Delegation of Russian Orthodox Church attends annual ceremony in commemoration of Russian prisoners of war who died in Slovenia during World War I



On 27-31 July 2017, with the blessing of His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia, a delegation of the Russian Orthodox Church, led by Metropolitan Pavel of Khanty-Mansiysk and Surgut, visited the Republic of Slovenia. The delegation also included singers of the choir of the Patriarchal Cathedral of the Holy Theophany in Moscow.

The representatives of the Moscow Patriarchate arrived in Slovenia on July 27, to attend the celebrations marking the 101st anniversary of foundation of the Russian Chapel of the Holy Prince Vladimir, Equal-to-the-Apostles, at the Vršič Pass, built to commemorate the Russian prisoners of war who died in Slovenia during World War I.

On July 28, Metropolitan Pavel of Khanty-Mansiysk and Surgut visited in Ljubljana the Cathedral of Ss. Cyril and Methodius, Equal-to-the-Apostles, the Enlighteners of the Slavs, which belongs to the Diocese of Zagreb and Ljubljana of the Serbian Orthodox Church. There he had a meeting with Metropolitan Porfirije of Zagreb and Ljubljana.

Later Metropolitan Pavel met with Archbishop Stanislav Zore of Ljubljana (Roman Catholic Church) at the palace of Catholic Archbishops of Ljubljana and visited the Catholic Cathedral of St. Nicholas the Wonderworker.

On the same day the delegation of the Russian Church attended a reception given in their honour in the town of Celje by Bishop Stanislav of Celje (Roman Catholic Church).

In the evening of July 28, the choir of the Patriarchal Cathedral of the Theophany gave a concert of religious music at the Franciscan Church of the Annunciation in Ljubljana.

On July 29, the delegation visited a Russian church near the town of Kranjska Gora, where a requiem service was celebrated in commemoration of those who had died under the Vršič Pass.

In the evening, a joint concert of the choir of the Patriarchal Cathedral of the Theophany and the choir of Kranjska Gora took place in the town square.

On July 30, a memorial ceremony and a requiem service were conducted in the Russian Chapel at the Vršič Pass. Among those in attendance were Mr. Borut Pahor, President of Slovenia; Mr. Karl Erjavec, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of Slovenia; Mr. Janez Hrovat, Mayor of Kranjska Gora; Mr. Nikolai Nikiforov, Minister of Communications and Mass Media of the Russian Federation; Bishop Stanislav of Celje; Mr. Doku Zavgayev, Russia's Ambassador to Slovenia; Mr. Primož Šeligo, Slovenia's Ambassador to Russia; Mr. Saša Geržina, President of the Slovenia-Russia Association; and Mr. Vladimir Kochin, Executive Director of the Russkiy Mir Foundation.

Metropolitan Pavel of Khanty-Mansiysk and Surgut celebrated a litiya in commemoration of the Russian soldiers and then addressed all those present, noting that the chapel, built in the early 20th century by the Russian prisoners of war and preserved with care by the people of Slovenia, has become the centre of unity of the peoples of Russia and Slovenia, the symbol of their dialogue and their aspirations to the future.

That same day a reception was given for the guests of honour, and a meeting was held between members of the Slovenia-Russia Association and the Russian delegation.

In the evening, the guests from Russia laid flowers to the Memorial to the Sons of Russia and the Soviet Union Who Died in Slovenia During the First and the Second World Wars. The monument was opened in Ljubljana in 2016.

On July 31, the delegation of the Russian Church departed for Moscow.

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The Russian chapel is a memorial commemorating the Russian soldiers who died in Slovenia during World War I. It is situated 1611 meters above sea level, under the Vršič Pass.

During World War I, a prisoner-of-war camp was organized near the town of Kranjska Gora, and a road across the Vršič Pass was built by the Russian prisoners. The camp functioned in 1915-1917. Over that period, some ten thousand people died there of back-breaking labour and hunger. To commemorate their fallen comrades, the Russian prisoners constructed a small wooden chapel not far from their temporary barracks.

In the 1920s, the road across the Vršič Pass was rebuilt, and the remains of the Russian prisoners of war were reburied in a mass grave near the chapel. A pyramid-shaped obelisk with the inscription that read *To the Sons of Russia* was installed on top of the chapel.

In 1995 the Russian chapel was given the status of an object of cultural heritage. In 2005, the area, adjacent to the chapel, was transformed into a memorial park.

In 2016, Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk, chairman of the Moscow Patriarchate's Department for External Church Relations, attended the commemorative events marking the centenary of foundation of the Russian chapel, and celebrated a litiya for the Russian prisoners of war who died in Slovenia during World War I.

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