



Primate of the Orthodox Church of the Czech Lands and Slovakia leads commencement celebrations at St. Petersburg Theological Academy



On September 1, 2016, during his official visit to the Russian Orthodox Church, His Beatitude Rostislav, Metropolitan of the Czech Lands and Slovakia, celebrated the Divine Liturgy at the church of St. John the Theologian in St. Petersburg Theological Academy and Seminary.

His Beatitude was assisted by the rector of the academy Archbishop Ambrose of Petergof, and the members of the official delegation – Archbishop Michael of Prague and the Czech Lands, Archimandrite Seraphim (Shemyatovsky), rector of the Moscow Representation of the Church of the Czech Lands and Slovakia, Archpriest Nikolay Lischenyuk, rector of the ROC Karlovy Vary Representation, Hieromonk Alexander (Galushka), secretary of the Moscow Representation of the Church of the Czech Lands and Slovakia, and Archdeacon Maxim (Durila), Diocese of Presov.

Among Metropolitan Rostislav's concelebrants were also Bishop Tikhon of Podolsk, vicar of Patriarch

Kirill, Archpriest Vasily Stoikov, first pro-rector of the academy, Archpriest Vyacheslav Kharinov, the academy's spiritual father, and Archpriest Vladimir Khulap, pro-rector for training.

Greeting the guests after the service, Bishop Ambrose said that spiritual ties between the Czech and Russian peoples began in 863, when Saints Cyril and Methodius Equal-to-the-Apostles came to the Great Moravia Principality, while in 1924, with the blessing of Patriarch Tikhon and through the efforts of Russian emigres, a church of the Dormition was built at the Olsany Cemetery in Prague. 'Filled with the feeling of brotherly love, the Russian Church in due course did all that was possible to help the Czechoslovakian Church to survive in the communist environment, and 65 years ago her autocephalous life was initiated', he said.

He warmly thanked the guests for the joy of common prayer and communion. He presented Metropolitan Rostislav with an icon of the Crucifixion of Christ with the Mother of God and John the Theologian standing before the cross, and a pectoral icon with an image of the Risen Saviour.

In his response, Metropolitan Rostislav wished God's help to the faculty and students of the academy, reminding them that many Czech and Slovakian hierarchs and priests had studied in the academy. 'Thus, the spiritual unity between our two Local Churches has always existed and I hope will exist', he said.

After the service a grand reception took place at the academy, devoted to the commencement of the academic year. Opening it, Bishop Ambrose read out a congratulatory message from His Holiness Patriarch Kirill addressed to the theological schools of the Russian Orthodox Church.

Metropolitan Rostislav addressed the students, saying in particular, 'It is gratifying to see in you the successors of the age-old tradition of St. Petersburg theological schools. Coming out from these walls founded in the 18th century were brilliant preachers and educators who carried the light of Orthodoxy and theological education not only in Russia but also in many other countries'.

He expressed hope that young students from Czechia and Slovakia, following the example of the best clergy and hierarchs of their Local Church, will prefer studying in St. Petersburg theological academy and other theological schools of the Russian Orthodox Church. He wished students the inexhaustible thirst of knowledge, tireless studies, creative inspiration, but above all, that each of them may, with God's help, cultivate a real Christian in himself.

'The spirit of time and the fashion of the world will repeatedly appear before you in tempting and bright colours' said Archbishop Ambrose addressing the students, 'but you should always steer your boat to the place pointed by the compass of conscience and the map of the good news, not to there where you

are carried to by the current of mass madness. Be strong in Christ, and He will surely fill the sails of your lives with the breath of the Holy Spirit Who overcomes the power of the current and waves of this world'.

At the rector's request and in accordance with the academic tradition, Metropolitan Rostislav presented each entrant with a copy of Holy Scriptures and gave him his Primatial benediction.

Then Metropolitan Rostislav and his delegation visited the St. Isaac Cathedral, the largest Orthodox church in St. Petersburg.

Later that day, Metropolitan Rostislav visited Kronstadt. He was introduced to the history of the memorial museum apartment of St. John of Kronstadt and its shrines.

At the Navy Cathedral of St. Nicholas, the delegation of the Church of the Czech Lands and Slovakia was welcomed by its rector Archimandrite Alexy (Gangjan). His Beatitude Rostislav prayed at the sanctuary and venerated the cathedral's shrines.

In a talk with the mass media reporters, the Primate of the Church of the Czech Lands and Slovakia gave a high value to this first visit to the Russian Orthodox Church. 'We have common cultural and Slavic roots and we rejoice in it feeling the strong spiritual closeness', His Beatitude said, 'The whole stay here leaves only the best impressions. Wherever we have been, we have been welcomed with love, not politeness, but sincere love'.

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