

History of the Convent of St. Peter and Paul - Lozen

When I came to the convent for the first time it looked almost desolate, just a field with some scattered plum-trees and a small white chapel in the middle. It was a hot summer day, at noon, and all the air around smelt of fruit and grass. There was nothing special about the look of the place, but it made me feel happy. I didn't know why. Later, I found out that that was how everyone felt when they came here.

An ancient monastery was built in this place in the tenth century. The existence of this monastery is marked by big stone remains of the old building. One of these stone remains is especially interesting. It is a stone cross with an inscription on it, which reads "*Saint Trinity 899 Lozen*".



The monastery existed for at least three centuries. Many prayers were said and many services were celebrated during that time. Monks translated church books into the Slavonic language and copied them. The monastery was part of Sofia Mount Athos (The Holy Mountain of Sofia) – a group of monasteries around Sofia (more than twenty) built in order to support each other in their spiritual life with common prayers and to bring faith to the people.

It was completely destroyed by the Turks in the thirteenth century. All the monks were killed. People from the nearest village, Lozen kept the memory of the place alive for more than five centuries. Every year on St. Peter and Paul's Day, they came and celebrated with prayers and hymns. They also cooked special meals and gave them to the poor to share the joy of the feast. After the liberation of Bulgaria in 1876 they built a small church at the same place where the old one had been and continued the traditions of the old times.

In 1935, an old man called Budin had a dream. A voice told him to go to the place where the monastery was and to live there, to pray all the time, not to cut his hair, not to eat meat and to look after the church. He was chosen to be the keeper of the place. He believed that the Mother of God had spoken to him. Budin did precisely what



he was told. He left his family – a wife and four children – and began an ascetic's life. He lived in the monastery for more than 20 years.



The Tsar's residence was not far from the place. The last Bulgarian Tsar, Boris III often walked in the fields. He came many times to the small church, sometime on foot and sometimes on horseback. When the Second World War broke out, he would come here and pray for hours. He loved his people and made every effort to protect them from the horrors of war. In 1943 he travelled to Germany. He wanted to keep Bulgaria safe from the Nazis, but the pressure was too much and the same week he arrived in Germany he died of a heart attack. On the fortieth day of his death - 17 November 1943 people from the village came to pray for him at the same place where he had prayed so many times for his

people. An old round stone with a metal ring to which he tied his horse is still kept in the convent.



During the Communist regime the place was empty but not forgotten. Different people tried to clean the place and to rebuild the church but the Communists didn't allow them to do anything.



In 1988 Father Joan Dinkov (a priest from Sofia) started the construction of a new church. Many people from the village helped him. It was the same church I saw when I came here for the first time in 1994.

The convent was built on the same site of the ancient monastery when our Mother Superior Veronica came here in the early 90s. Thanks to her many efforts and sacrifices, and with the blessing of our spiritual Father Bishop Nikolai (now Archbishop of Plovdiv), the convent was built both in material and spiritual terms. A new, bigger church and a living compound were also built. The church was consecrated by the late Bulgarian Patriarch Maxim on St. Peter and Paul's Day in 2005.



Many things have changed from that summer day in 1994 when I arrived for the first time. But the happiness the place gives to those who come here remains the same. God has blessed this place for now and forever and for ages to come. Hopefully this blessing will bring salvation to many!