Blessed Nykyta Budka (1877–1949)

Born in 1877 in Dobromirka (then Austria-Hungary, now Ukraine), Nykyta Budka is ordained in 1905 in Lviv. Seven years later he is consecrated bishop by Greek Catholic Metropolitan Andrey Sheptytsky for the Ukrainian Catholic immigrants in Canada. His nomination as the first Greek Catholic bishop in Canada is a response to a wave of immigration from Central Europe. When he arrives in Winnipeg, Manitoba, in December 1912, the Ukrainian population in Canada exceeds 150,000. For fifteen years he travels throughout the country visiting scattered Ukrainian communities. He works hard, administering sacraments, teaching, founding schools, training catechists, ordaining local priests as missionaries, and encouraging priests and laity back home to come to Canada. Bishop Budka devotes himself to sustaining Canadian Ukrainian Greek-Catholics in their faith. During his tenure the Ukrainian Catholic Church in Canada grows from 25 to 170 parishes. Among his priorities, however, is legal recognition for the Eastern Catholic Church in Canada, which then included Ukrainians, Ruthenians, Slovaks and Hungarians; the various communities are incorporated as the Ruthenian Greek Catholic Episcopal Corporation of Canada in 1913.

Despite his commitment to the mission in Canada, Bishop Budka is forced to resign in 1928, mainly due to his poor health. He returns to Ukraine, where he serves as a canon and leads the renovation of a Marian shrine. Bishop Budka's mission is not over by any means. He works for eighteen more years among the Ukrainians and serves in Lviv as Vicar-General for his friend, and superior, Metropolitan Sheptytsky. The valiant duo suffers through the Russian occupation in 1939 and the Nazi occupation in 1941. Sheptystsky dies in 1944 at seventy-eight years of age, not before petitioning Rome to have the heroic dry martyr, Joseph Slipyj, appointed as his successor. One year later, Bishop Budka, Metropolitan Slipyj and all the Ukrainian Catholic bishops are arrested and thrown into prison or labor camps by the Soviet communists. Bishop Budka had always maintained his Canadian citizenship and, during his imprisonment, the Vatican and Canadian officials collaborated to negotiate his release but without success. He dies in a prison hospital of Kazakhstan on October 1, 1949. Pope John Paul II beatified him in 2001, along with 26 other Ukrainians martyred by the Soviet regime.