



Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk visits Bari

On December 18-19, 2017, Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk, head of the Moscow Patriarchate's Department for External Church Relations (DECR), visited Bari, Italy, with the blessing of His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia.

On December 18 the DECR chairman met with Mons. Francesco Cacucci, Archbishop of Bari-Bitonto at the archbishop's palace. Metropolitan Hilarion expressed his joy over an opportunity to visit Bari at the end of the year which was marked by the unprecedented event: a particle of the relics of St. Nicholas, Archbishop of Myra in Lycia was brought to Moscow and St. Petersburg, called it a historical event and thanked Archbishop Cacucci for his personal assistance as well as for hospitality always rendered to the Russian Orthodox pilgrims. Archbishop Cacucci thanked Metropolitan Hilarion for his visit and fraternal talk during which cooperation between the Moscow Patriarchate and the Diocese of Bari was discussed.

That same day in the evening Metropolitan Hilarion was awarded a degree of doctor *honoris causa* of the Faculty of Theology of Apulia. The ceremony, chaired by Archbishop Cacucci, was held at the St. Nicholas Institute of patristic and ecumenical studies.

On December 19, the commemoration day of St. Nicholas, Metropolitan Hilarion officiated at the Divine Liturgy in the upper church the Basilica where the relics of the great saint have been rested for 930 years. Concelebrating were Metropolitan Kirill of Yekaterinburg and Verkhnyaya Tura, Metropolitan Filipp of Poltava and Mirgorod, Bishops Iriney of Orsk and Gai, Alexy of Buzuluk and Sorochinsk, and Mefody of Kamensk and Alapaevsk. Praying at the liturgy were many ordained and lay persons from Russia, Ukraine and other countries in the canonical territory of the Russian Orthodox Church.

Attending the service were Archbishop Cacucci, Fr. Gioivanni Distante, prior of the St. Nicholas Dominican community, and Fr. Hyacinthe Destivelle of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity.

In his homily delivered after the Liturgy Metropolitan Hilarion congratulated all the worshippers on the commemoration day of St. Nicholas, who is deeply venerated in the Russian Orthodox Church and always heeds to requests addressed to him in prayer. Metropolitan Hilarion reminded all those present of the bringing of a particle of the relics of St. Nicholas to Russia last May-July and said that some two

and a half million believers venerated the relics. Also, Metropolitan Hilarion thanked Archbishop Cacucci for his assistance in arranging this unforgettable event and for an opportunity he provides for representatives of the Russian Orthodox Church to celebrate at the relics of the saint. A short prayer service was celebrated at the reliquary in the crypt.

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