Patriarch Kirill meets with Primate of Orthodox Church of Alexandria



On July 27, 2018, His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia met with His Beatitude Theodoros II, Patriarch of Alexandria and All Africa, who had come to Moscow for the celebrations devoted to the 1030th anniversary of the Baptism of Rus. They met at the patriarchal and synodal resident at the St. Daniel Monastery in Moscow.

They were joined in their talk by Metropolitan Athanasios of Kyrene, representative of the Patriarch of Alexandria to the Patriarchal See of Moscow; Metropolitan Damaskinos of Johannesburg and Pretoria; and Archimandrite Daniel (Biazis), general secretary of the Patriarch of Alexandria Holy Synod, who accompanied Patriarch Theodoros during his visit.

From the Russian Orthodox Church there were Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk, chairman of the Moscow Patriarchate department for external church relations (DECR); Metropolitan Arseniy of Istra,

first vicar of the Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia; Archpriest Nikolay Balashov, DECR vice-chairman; and Archpriest Igor Yakimchuk, DECR secretary for inter-Orthodox relations.

Before the talks the Primates of the Orthodox Churches of Russia and Alexandria said a prayer at the residence chapel dedicated to All the Saints of the Russian Church.

After the thanksgiving, Patriarch Kirill welcomed the high guest thanking Patriarch Theodoros and his party for the efforts they made to come to the capital city for the anniversary days.

'You have brought us' His Holiness said, 'a blessing from the holy city of Alexandria and your Church, one of the oldest Churches in the Orthodox world. Its history is that of universal Orthodoxy, for the Patriarch of Alexandria has always played a very special role in the family of Local Orthodox Churches. Today you occupy a see that outstanding fathers of the Church did before you, and their names are known to every Orthodox Christian. We are happy that it is you who will lead the anniversary celebrations in Moscow with a blessing you have brought to our Church and our people from the holy Church of Alexandria.

'We are glad to see you – our brother and friend of the Russian Orthodox Church, a friend of our people. I very much hope that the days of your stay in Moscow will be very important for the Russian Orthodox Church and, in some sense, for the whole Orthodoxy because we will together celebrate the event which happened 1030 years ago and which changed the course of history. It initiated the enlightenment of a vast territory equal to a quarter of the whole globe with the light of the truth of Christ. And throughout 1030 years, great deeds were performed, such as the Orthodox mission among both the Russian people and other nations living in this great territory.

'Certainly, you as a First Hierarch, who has as his main task to carry out mission in the African continent, feel a kinship with the history of the unique mission of Orthodoxy in the Eurasian part of the part of the world called Russia.

We rejoice in your stay in Moscow anticipating the joy of common liturgical celebrations. From my heart I say: You are welcome, Your Beatitude! Christ is in our midst!'

Speaking in response, His Beatitude Theodoros said, 'From the bottom of my heart, I would like to express my joy over my stay with you, Your Holiness. I was sitting in my office; before me was a map of the African continent, and I marked the routes I have already taken and the routes I am going to take. I was thinking about how I will manage to visit the parts of the continent unknown to me. Suddenly there was a knock at my door; the secretary came in and said that a letter came from Moscow. And I immediately give an instruction to write in reply that I will certainly go and visit my brother Patriarch of

Moscow and All Russia. How can one forget what the old Church of Alexandria owes to the great Russian Orthodox Church in the sphere of missionary work? How can I forget the names of the Patriarchs of the Church of Alexandria – Christopher, Parthenius, Nicholas, who came to the Russian Church which always supported them? I have come here to celebrate the 1030th anniversary of the Baptism of Rus'. I remember how three decades ago in the same Monastery of St. Daniel, then still an archimandrite I took part in the anniversary celebrations of the Millennium of the Baptism of Rus'. And hardly had I stepped today in the territory of the monastery, I fell into remembrances of that'.

Then the Primates had a talk. Addressing the high guest, Patriarch Kirill said, 'I wholeheartedly thank you for your coming to us to share the joy of all our people who celebrate the 1030th anniversary of the Baptism of Rus'. I am also glad that you and I meet frequently. We remember your coming to Moscow for the centenary of the restoration of Patriarchate in the Russian Orthodox Church and the enthronement of His Holiness Patriarch Tikhon. At that time you had an opportunity to visit St. Petersburg and Yekaterinburg to see our church life not only in the capital city but also in other places'.

Patriarch Kirill underscored that the celebration of the 1030th anniversary of the Baptism of Rus' is associated for the Russian faithful with special spiritual experiences. 'The baptism of Prince Vladimir really changed the course of history of the Slavic civilization and the consequences of the adoption of Eastern Christianity had a decisive importance for the formation of our national self-awareness and our culture', he said.

'Our people took Orthodoxy so close to heart', he continued, 'and it took root in their life so rapidly also because Prince Vladimir himself showed an example of how much his life might change under the influence of the preaching of the gospel. Before his baptism he was a very cruel ruler who actually had no moral constraints. He used to ruin the lives of the women who became his victims. And now this terrible man, through the power of God's grace, changes in no time. Certainly, it could not stay unnoticed by people, and Prince Vladimir's personal example was very important for all the people'.

His Holiness noted that historians offered different explanations why Prince Vladimir adopted Christianity from Byzantium and said, 'Perhaps, as a statesmen he had some political considerations but no political motives could change his personality, his soul, but only the grace of God could. That is why our people embraced Orthodoxy as a faith improving a person and that is why the Christian peaching became so attractive for our people. The subsequent history was marked with a multitude of saints, their images have gone down our history and folklore, and it is the personalities of saints that have formed the moral ideal of the Russians'.

'Now we have run through 1030 difficult years', His Holiness continued, 'For almost 300 year we were under a foreign yoke, fratricidal wars, social and political upheavals, and revolutions. There were terrible

wars, called world wars. If today, in the 21st century, we celebrate the 1030th anniversary of the Baptism of Rus', it means that God is really present in history and God's grace is present in our people. The hand of God is visible in history, because we were to be a different people and a completely different country, and nobody knows if we could have at all over a thousand years of our history'.

Patriarch Kirill pointed out that the celebration of this anniversary, along with a historic, had also great spiritual significance and noted with gratitude the forthcoming participation in them of the Patriarch of Alexandria and representatives of other Local Orthodox Churches. 'Tomorrow we will celebrate the Divine Liturgy at the Cathedral Square in the Kremlin and then will march in a solemn procession with the cross to the monument to Prince Vladimir. It has been relatively recently erected next to the Kremlin wall. We will have an opportunity to address people but, most importantly, to pray together and glorify the Lord for the mercy He has poured on our people, to ask for His help and blessing upon the further historical journey along historical paths yet unknown to us, but with hope for God's mercy and His grace-giving help'.

Having thanked Patriarch Kirill for kind words and cordial welcome, His Beatitude Theodoros II said in particular, 'I anticipate that Alexandria will be with Moscow again and again – the Church of Alexandria which bears the load of martyrdom, theology, millennium-long history, and the Patriarchate of Moscow next to her, full of power and living witness'.

His Beatitude drew the attention of his interlocutor to the role played in history by three great personalities: 'Alexander of Macedonia was a short but very strong man. He changed the world history. I often read about his life, about what he did, and always feel excitement when I read about how he planned the construction of Alexandria, the beloved city in which I live. This military leader was full of life and optimism; his trace in history is felt to this day. The second great man is Constantin the Great. He had many gifts. This man also changed history and for this reason was named the Great. And the third man is Prince Vladimir. Just as Constantine the Great was proud of Constantinople, the city he built, so Vladimir was proud of his creation. By his side were his holy grandmother (Olga Equal-to-the-Apostles), and a very nice spouse of Byzantine origin, Princess Anna. They made a great impact on this man and, thanks to it as well, we can celebrate today the 1030th anniversary of the Baptism of Rus'. And the fact that they endured so many trials and continue their history speaks that the Lord Himself blesses your people and your country. It is not for nothing that history has preserved the naming of Rus' as Holy.

His Beatitude also spoke about his participation in the work of the recent conference in Bari, Italy, devoted to the situation of Christians in the Middle East. The conference was initiated by Pope Francis of Rome. It brought together heads and representatives of Christian Churches in the Middle East. The Russian Orthodox Church was represented by Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk, chairman of the Moscow Patriarchate department for external church relations. Among its topics was the problem of

refugees. ‘The Patriarchate of Alexandria has jurisdiction over Lebanon, which I believe to be an enormous cemetery, as my faithful continually drown in the sea’, he said about people who, in escaping actions of the extremists seek to reach European countries by sea.

Patriarch Theodoros also conveyed to Patriarch Kirill words of gratitude from Coptic Patriarch Tawadros, stressing that the Russian Church does not forget about Christians in the Middle East.

‘We are a great Christian family. It is good that you never forget about us, Your Holiness. God has installed you to the Patriarchal throne so that in your person we could have support, courage and aid. Please remain as strong as you are now. It is wonderful that we live helping each other’, His Beatitude said.

In memory of the meeting, Patriarch Kirill presented Patriarch Theodoros II with a set of Eucharistic vessels. His Beatitude gifted to His Holiness an icon of St. Patriarch Cyril (Lukaris) and a commemoration medal.

DECR Communication Service

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