



**THE RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH**

Department for External Church Relations

## **Archbishop Anastasios visits the Moscow church of Our Lady the Joy to All the Afflicted**

December 3, 2017 – Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk, head of the Moscow Patriarchate department for external church relations (DECR), celebrated the Divine Liturgy at the church of Our Lady the Joy to All the Afflicted-in-Bolshaya Ordynka. His Eminence was assisted by the parish clergy. The deacon's ministry was led by Protodeacon Vladimir Nazarkin, assistant to the DECR chairman.

Among the worshippers in the sanctuary was His Beatitude Anastasios, Archbishop of Tirana and All Albania, who had come to Moscow for the celebrations marking the centenary of the restoration of Patriarchate in the Russian Orthodox Church.

The Primate of the Albanian Orthodox Church was accompanied by the members of his delegation including Metropolitan Joan of Korca, Metropolitan Nathaniel of Amantia, Bishop Flavian of Cherepovets and Belozersk, and Deacon Spyridon Topanxha.

Worshipping in the sanctuary was also Bishop Irenaeus of Sacramento, vicar of the diocese of Western America, Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia.

After the Prayer of Fervent Supplication, Metropolitan Hilarion read a prayer for peace in Ukraine.

After the Liturgy, Metropolitan Hilarion addressed himself to His Beatitude Anastasios and his delegation with words of greeting. He said:

‘Your Beatitude Metropolitan Anastasios of Tirana and All Albania,

Your Eminences and Your Grace:

I would like to wholeheartedly welcome you to this holy church in which the Icon of the Most Holy Mother of God ‘Joy to All the Afflicted’ is venerated with piety. To this miracle-working icon of the Heavenly Queen thousands of Orthodox believers resort with prayers for healing, spiritual and physical fortitude and the prayer that the Most Holy Mother of God may not leave us in the future too without Her help and intercession.

Your Beatitude! We greet you as the Primate of a confessor Church. Addressing the assembly of bishops of the Russian Orthodox Church yesterday, you said that in the 20<sup>th</sup> century the Albanian Church was crucified and buried and then rose from the dead.

The Lord promised that the gates of hell would not prevail over His Church. These words are referred to the Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church. We know however that Local Orthodox Churches in various epochs endured persecution. And our Russian Orthodox Church went through the gravest and cruelest persecution in the 20<sup>th</sup> century 20s and 30s. Little remained of the previous pre-revolutionary splendor of the Russian Orthodox Church. Almost all the clergy were executed by shooting; almost all the churches were closed; many churches were blown up or destroyed.

But the Albanian Orthodox Church, after the atheistic regime was established in Albania, was eliminated completely – not a single priest, not a single church remained. Albania proclaimed militant atheism as its official doctrine, and any religion, any manifestation of the religious sentiment was banned.

It was only in 1991, when the shackles of the atheistic regime fell down, that the revival of the

Church became possible. And Your Beatitude was given the most arduous mandate by the Universal Church to revive the Orthodox Church in Albania. You started from scratch. In the hardest situation you worked to restore what was possible to restore and created the new. Thanks to your apostolic efforts, the Albanian Orthodox Church has risen from the dead and strengthened. And throughout Albania today Orthodox churches stand, payers are lifted up to the Lord and the Bloodless Sacrifice is offered. Though not without obstacles, today the Albanian Church bears her witness before the world.

Today we greet Your Beatitude as a man whose feat in this life is like that of the apostles. We welcome you venerable brothers who are accompanying you. We wish God's help to the Albanian Orthodox Church and to Your Beatitude. May the Lord fortify you in your efforts and preserve you for many good ears'.

For the prayerful memory of the festive divine service, Metropolitan Hilarion presented the Primate of the Albanian Orthodox Church with the Russian version of His Beatitude's book, which is being prepared for publication in Russia.

In his response, Archbishop Anastasios said, 'I am aware of the great heroism and courage with which the Russian Orthodox Church went through the trials in the years of communism. We have been together with my dear friend His Holiness Patriarch Kirill for 48 years now, both in the hard years and in the recent blessed years. This unity in both sorrow and joy is especially typical of us, the Orthodox. We feel each other's hardships and joys as our own'.

His Beatitude laid special emphasis on the calling of all the Orthodox Christians today to bear witness to the love of Christ before the contemporary world.

'Every time when we celebrate the Liturgy, we feel our unity and bonds with the Orthodox Christians of the whole world', he said, 'And standing in the center of our unity is not some external magnificence but the Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist, the embodiment of God's love. This gives us joy and ability to overcome trials as well as the hope and resources to continue our work for the good of the Church of Christ'.

This exchange was following by praising at the venerated icons of the Most Holy Mother of God 'Joy to All the Afflicted'.

*DECR Communication Service*