Patriarch Kirill meets with Italian delegation accompanying the relics of St. Nicholas



May 22, 2017 – His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia met with the Catholic Archbishop of Bari, Mons. Francesco Cacucci, and the Italian delegation who brought the shrine with a part of the honourable relics of St. Nicholas the Wonderworker, Archbishop of Myra in Lycia, from Bari to Moscow. The meeting took place at the Supreme Church Council Hall at the Cathedral Church of Christ the Saviour.

The Italian delegation included Archbishop Celestino Migliore, apostolic nuncio to Russia; Mons. Andrea Palmieri, vice-president of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity (PCPCU); Mons. Angelo Romita, director of the Bari-Bitonto diocesan office to ecumenism; Rev. P. Ciro Capotosto, rector of the Basilica of St. Nicholas; Rev. P. Hyacinthe Destivelle, PCPCU staff member; Dr. Michele Emiliano, governor of Puglia; Dr. Antonio De Caro, Mayor of Bari; and Prof. Francesco Introna, director of the Department of Medicine, University of Bari.

The Russian Orthodox Church was represented by Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk, Archbishop Sergiy of Solnechnogorsk, head of the Moscow Patriarchate administrative secretariat; Bishop Antoniy of Bogorodsk, head of the Moscow Patriarchate office for the institutions abroad; Archpriest Mikhail Ryazantsev, ecclesiarch of the Church of Christ the Saviour; Archpriest Andrey Boitsov, rector of the St. Nicholas patriarchal metochion in Bari; Hieromonk Stephan (Igumnov), DECR secretary for inter-Christian relations. There were also Mr. V. Suchkov, head of the Moscow municipal department for ethnic policy and interreligious relations; and Mr. I. Kuzmin, head of the department for external economic and international relations.

“This joyful event has become another concrete result of our meeting with Pope Francis of Rome, which dealt with matters concerning bilateral relations between our two Churches, as well as Orthodox-Catholic cooperation in the most burning issues of today”, Patriarch Kirill said, welcoming the guests, “The Joint Statement says that ‘in the contemporary world, Catholics and Orthodox are called to work together fraternally in proclaiming the Good News of salvation, to testify together to the moral dignity and authentic freedom of the person, ‘so that the world may believe’ (Jn 17:21)’. Without any doubt, the brining to Russia of the relics of the great man of God who is venerated in East and West is a vivid example of our common witness to the Christian faith”.

According to His Holiness, ‘in our difficult time when in the field of international relations we see the escalation of conflicts and confrontations, cultural and spiritual cooperation is one of the most effective means for Churches to help overcome enmity among nations.

‘Russia and Italy have a tremendous cultural legacy, His Holiness continued, ‘this legacy was formed primarily by the Christian faith of our nations, and by no means should we lose today this foundation of our cultural dialogue. <…> In this connection, I would like to remind you of the great interest our society showed in the exhibition in Moscow, which presented exhibits from the treasury of the Vatican Museum, including canvasses on Biblical and Christian themes. A great number of people who visited that exhibition also bear witness to our spiritual and cultural community’.

Speaking about the cooperation between the Russian Church and the Roman Catholic Church in Italy, Patriarch Kirill pointed to the pastoral care for Russian compatriots living in the Apennines taken in over 60 parishes of the Moscow Patriarchate and expressed hope for the development of their relations with appropriate institutions of the Catholic Church. In this connection, His Holiness made a special mention of the constructive cooperation established by the diocese of Bari and the Pontifical Basilica with the St. Nicholas Patriarchal Representation in Bari which was handed over to the Russian Orthodox Church in 2008.

His Holiness expressed profound gratitude to Dr. Michele Emiliano for assistance in this important work

when he was Mayor of Bari in 2008. Patriarch Kirill also thanked the present mayor of the city, Dr. Antonio de Caro for having created favourable conditions for Orthodox pilgrims who come to venerate the relics of St. Nicholas.

As His Holiness said, the bringing of the shrine to Moscow became possible thanks to the participation of the diocese of Bari and the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity. An important role was played by Italian specialists led by Prof. Introna, who solved the difficult problem of extracting a part of the relics of the saint from the sarcophagus.

‘I believe all our common efforts made with the participation of the Russian Orthodox Church and Metropolitan Hilarion’s department for external church relations and his colleagues have been crowned with a remarkable result, as the relics are in Moscow today. And already now tens of thousands of people are standing in line to venerate the shrine’, His Holiness concluded.

In his response, Archbishop Francesco Cacucci of Bari-Bitonto noted that the relics of St. Nicholas the Wonderworker ‘belong not only to the city of Bari, but also constitute the legacy of the entire Christendom’. He described the Havana meeting as ‘one of the unique events since the division of the Churches, the so-called 1053 Great Schism’.

‘Almost every day, requests come to us to share the relics of St. Nicholas, and what has happened is clearly the privileged status of our attitude towards the Russian Orthodox Church and personally to you, Your Holiness’, the archbishop stated.

In conclusion of the meeting Patriarch Kirill presented Archbishop Francesco Cacucci with a patriarchal cross.

Then, at the Throne-Hall, Patriarch Kirill presented Italian delegation members with the Russian Orthodox Church awards in recognition of their efforts to bring the relics of St. Nicholas to Russia.

His Holiness asked Archbishop Francesco Cacucci to convey to Pope Francis an old icon of St. Nicholas and commemorative medals associated with his ministry.

Patriarchal Press Service

DECR Communication Service

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