

the chunks roaring down the chute. When it finally got too bad, we would shout as loud as we could and bang on the deck with our shovels. The belt would stop for a minute, we'd scramble out, then continue distributing the coal from the hatchway. There were a lot of injuries on this job, and everyone hated it. But the work schedule had to be met; we were expendable.

Still, work in the holds had its rewards. As soon as we entered a hold, for instance, we would immediately explore every nook and cranny, looking for ears of wheat that might be stuck in the timbers or in crevices along the walls. Whatever we found was crammed into our pockets like so many pieces of gold, dirt and all. Sometimes we scavenged as many as five or six pocketfuls between us. We'd share it that night in the barracks—if we could get it past the guards.

When the ship was full, or the day's quota finished, the guards lined us up quickly and marched us off, anxious to get back to camp themselves. The whole crew would have to undress at the gate, despite the piercing wind and bitter cold, and submit to a search. It was then we might lose our precious bits of grain. Everyone was as black as the coal itself, but once past the search and the check-in, nobody bothered to wash. Our first concern was food. We hadn't eaten a thing since breakfast, except for whatever part of the morning's ration we managed to save for lunch.

That first night, they brought us a half liter of soup apiece and 200 grams of *kasha*, plus hot water. We wolfed it down. Then everyone collapsed on the plank bunks like a company of dead men. After years in prison with little exercise, this first full day of hard work had been torture.

Father Cizek's First Mass in the Camp...



to the coal piles to begin another long day with the shovels. Toward the end of our first week in Dudinka, Father

Casper came looking for me in the barracks one night. Some of his Poles had told him there was another priest in camp. He found me before I had a chance to look him up and asked me if I wanted to say Mass. I was overwhelmed! My last Mass had been said in Chusovoy more than five years ago. I made arrangements to meet him in his barrack next morning as soon as the six o'clock signal sounded.

The men in Father Casper's barrack were mostly Poles. They revered him as a priest, protected him, and he tried to say Mass for them at least once a week. They made the Mass wine for him out of raisins they had stolen on the docks, the altar breads from flour "appropriated" in the kitchen. My chalice that morning was a whiskey glass, the paten to hold the host was a gold disc from a pocket watch. But my joy at being able to celebrate Mass again cannot be described.

Father Casper had the prayers of the Mass written out on a piece of paper. Although I knew them by heart, I was so moved and so excited that morning I was glad to have them. Afterward, he made me a copy. I tore them up when I left Dudinka, for fear they would be discovered in the routine processing inspections at the next camp. I wrote them again from memory inside the camp.

The rest of the time I was in Dudinka, I said Mass frequently in Father Casper's barrack. I was encouraged by his example, too, to work among the men as a priest. I heard confessions regularly and, from time to time, was even able to distribute Communion secretly after I'd said Mass. The experience gave me new strength. I could function as a priest again, and I thanked God daily for the opportunity to work among this hidden flock, consoling and comforting men who had thought themselves beyond His grace.

August in Dudinka is cold, bitterly cold. We were still working in the light cotton summer clothing we had been issued when we arrived. Working at a furious pace, as we were, we could stay warm enough. But the long cold walk to work in the morning and especially the trudge home at night, when the sweat would almost freeze on our bodies, was an excruciating experience. The wind drove through the cotton clothing like a knife. Everyone tied rags around his ankles and shoe tops; an old potato sack that could be