



## **Patriarch Kirill prays for persecuted Christians at the Statue of Christ the Redeemer and visits the church of St Zinaida the Martyr in Rio de Janeiro**



On February 20, 2016, His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia held a prayer service for persecuted Christians at the Statue of Christ the Redeemer in Rio de Janeiro.

Among the participants in the service along the Russian Orthodox Church official delegation members were Bishop Peter of Cleveland, Bishop John of Caracas and South America, Bishop John of Canberra, Bishop Leonid of Argentina, Brazil and South America, Bishop Nicholas of Manhattan, Archpriest Anatoly Topala, dean of the Brazilian district of the Diocese of Argentina, Father Sergiy Malashkin, rector of the church of St Zinaida the Martyr in Rio de Janeiro, as well as clergy of the Diocese of Argentina's deanery of Brazil.

Present at the service were Russia' ambassador to Brazil S. Akopov, Russia's general consul in Rio de Janeiro V. Tokmakov; Cardinal Orani João Tempesta, Archbishop of Rio de Janeiro, and other representatives of the Roman Catholic Church in Brazil.

During the prayer service, special petitions were brought to the Lord for Christians persecuted in the Middle East. The Gospel, petitions and prayers were said in Church Slavonic and Portuguese.

After the prayer service, Patriarch Kirill visited the ROC church of St. Zinaida the Martyr in Rio de Janeiro and celebrated a thanksgiving in it.

The service was attended by Russian Ambassador S. Akopov, Consul General V. Tokmakov, Bishop Leonid of Argentina, Brazil and South America and members of the official delegation of the Russian Orthodox Church.

After the thanksgiving, the Patriarch Kirill addressed the congregation. He spoke about his first visit to that church during one of his first trips to Brazil. He found the church in bad shape with no priest, but there had already been a petition from the parishioners to join the Russian Orthodox Church. Eventually, the church was restored and a priest was sent to serve in it. 'Exactly today ten years ago I consecrated this church', His Holiness said, adding, 'Today the church of St Zinaida is of a great importance because Russia's relations with Brazil are growing and the development of these relations will reflect the number of Russians coming here. For them all this church will be a spiritual home, a part of their Motherland'.

Patriarch Kirill thanked Father Roman Kunen for organizing a Mission of the Protecting Veil of the Most Holy Mother of God in Rio de Janeiro, stressing that missionary work should be aimed at involving into church life those who are losing their religiosity or who are far from the faith. 'It concerns not only Brazil but first of all Russia', he noted. 'We address our preaching not only to the baptized but also the non-baptized and those who are baptized but have lost their faith and any connection with the Church. It is exactly a new mission aimed at strengthening the Christian presence in our world', he said.

As a token of the visit, His Holiness presented the parish with an icon of St. Vladimir Equal-to-the-Apostles the Baptizer of Russia.

Later that day Patriarch Kirill attended a reception given on behalf of Cardinal Orani João Tempesta in honour of the Primate of the Russian Orthodox Church. Greeting his high guest, His Eminence thanked him for the visit to Brazil and pointed to the special significance of the prayer service held by His Holiness at the Statue of Christ the Redeemer, stressing that the words that Patriarch Kirill said about the persecuted Christians should be heard throughout the world. The cardinal also spoke about the de-

Christianization of Europe, which is reflected in the Joint Statement of Patriarch Kirill and Pope Francis.

His Eminence presented Patriarch Kirill with an image of the Holy Protomartyr George the Conqueror. Accepting the gift, Patriarch Kirill said that the Orthodox and the Catholic Churches are united by the common spiritual Tradition and the saints of the early Christians, St. George among them. This 'common Tradition of the first ten centuries' shared by the Orthodox and Catholics is referred to in the Joint Statement signed in Havana, Patriarch Kirill reminded and said that today the Orthodox and Catholics have important common tasks and the protection of the Christians roots of the Western civilization is one of them.

After the reception, His Holiness Kirill left for Sao Paulo.

The visit of Patriarch Kirill to Brazil was timed to the 95<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the coming of 1217 Russian refugees from Gallipoli, Turkey, to Rio de Janeiro and the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the establishment of the Russian Orthodox Church's diocese of Argentina and South America.

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