Primate of Russian Orthodox Church celebrates Liturgy at the Church of Kazan Icon of the Mother of God in Havana

On 14 February 2016, 37th Sunday after Pentecost, forefeast of the Meeting of the Lord, His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia celebrated the Divine Liturgy at the Russian Orthodox church of the Kazan Icon of the Mother of God in Havana.

Concelebrating with His Holiness were: Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk, Chairman of the Moscow Patriarchate's Department for External Church Relations; Metropolitan Anthony of Borispol and Brovary, Chancellor of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church; Bishop Sergiy of Solnechnogorsk, head of the Moscow Patriarchate's Administrative Secretariat; Bishop Kallistrat of Gorno-Altaysk and Chemal; Bishop Anthony of Bogorodsk, head of the Moscow Patriarchate's Administration for Institutions Abroad; Archimandrite Philaret (Bulekov), DECR vice-chairman; archpriest Andrey Milkin, head of the Patriarchal Protocol Service; and Rev. Alexander Volkov, head of the Patriarchal Press Service.

Among those who attended the service were Mr. Raúl Castro Ruz, President of Cuba's Council of State and Council of Ministers; Mr. Miguel Díaz-Canel Bermúdez, First Vice-President of the Council of State and the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Cuba; Mr. Esteban Lazo Hernández, President of the National Assembly of the People's Power of the Republic of Cuba; Mr. Caridad Diego Bello, head of the Office for Religious Affairs of the Central Committee of the Cuban Communist party; Mr. Bruno Rodríguez Parrilla, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Cuba; and Ms. Ena Elsa Velázquez, Minister of Education of the Republic of Cuba.

In attendance were also Kurt Cardinal Koch, President of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity; Jaime Lucas Cardinal Ortega y Alamino, Archbishop of San Cristobal de la Habana; other representatives of the Roman Catholic Church; and the faithful of other Christian denominations of Cuba.

Clerics of the Church of St Nicholas in Havana (Patriarchate of Constantinople) also prayed at the Liturgy.

During the service, the Gospel, the Creed, and the Lord's Prayer were read out in the Church Slavonic and Spanish languages.

The Gospel reading was followed by a homily delivered by His Holiness Patriarch Kirill.

After the Liturgy, archpriest Dimitry Orekhov, rector of the Church of the Kazan Icon of the Mother of God, greeted the Primate of the Russian Orthodox Church and presented him with a Kazan icon of the Most Holy Theotokos with images of the Holy Prince Vladimir Equal-to-the-Apostles and St Cyril Equal-to-the-Apostles.

In his Primatial homily, Patriarch Kirill expressed his joy over an opportunity to celebrate the Liturgy at an Orthodox church in Havana.

“This time my visit to Cuba coincided with an event of great significance for the history of Christendom,” the Primate of the Russian Church said, “I had a meeting, brotherly, open and full of love, with the Bishop of Rome, Pope Francis. For all still existing theological differences between the Orthodox Christians in the East and Catholic Christians in the West, we are well aware today of our shared responsibility for what is going on with people.”

“What we are responsible for is, certainly, the preservation of peace on our planet,” His Holiness continued, “so that people, despite their political, economic and other differences, may learn to live in peace, so that pursuing foreign policy goals may not lead to the use of force in order to gain victory. This is an ideal world, an ideal image, of course. Yet, if there is no ideal, there is no goal either. That is why, acting together, we called on the whole of Christendom and the whole world to pursue this goal. We cherish the hope that the world will hear us.”

The Primate of the Russian Church greeted the representatives of Pope Francis who were present at the service, as well as Mr. Raúl Castro, President of Cuba’s Council of State and Council of Ministers. Addressing the head of the state, Patriarch Kirill wished to the people of Cuba “prosperity, peace, spiritual growth and increase in material wellbeing.”

His Holiness wished God’s help to the parishioners and presented the church with a Vladimir Icon of the Mother of God and church utensils.

The worshippers received icons of Christ the Saviour with the Patriarchal blessing.

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The Church of the Kazan Icon of the Mother of God in Havana is the largest Russian Orthodox church in America. It is the only church built with an active participation of a state that is not in the canonical territory of the Moscow Patriarchate. The snow-white church with five domes was designed in the

traditions of old Russian architecture. It is adorned with a tent-roofed bell tower styled after the 17th century churches.

The church, which is 30 meters high and 18 meters long, can house up to 500 people.

Situated nearby are St Nicholas Church of the Patriarchate of Constantinople and a famous old Catholic Basilica of St Francis of Assisi.

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People from Russia would visit Cuba and live in this province of Spain as far back as the 18th and 19th centuries. Representatives of the first wave of the Russian immigration came to Cuba in the 1920s. In the late 1950s a Greek Orthodox church of Ss Constantine and Helen, Equal-to-the-Apostles, was built in Havana. It was passed on to a Russian-speaking community after the Cuban revolution. In 1971, Archbishop Nikodim (Rusnak) of Kharkov and Bogodukhov, acting Patriarchal exarch in Central and South America, consecrated the church.

In the early 1980s, the activities of the Orthodox parish were put on hold, and the building was passed on to a youth theater.

A new page in the history of the Russian Orthodoxy in Cuba opened in the last decade of the 20th century. In July 1998 the chairman of the Department for External Church Relations, Metropolitan Kirill of Smolensk and Kaliningrad (now Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia) paid a visit to Cuba. On November 14, 2004, Metropolitan Kirill performed the rite of the blessing of the church's foundation stone. On October 19, 2008, Metropolitan Kirill, in concelebration with an assembly of archpastors and pastors of the Moscow Patriarchate and the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia, officiated at the rite of consecration of the Church of the Kazan Icon of the Mother of God in Havana.

In compliance with a decision of the Holy Synod of May 30, 2011 (Minutes 62), archpriest Dimitry Orekhov was appointed rector of the Kazan Church.

Press Service of the Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia/

DECR Communication Service

Photo by Press Service of the Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia

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