villages in his diocese, forcing the inhabitants to flee elsewhere. He himself had to flee, and he became a perpetual refugee from the Muslim Turks, fleeing from place to place, and hiding in the woods.

At last in 1803 he managed to escape the Turks in Bulgaria and get to Bucharest, Hungary, where he could once again serve the Church, now under the Metropolitan of Hungary and Wallachia. In his continuing labors on behalf of his people, he wrote books in Bulgarian, including a catechism and sermons for Sundays and feast-days. After ten years of serving the Lord in Bucharest, he peacefully fell asleep in the Lord in 1813, at the age of 74, and was buried in a monastery in Bucharest where he had been the abbot during the last years of his life. The Church of Bulgaria glorified Saint Sofrony on 31 December 1964.

*By: Sister Ioanna, St. Innocent of Alaska Monastic Community, Redford, Michigan*

*The icon at the top was written/painted by Fr. Theodore Jurewicz of Erie, PA.*



*St. Sophrony, on sanctuary wall  
of St. Innocent Orthodox Church, Redford, Michigan*