



## **Commission on canonization of Archbishop Seraphim (Sobolev) meets in the capital of Bulgaria**



On 3-4 December 2015, the joint commission of the Russian and the Bulgarian Orthodox Churches on the canonization of Archbishop Seraphim (Sobolev, 1881-1950) of Boguchar held its session in Sofia. Archbishop Seraphim, a hierarch of the Russian Orthodox Church, who lived for a long time in Bulgaria and died there, is widely venerated by the Bulgarian Orthodox Christians.

The commission was established in compliance with the decisions of the Holy Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church of 22 October 2015, and of the Holy Synod of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church of 25 September 2015. Representing the Russian Orthodox Church at the meeting were Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk, chairman of the Department for External Church Relations of the Moscow Patriarchate; Bishop Pankratiy of Troitsk, chairman of the Synodal Commission for Canonization; Archimandrite Philip (Vasiltsev), rector of the Russian Orthodox Church's Metochion in Sofia; archpriest Vladimir Vorobyov, dean of St Tikhon's Orthodox University; archpriest Igor Yakimchuk, DECR secretary for inter-Orthodox relations; and Mr. Andrei Kostryukov, a senior lecture at St Tikhon's University.

The Bulgarian Orthodox Church was represented by Metropolitan Joan of Varna and Veliki Preslav; Bishop Arseny of Znepolje, vicar of the Plovdiv metropolia; archpriest Teodor Stoychev; Prof. P. Pavlov of the Faculty of Theology, Sofia University; Mr. S. Stefanov, a senior lecture at the Faculty of Theology, University of Shumen; and Mr. M. Stoyanov, a senior lecture at the University of Veliko Tŕrnovo.

Preceding the meeting, a litia for the repose of the soul of Archbishop Seraphim was celebrated at his tomb in the crypt of the Church of St Nicholas, the Metochion of the Russian Orthodox Church in Sofia.

His Holiness Patriarch Neofit of Bulgaria received the members of the joint commission.

The reports presented at the session focused on the life, ministry and theological works of Archbishop Seraphim, as well as on the reverence that the people of Bulgaria and Russia have for this hierarch. Also discussed were historical studies concerning the possibility of the canonization of Archbishop Seraphim in the Russian Orthodox Church. To conclude the meeting, Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk and Metropolitan Joan of Varna and Veliki Preslav, co-chairmen of the commission, signed a document that will be submitted for consideration to the Holy Synods of the Russian and the Bulgarian Orthodox Churches.

Following the final session, which took place at the meeting hall of the Holy Synod of the Bulgarian Church on December 4, Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk and Metropolitan Joan of Varna and Veliki Preslav answered questions from the Bulgarian and the Russian journalists.

In the evening of the same day, Metropolitan Hilarion was invited to a concert of religious music, which marked three memorable dates in the life of His Holiness Patriarch Neofit of Bulgaria: his 70<sup>th</sup> birthday, the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his monastic tonsure, and the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his episcopal consecration. During the concert, the choir and the orchestra of the Sofia Opera and Ballet Theatre, conducted by Velizar Genchev, performed Metropolitan Hilarion's Christmas Oratorio for soloists, choir and orchestra.

Among those who attended the concert were His Holiness Patriarch Neofit, members of the Holy Synod of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church, and the head of the Bulgarian Royal Family, Simeon II Sakskoburggotski.

Before the concert, Metropolitan Hilarion warmly greeted the Primate of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church with his jubilee on behalf of His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia and wished Patriarch Neofit God's help in his lofty Primatial ministry.

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