



## **Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk celebrates Divine Liturgy for compatriots in the Metropolis of Neapolis and Stavroupolis**

On 29<sup>th</sup> June 2019, with the blessing of Metropolitan Varnavas of Neapolis and Stavroupolis, Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk, chairman of the Moscow Patriarchate's Department for External Church Relations, celebrated the Divine Liturgy at the Church of St. Seraphim of Sarov – a place of worship for the Russian-speaking community of the city of Thessaloniki, Greece. Concelebrating with Metropolitan Hilarion were Archpriest Leo Ephremidis, rector of the church; Archpriest Igor Yakimchuk, DECR secretary for inter-Orthodox relations; Hieromonk Grigory (Sokolov), DECR staff member; and Priest Georgios Emidis.

Among those present was Mr. Alexander Scherbakov, Consul General of the Russian Federation in Thessaloniki.

After the service Metropolitan Hilarion delivered a homily, saying in particular:

“Commemorated throughout Greece today are Ss. Peter and Paul, Leaders of the Apostles – the two apostles whom the Church distinguished in a particular way and glorified as pillars of faith and piety. Today we have heard a reading from St. Paul's Epistle to the Corinthians about God's blessings that this great apostle was vouchsafed, as well as about the ordeals that he suffered. And the Gospel reading has told us how St. Peter, on behalf of the entire community of apostles, confessed that Jesus is the Son of God. In reply the Lord said to him, “... you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the powers of death shall not prevail against it” (Mt 16:18).

“We praise the Leaders of the Apostles for their great deeds. We glorify St. Peter as the rock of faith, as a man who from the very beginning and to the very end was faithful to our Lord Jesus Christ. And though in the hard days of trials he denied the Lord, he expiated his denial by the heroism of all his life afterwards.

“And we praise St. Paul as a man who laid the foundation of Christian theology. We read his epistles in the New Testament. They are not very easy to understand, and it was Apostle Peter who once said that there was something abstruse in these letters, which some misinterpreted to their own perdition. However, nowadays, apart from the epistles themselves, there are many commentaries that help us

understand what St. Paul was saying.

“Commentaries on St. Paul’s epistles were written, among others, by St. Theophanes the Recluse, whom we are commemorating today in accordance with the old calendar. In his times St. Theophanes was a man who thoroughly and systematically studied the Holy Scripture. He not only read, but also interpreted each and all of St. Paul’s letters. If we want to understand what the apostle was saying, what he meant, we can refer to these remarkable commentaries revealing for us the meaning of the apostle’s words.

“Let us refer to the heritage of the Holy Apostles and ask them for instruction, so that we all may understand Who Jesus Christ is, why He came into this world and, most importantly, what we need Him for. Both Leaders of the Apostles, as well as other apostles and holy fathers and doctors of the Church have taught us that the Lord Jesus Christ is God Incarnate. He is the God Who became man. He came in order to live with us and in us. And every time we come to a church of God to celebrate the Divine Liturgy, every time we partake of the Holy Mysteries of Christ, we do not see, but feel that our Lord Jesus Christ Himself enters our body, that His Blood becomes our blood, and His Body becomes a part of our body. The Lord enlightens us with His grace from inside, helping us to live our life and carry the cross that He laid upon us, as well as to endure in all humility the sufferings and ordeals befalling us.

“Dear fathers, brothers and sisters, I would like to wish all of you firm faith. May God’ help be with you in your walk of life, and may the Most Holy Theotokos cover you with her precious omophorion, protecting you from every evil, and may the prayers of the Holy Apostles help you follow the path of faith – the path leading to the Heavenly Kingdom. Amen.”

*DECR Communication Service*

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