



Metropolitan Hilarion celebrates Divine Liturgy at Bulgarian Orthodox Church representation in Moscow



On October 30, 2016, Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk, head of the Moscow Patriarchate's department for external church relations (DECOR), celebrated the Divine Liturgy at the church of the Dormition of the Most Holy Mother of God – the Moscow representation of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church.

His Eminence was assisted by Archimandrite Feoktist (Dimitrov), rector of the Volga Orthodox Institute of St. Alexis of Moscow, Archpriest Dmitry Leskin and clergy of the church.

After the Prayer of Fervent Supplication, His Eminence lifted up a prayer for peace in Ukraine.

In conclusion of the service, Metropolitan Hilarion said a prayer at the icon of St. John of Rila.

Upon the dismissal, Archimandrite Feoktist greeted the DECR chairman and presented him with an icon of the Most Holy Mother of God 'The Three Hands'.

Addressing the congregation, Metropolitan Hilarion said:

'I cordially greet you all on the occasion of this Sunday and the commemoration day of St. John of Rila, a man who is honoured in the Bulgarian Orthodox Church no less than St. Sergius of Radonezh, the miracle-worker of All Rus' is honoured in the Russian Orthodox Church. It may be not accidental that one of the most venerated Russian saints, St. John of Kronstadt, bore the name of St. John of Rila.

'Our two Churches and our two peoples are tied by very many things. We all are heirs of Ss Cyril and Methodius Equal-to-the-Apostles, and their feat of enlightenment. It was these saints who brought Holy Scriptures to the Slavic nations together with the liturgy in Slavonic and it was their feat that initiated the spreading of Orthodox Christian faith in our lands.

'In the hard years when Bulgaria was under the Turkish yoke Russia helped the Bulgarian people and the Russian Tsar Alexander II is honoured by them as their liberator from the Turkish yoke. There is a monument to him standing in the Bulgarian capital, and the liberator tsar is commemorated by the grateful Bulgarian people.

'I have been to Bulgaria on many occasions, also in the Monastery of St. John of Rila, and I was a witness and participant in many celebrations, the most memorable of them was the glorification of Archbishop Seraphim (Sobolev) as a saint. We had prepared this canonization together with the Bulgarian Orthodox Church. With the blessing of our Patriarchs, we set up a joint commission to study the life of this archpastor and his deeds and unanimously proposed him to our Local Churches for canonization. This solemn glorification took place in Sofia and later in Moscow, and today we have another heavenly patron who binds our Churches and our people together.

'During the Divine Liturgy today we heard the Lord Jesus Christ's parable about the sower (Lk. 8:5-15). Some of the seeds he scatters fall on the rocky ground, other seeds fall among thorns, still other seeds fall on good soil. Those on the rocky ground are eaten by birds; those among thorns grow up but are choked by them; those along the road wither because they have no root, and it is only the seed that falls on good soil yields a crop.

The disciples did not understand the parable and asked what it meant. The Lord said, *the seed is the word of God* (Lk. 8:11) and explained that it is sown by our Lord Jesus Christ Himself. However, people understand it differently because someone's hearts are prepared to take in the word of God while others' hearts are not. Some have the word sown in them choked by this life's worries, to others the devil

comes and takes away the word.

‘It was so already in the time of the Lord the Saviour. We can see that some people responded to the preaching of Christ and followed Him, while others failed to respond. And there were those who hated Him the more the longer He preached. It was always so and so it is in our time. The word of God continues to be sown by the Divine Sower through those who is chosen by Him for apostolic ministry, but not everyone and not always respond to this preaching because people behave differently and wish to live differently.

There are those who want to live without God altogether. They say, ‘There is no need for God; we ourselves are masters of our life and will arrange it as we like’. There are those who are outraged at the fact that the Church is free today, that the Church preaches, that the Church gives her own assessment to this or that phenomenon. And they say, ‘Why should the Church direct us? We want to live in our own way’. By this parable the Lord Jesus Christ reminds us that it was always so and will always be so. He will continue sowing His divine word on the earth, but people will continue to give different responses to Him.

‘From the history of the Russian and Bulgarian peoples we know how ardent and warm was the response of our ancestors to the peaching of Christianity in their lands, how great was the love with which they accepted Christ, the Orthodox faith, Holy Scriptures and the Divine Liturgy – all that the enlighteners of the Slavic nations, Cyril and Methodius Equal-to-the-Apostles, brought to them. And we know how wonderful were the fruits of sanctity that the Orthodox faith brought forth in our lands, how many saints showed forth for the past centuries, and we glorify them today as our heavenly intercessors and patrons, among then St. John of Rila who is venerated in both the Bulgarian and Russian Churches.

‘Let us pray to the holy men of God that they may help us to be the good soil on which the seed of the word of God yields an abundant crop. Let us ask in our prayers that they may bless our peoples and our Churches.

‘We expect with love the forthcoming visit of His Holiness Neophytus, Patriarch of Bulgaria, to Moscow for the 70th birthday of His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia.

‘To all of you, dear brothers and sisters, I convey a blessing of His Holiness Patriarch Kirill, and may the Lord preserve us all for many good years’.

DECR Communication Service