Primate of Serbian Orthodox Church celebrates Divine Liturgy at the Kazan Cathedral in St. Petersburg



On 21 July 2013, feast day of the Kazan Icon of the Mother of God, His Holiness Patriarch Irinej of Serbia celebrated the Divine Liturgy at the Kazan Cathedral in St. Petersburg. Concelebrating with His Holiness were Metropolitan Vladimir of St. Petersburg and Ladoga; Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk, chairman of the Moscow Patriarchate's Department for External Church Relations; Bishop Amvrosiy of Petergof, rector of the St. Petersburg theological schools; Bishop Savva of Voskresensk, abbot of the Novospassky Stavropegic Monastery; Bishop Mstislav of Tikhvin and Lodeynoye Pole; and hierarchs of the Serbian Orthodox Church, accompanying His Holiness Patriarch Irinej on his visit.

After the service, Metropolitan Vladimir of St. Petersburg and Ladoga greeted His Holiness Patriarch Irinej and all those present with the feast of the Kazan Icon of the Mother of God, saying in particular, "The Kazan Icon of the Mother of God is a most venerated icon in Russia and in the whole Orthodox world. Today we are celebrating its miraculous finding in the city of Kazan. Numerous copies of the Kazan can be found in all cities and towns of our Motherland and are venerated as wonderworking

images. One of the copies was brought to St. Petersburg, and this grand Cathedral was built to host the Kazan icon which has become a protector and patron of the northern capital, and many worshippers come to venerate it.

“Your Holiness, we hope that our common prayer before this venerated icon of the Most Holy Theotokos has become for you, as well as for all of us, a source of Divine grace. We wish you good health and God’s help in your primatial ministry.”

His Holiness Patriarch Irinej of Serbia addressed all those present, noting that St. Petersburg has been playing an important part not only in the life of Russia, but in the life of Serbia as well. “Metropolitans of Montenegro, Peter I and Peter II, used to come to St. Petersburg and live here,” Patriarch Irinej said. “St Peter I of Cetinje is venerated not only in the Serbian Church, but in the Assembly of the Saints of St. Petersburg as well. St Peter was consecrated bishop in St. Petersburg. Patriarch Varnava of Serbia and great theologians, St Justin (*Popović*) of *Ćelije* and St Nicholas (V*elimirović*) of Žiča, studied at the St. Petersburg Theological Academy.”

“St. Petersburg is a city of Tsar-Martyr Nicholas II,” His Holiness Patriarch Irinej continued. “We venerate him not only as a passion-bearer, but also as a fighter for the Serbian people… We have the Novo Groblje cemetery in Belgrade. Buried there are Russian soldiers whom Tsar Nicholas had sent to fight for Serbia, for the liberation of all people of the Serbian Patriarchate. We pray for them just like we pray for our relatives, our fathers and grandfathers, as they are warriors of Christ.”

The Primate of the Serbian Church also expressed his deep gratitude to the Russian Church, Russian government and all Russian people for the assistance they render to the Serbian people in Kosovo. “It is very important for us, because the Russian Church is the only one in the world, which supports us so openly and persistently in the Kosovo issue,” Serbian Patriarch said.

A reception was given in honour of His Holiness Patriarch Irinej on behalf of Metropolitan Vladimir of St. Petersburg and Ladoga in the refectory of the Kazan Cathedral. Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk, chairman of the Moscow Patriarchate’s Department for External Church Relations, greeted the Primate of the Serbian Church, saying: “The Russian Orthodox Church and the St. Petersburg metropolia in particular greet Your Holiness with such love because our Churches have maintained strong ties of friendship and kinship for many centuries. These ties were cemented by the blood of our soldiers who had defended Serbian land, and their memory is revered by the Serbian people.”

“You have said today that there is no Church, like the Russian Church, that renders such support to the Serbian Church, in the Kosovo problem in particular. Indeed, during several recent years we have seen the greatest tragedy of the Serbian people living in Kosovo. Defilement of shrines and violence against

Serbian people in Kosovo occured under orders of Western powers, with Western mass media presenting one-sided vision of the situation and trying to convince readers that the Serbs were the ones to blame and the Albanians were victims.

“Many of us have been to Kosovo and know what is really going on there. We have seen in which circumstances Serbs are living there, including monks of the Visoki Dečani Monastery and the Patriarchate of Peć. And, of course, we will continue to support the Serbian Church in her efforts to preserve the holy sites of Kosovo and to protect Serbian population in Kosovo and Metochija.”

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