Patriarch-Catholicos Ilia II of All Georgia visits St. Sergius' Laura of the Trinity and Moscow Theological Schools

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January 24, 2013 – His Holiness and Beatitude Ilia II, Patriarch-Catholicos of All Georgia, and the delegation of the Georgian Orthodox Church visited St. Sergius Laura of the Trinity. They were accompanied by Archbishop Mark of Yegoryevsk, head of the Office for Institutions Abroad, Archimandrite Vakhtang of the St. George's Church in Moscow, and Rev. Mikhail Bogdanov, Department for External Church relations.

At the Laura's Cathedral of the Trinity, Patriarch-Catholicos Ilia and his delegation were welcomed by the abbot of the Laura, Archbishop Feognost of Sergiev Posad, Archbishop Yevgeny, chairman of the ROC Education Committee and rector of the Moscow Theological Academy and Seminary, and the brethren of the monastery.

Addressing the high guest, His Eminence Feognost said, 'We thank God for an opportunity to welcome you here, at the relics of St. Sergius. Aware of your love of our venerable and God-bearing Father Sergius, and on the occasion of your 80th birthday, our brethren would like to present your Holiness and Beatitude with this wonderful image, a copy of the first cover which was laid on the relics of the saint in 1425. According to tradition, it was embroidered by the brethren of St. Sergius's Laura'.

In his response, the Primate of the Georgian Orthodox Church said: 'Your Eminence Archbishops Feognost, Your Grace Bishop Yevgeny, dear brother and sisters, with great love have I come today to this place in order to ask for a blessing of our venerable Father Sergius. I remember my student's years when we would come and venerate his relics every day. Thank you for not forgetting our country Iberia, a place of the Most Holy Mother of God, in your prayers'.

As a token of love for the monastery of St. Sergius, His Holiness Ilia presented Archbishop Yevgeny of Vereya with an edition of 'The Knight in Tiger Skin' by Rustaveli artistically executed by Georgian masters in five languages including Russian, saying, 'I would like it to remind you of Georgia'.

His Holiness and Beatitude Ilia presented Archbishops Feognost and Yevgeny with crosses made of vine.

His Holiness Ilia and his delegation venerated the shrines in St. Serapion's Chamber and came down to the crypt of the Cathedral of the Assumption to say the Office for the Dead at the graves of ever-remembered Patriarchs Alexis I and Pimen.

Then His Holiness Ilia and his delegation visited the Moscow Theological Schools including the Academy's Chapel of the Protecting Veil and the Church Archaeology Room. After that His Holiness Ilia met with the faculty and students at the Academy's assembly hall.

The rector, Archbishop Yevgeny, welcomed the high guest, saying, 'Your Holiness, we welcome you here as Primate of the Georgian Orthodox Church who is a guest of the Russian Orthodox Church but in the first place we welcome you as a graduate of the Moscow Theological Academy. It is the place in which you spent your young years. In the late 50s and the early 60s you were first a student of the Moscow Seminary and later defended the Candidate's thesis at the Moscow Theological Academy, and in 1978, the Academic Council of the Moscow Theological Academy made you its honorary member'.

At a request of Archbishop Yevgeny, His Holiness Ilia II addressed those present, noting that the years of his study at the theological schools were the happiest in his life. He spoke about his student's years and his teachers and mentors. In conclusion he wished the audience God's help in their work, saying, 'Value the hours, days and years you are here. Value especially the presence of our venerable Father

Sergius. He helps all those who turn to him. I believe I am his unworthy disciple and servant. I invoke God's blessing on all. May the Lord preserve you!'

Archbishop Yevgeny presented His Holiness Ilia with an album 'Icons from the Collection of the Church Archaeology Room'.

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