President Putin visits Russian St. Panteleimon Monastery on Athos



On May 28, 2016, President Vladimir Putin visited Holy Mount Athos. The visit of the head of the Russian State was dated to the millennium of the Russian monasticism on the Holy Mount.

Upon his arrival on Athos, President Putin visited Karyes, administrative center of Athos, in which the Athonite conciliar authorities including the Holy Kinot (Protatis) are located.

President Putin attended the prayer service at the Protatis Cathedral of the Dormition. Praying together with him were Father Paul, proto-epistatis of Mount Athos, and Athonite monks. After the service, President Putin addressed them, saying, ‘I am here for the second time and I can feel a special warmth, kindness and the best attitude not only towards me as head of the Russian State, but also to the Russian people as a whole. Taking place on Holy Mount Athos is an act very important and necessary for the Orthodox world. This act is about the preservation of moral traditions of our society. To a considerable degree, you are a source of this well-being and grace’.

Then Mr. Putin met with members of the Holy Kinot. Present at the meeting were the Greek President Prokopis Paulopoulos, and Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk, head of the Moscow Patriarchate's department for external church relations.

In his speech President Putin stressed the exceptional role that Athos played in the preservation of Orthodox spiritual values. He said,

'Esteemed Mr. President,

Your Reverences,

Dear Fathers:

I am happy to visit Holy Mount Athos again. In the Orthodox tradition, it is believed to be the earthly domain of the Most Holy Mother of God, so everyone who steps on this sacred much-prayed-on soil doubtlessly experiences special feelings.

Mr. President [of Greece] has said that Holy Mount Athos is a unique centre of Orthodoxy and Christianity. For over a thousand years now, the spiritual traditions and our common values have been carefully preserved and enriched here. I fully agree that the role played by Mount Athos is crucial at a time when Orthodoxy is growing stronger in Russia and other countries where it is confessed. Orthodoxy is gaining ground, helping a great number of people, including Russians, to find inner support.

The first written reference to Russians on Mount Athos was made a thousand years ago, which underscores once again the importance of this special place for today's Russia as well. For centuries, Orthodox believers from our country have drawn spiritual strength and knowledge from here.

Today, as we revive our patriotic values, historical memory and traditional culture, we count on building a stronger relationship with Mount Athos. I am happy to note that each year an increasing number of pilgrims are coming here from Russia, already over 11,000 a year. I would like to thank you for your warm hospitality and kindness towards our compatriots.

Among the important evidence to the deepening ties between Russia and Mount Athos are Athonite shrines brought to Russia for veneration. These are the Belt of the Most Holy Mother of God from the Monastery of Vatopedi and the Holy Right Hand Remains of St George from

the Xenophontos Monastery, which have been venerated by hundreds of thousands of Russian Orthodox believers. I want to thank you especially for this. I hope that this lofty and noble mission of Athonite monasteries will continue.

In 2016, we are holding a reciprocal Year of Culture between Russia and Greece. For centuries our people have been united by a common faith and mutual affection, which, as has already been mentioned, have helped our peoples overcome difficulties and vanquish. This was true during the liberation of the Balkans and at other stages of world history. Today's generation of our citizens fully shares these deep mutual feelings.

I am confident that Russia's ties with Holy Mount Athos and Greece as a whole will continue to strengthen, and spiritual kinship and trust will continue to set the tone of our traditionally close and friendly relations.

Christ is risen!'

After that the Russian president visited the Russian St Panteleimon Monastery on Athos.

In the monastery he was welcomed by His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia, Archimandrite Jeremiah (Alyokhin), abbot of the monastery, and the monastic community.

To the sound of the bells, the president and the patriarch, accompanied by the brethren, proceeded to the Cathedral of the Holy Protomartyr and Healer Panteleimon. There was the shrine with the relics of St. Panteleimon installed in the center of the church, at which a thanksgiving was celebrated to the Russian saints who shone forth on Holy Amount Athos.

Prayers were lifted up for 'His Holiness Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople and His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia, for President Vladimir Vladimirovich, the Government and the Armed Forces of our God-Saved Fatherland'.

After the thanksgiving, Patriarch Kirill addressed Mr. Putin and the participants in the service. He presented President Putin with an icon of St. Panteleimon.

President Putin addressed those present, saying,

'Your Holiness,

Dear Father Jeremiah,

Reverend Fathers and Brethren:

I am glad to have this opportunity to visit the Russian St Panteleimon Monastery again. Historically, it carried out and continues to carry out a lofty spiritual mission, for which it is held dear by Orthodox believers in Russia and other countries.

I didn't come here 40 years ago as the Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia did, but I did come here in 2005 and I can attest today that the changes are incredible, just miraculous.

It was with a special feeling that I responded to your invitation to attend the millennium anniversary of the first written account of the presence of Russian monks on Mount Athos.

I want to stress once again that a great work has been carried out to prepare the anniversary celebrations. A joint plan of festive events is being implemented in Russia, Greece and on Mount Athos itself, and for this we should thank both the Ecumenical Patriarch and the Church of Greece.

I want to stress that Russia and Mount Athos have long been united by close religious bonds. The traditions of Mount Athos have played a significant role in the life of the Russian people.

And in our days too, Russia’s interest in Mount Athos remains strong. In recent years, the historic sites linked to the Russian presence on the Holy Mount have been restored and preserved through the energetic efforts of the Russian Orthodox Church and with the support and direct participation of the Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia himself, as well as the benefactors already mentioned by the Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia. It is especially gratifying to see the visible improvements at your monastery.

I am glad to find Your Reverence in good health. You have made an invaluable contribution to the restoration of this holy monastery and have done much for the development of the Russian pilgrimage.

As the Patriarch just said, Russian Athonite monks had to live through difficult times in the 20th century. In fact, out of several thousand monks who lived here in 1913, only dozens were to remain here later, and eventually only a few.

The first visit of Patriarch Pimen of Moscow and All Russia in 1972 actually marked the

beginning of the St Panteleimon Monastery's revival. It was indeed very difficult to travel over here from Russia at that time, and even more difficult to go from here to visit our country. Today, a multitude of believers from Russia and other Slavic countries come to your monastery to venerate the Athonite shrines. It is important to continue doing everything to ensure that this little corner of Russia on Mount Athos continues to foster the spiritual strength of all Orthodox believers.

I would like to thank you, your Reverence, and the brethren for the warm hospitality extended to our compatriots. You show us an example of commitment to the principles of humanity, goodness and justice. These traditional ethical and cultural values are a moral benchmark and support for all of us, crucial for keeping peace, making Russia stronger, and preserving the unity of the Russian Orthodox Church.

I would like to wish your monastery prosperity, and to each of you I wish a robust health and a long life. May the Lord help you.

Christ is risen!'

President Putin and Patriarch Kirill visited the church of Ss. Eubula and Hermolaus, St. Panteleimon's mother and his spiritual teacher, and venerated their holy relics.

Patriarch Kirill and Vladimir Putin had a talk at the monastery's library.

Patriarchal Press Service

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Photos by Patriarchal Press Service

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