Metropolitan Hilarion celebrates liturgy on the 30th anniversary of his monastic vows at Monastery of the Holy Spirit in Vilnius



From June 18 to 20, 2017, Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk, head of the Moscow Patriarchate department for external church relations (DECR) was on a visit to Lithuania.

In the morning of June 19, the commemoration day of St. Hilarion the New, Metropolitan Hilarion celebrated the Divine Liturgy at the Monastery of the Holy Spirit in Vilnius, where on that day 30 years ago he took monastic vows. His concelebrants were Metropolitan Innokenty of Lithuania, Metropolitan Agapit of Mogilev-Podolsk and Shargorod, Bishop Adrian of Rzhev and Toropets and Bishop Philaret of Lvov and Galich.

After the service, the Office for the Dead was said for Archbishop Viktorin (Belyaev), the hierarch who stood at the beginning of Metropolitan Hilarion's spiritual journey.

Metropolitan Innokenty congratulated His Eminence on his name day and the 30th anniversary of his monastic vows.

In his remarks in response, Metropolitan Hilarion said:

‘With emotions I crossed over the threshold of this holy church, in which on this day 30 years ago, when the memory of St. Hilarion the New was celebrated, I was made a monk by then father superior of the Vilnius Monastery of the Holy Spirit, the late Archimandrite Nikita with the blessing of Archbishop Viktorin of eternal memory.

For each monk the day of monastic vows is an especially memorable day because from that time on a new life begins for him, as if he is reborn. It is not accidental that during monastic vows a person receives a new name: not the one he himself wished or asked for but the name given by he who makes him a monk. And the fact that one strips his civil clothes and on one’s knees kisses the holy altar and joins the holy monastic community underscores that a new life begins for him.

I was twenty when I took monastic vows, and Archimandrite Nikita explained to me the choice of the name: First, my tonsure coincided with the commemoration day of St. Hilarion the New; secondly, this man of God took monastic vows when he, too, was twenty. Father Nikita told me to remember the example of my saint. Of course, since that time I honour this day in a special way, and the holy monastery, in which my monastic service began, in which I was ordained as deacon, in which my priestly ministry began – all this I remember in a special way and cherish in my heart.

In today’s Reading of the Gospel, we heard the words of the Lord Jesus Christ that the harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. These are the words the Lord said to His disciples, adding, ‘Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field’ (Mt. 9:38). In our time when the Church is reviving everywhere, it seems to us that there is not only a plenty of harvest, but also many workers. Today there seem to be no want of priests or bishops or those who come to study in theological schools to become pastors or those who enter monasteries to take monastic vows.

But in the time when I began my church service it was completely different. Today we have over 900 monasteries, but at that time there were only twenty monasteries in the whole Russian Orthodox Church. One of them was this Vilnius Monastery of the Holy Spirit, which was not closed for some reason. There was a small monastic community in it, and to that monastery I used to come when I was still a schoolboy to get initiated to the beginning of monastic life. Here I met His Eminence Viktorin, who later ordained me, and Father Nikita and the brethren, many of whom are still here while others are not there any longer – they passed to the other life.

I hold especially dear today the presence of those together with whom we began monastic life in this monastery. His Grace Adrian, who was hierodeacon when I came, became later a hieromonk and hegumen. He helped me to adapt, as they day nowadays, to feel their own one in his small monastic family in which each lived his own life and at the same time all had a common life as well, when we were going to the church for services, sang together in choir and shared in the meals…

And I am grateful to Metropolitan Innokenty, of course, the archpastor of this diocese, who accorded us all hospitality today. His Eminence invited us, gave his blessing upon our celebrating the Divine Liturgy at the relics of holy martyrs and praying for our holy Church and our late brothers whom we remember, love and cherish in our hearts.

Thirty years have passed but I know the names and remember from our youth at least half of my concelebrant presbyters. It is so joyful that there is a plentiful harvest and many workers who came to the field three decades ago and continue to work hard today taking care of the beauty of the churches and welfare of their flock.

During these years I have felt in a special way the intercession of the holy martyrs of Vilnius. I was made a monk at their relics and at their relics I began my monastic life. Then, as it is today, each day in this holy monastery began with the brethren's common prayer at the relics of holy martyrs and each day we asked for their blessing on our work to fulfil our monastic tasks. The holy martyrs of Vilnius - Antoniy, Ioann and Yevstafiy have a special power, and everyone who turns to them knows how quickly they respond to the prayer.

On this day, I would like to thank in a special way those who have already passed to the other world. Archbishop Viktorin of eternal memory, who was an example of bishop for me because he celebrated the Divine Liturgy with great reverence. He was deeply rooted in the Church's life of prayer, was an expert in the church statute and looked after the beauty of church singing. He treated me, as a schoolboy and later a young man, with sincerely paternal love. When as a schoolboy I used to come to the monastery almost every school holidays – in summer, winter, spring and autumn – I always acted as his subdeacon. He also took me to his parish trips.

When after I finished school and military service I face the question of where I should bend my steps, the Lord again pointed at this place to me. I came here and His Eminence Viktorin said: You enter in obedience, now your life does not depend on you. It will be as we dispose of it. And I did not have to wait long for the tonsure, deacon's and priest's ordinations precisely because there were few workers and all this happened fast. Later we all worked together and witnessed the Church's revival throughout the space of historical Rus', just as it revived here, in the diocese of Vilnius and Lithuania'.

Metropolitan Hilarion thanked Metropolitan Innokenty and all the archpastors who shared in the festivity and all the clergy of the diocese of Vilnius and Lithuania and invoked God's blessing on all the Orthodox flock in the country.

On the same day, Metropolitan Hilarion said the Office for the Dead at the grave of Archimandrite Nikita (Yakerovich), who made His Eminence a monk thirty years ago.

In the evening Metropolitan Hilarion met with the Catholic Archbishop-Metropolitan Gintaras Grusas of Vilnius. They discussed the bilateral relations between the Russian Orthodox Church and the Roman Catholic Church in Lithuania.

On June 20, after the liturgy at the Monastery of the Holy Spirit, Metropolitan Hilarion led a procession with the cross to the miracle-working Istrobramsky Icon of the Most Holy Mother of God and presided over the thanksgiving at the icon.

During his trip, Metropolitan Hilarion was accompanied by Hieromonk Ioann (Kopeikin), pro-rector of the Ss Cyril and Methodius Institute of Post-Graduate Studies, and Russia's Honoured Artist A. Puzakov, conductor of the Moscow Synodal Choir.

DECR Communication Service

Photos from the site of the ROC diocese of Vilnius and Lithuania

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