THE RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH
Department for External Church Relations

Primate of Russian Church meets with Patriarch Irinej of Serbia



On 17 July 2013, His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia met with His Holiness Patriarch Irinej of Serbia at the Patriarchal residence in St Daniel's monastery.

The Primate of the Russian Orthodox Church cordially greeted Patriarch Irinej and the delegation of the Serbian Church, saying in particular, "We are very glad that Your Holiness's long-awaited visit to the Russian Church is timed to this blessed period of the celebrations marking the 1025th anniversary of the Baptism of Russia, and that you will take part in them."

His Holiness noted that the Russian and Serbian Orthodox Churches have always had special relationships. "We are heirs to the common Slavic spiritual and cultural tradition which goes back to Ss Cyril and Methodius. Both Russians and Serbs understand the language of the Divine Service we celebrate. This liturgical tradition spiritually and devotionally unites our people," Patriarch Kirill said. He also reminded those present that St Sava, founder of the Serbian Church, who took monastic vows in the Old Russik on Mount Athos, translated the Nomocanon into the Slavonic language. The Russian Orthodox Church used this translation for several centuries.

Expressing his joy over the forthcoming joint celebration of the 1025th anniversary of the Baptism of Russia, the Primate of the Russian Orthodox Church noted that the Russian Church's revival after decades of atheistic persecution and oppression began in the year when the Millennium of the Baptism of Russia was celebrated. "We have being working these twenty-five years to revive our Church. For all of us living in historical Rus' – in different states now, but in the one Church, - it gives an opportunity to reflect upon and assess what has happened, to thank God and pray to Him so that His blessing would always be with us."

Patriarch Irinej thanked the Primate of the Russian Orthodox Church for his greeting and said, in particular, "These are the words said by the Primate of the great Church of the great nation – the nation which is important not only for the Slavic people but which plays also a significant part in the history of the whole world".

The Primate of the Serbian Orthodox Church thanked His Holiness Patriarch Kirill "for the opportunity to venerate the Russian Church's shrines, to pray together with the Russian people and to receive God's grace." According to Patriarch Irinej, the 1025th anniversary of the Baptism of Russia is important not only for the Russian Orthodox Church but for all the Slavic peoples as well.

Speaking about his visit to the Russian Orthodox Church, which began the day before, Patriarch Irinej noted that the visit would strengthen spiritual ties between the two Churches and develop their relations. The Primate of the Serbian Orthodox Church expressed confidence that the Slavic people should unite

and reminded all those present about the words of St Nicholas (Velimirović) about the historical role the Slavic nations are to play in the future. “This role belongs mainly to the Russian people and the Russian Orthodox Church which is to lead the large Slavic family,” His Holiness said.

The Primate of the Serbian Orthodox Church also mentioned the situation in Kosovo. He reminded the participants in the meeting that the chair of Primates of the Serbian Orthodox Church is located in the Patriarchate of Peč. There is a danger that this territory will be beyond Serbian borders. “Our people in Kosovo and Metochija have been suffering for centuries,” Patriarch Irinej said. He also recalled the Ottoman rule and the wish of some countries to form a second Albanian state in this territory today.

“Had we repudiated Kosovo and Metochija, it would have meant that we repudiated our shrines and our history, as our major historical sites are located there,” His Holiness said.

“The leadership of our country is now influenced by the West, and the Serbian Orthodox Church makes enormous efforts to persuade the Serbian authorities to maintain ties with Russia and the Russian Orthodox Church,” Patriarch Irinej said. “I often remind them the words of Nikola Pašić, famous Serbian politician of the first half of the 20th century, who said that we need to tie our small boat of the Serbian Orthodox Church to the ship of the Russian Orthodox Church.”

“We believe that today the word of the Russian Orthodox Church carries great weight when we are talking about the future of Kosovo and Metochiaja,” the Serbian Patriarch said and expressed hope for the Moscow Patriarchate’s and the Russian government’s support in this matter.

The Primate of the Russian Orthodox Church said in response: “We have been closely following the situation in Kosovo and Metochija and we have an impression that the year 2013 has become a year of particular ordeals for the Serbian people: churches are been desecrated, gravestones are been destroyed, Orthodox Serbs are been threatened. We admire and honour the courage of the Serbian people who, in spite of their lives being in danger, stay there, at the place, spiritually and historically important for the whole Serbian nation. We give our unconditional support to the just position of the Serbian Orthodox Church regarding Kosovo and Metochija and we have made many statements on this matter. We will continue our dialogue with our government and with governments of other countries, presenting our point of view shared with the Serbian Church. The Russian Orthodox Church has supported the participation of the Russian Federation in UNESCO projects aimed at the restoration of sacred sites of the Orthodox Church in Kosovo and Metochija. You know that the restoration, with the Russian Federation being one of its sponsors, has been carried out at the Patriarchate of Peč and at other sites.”

As it was noted, the fund-raising campaign in aid of the Raška-Prizren diocese of the Serbian Orthodox

Church was carried out in the Russian Orthodox Church with the blessing of His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia. Two hundred thousand Euros were collected for the restoration of the Prizren Theological Seminary.

His Holiness Patriarch Kirill expressed his solidarity with the position of the Primate, the Holy Assembly of Bishops and the Synod of the Serbian Church on the Kosovo issue, saying, “We are sorry to see that the political leadership of Serbia is lacking for this adherence to principles and we suppose that it should lend an ear to the voice of the Serbian Orthodox Church instead of ignoring it. We believe that it is necessary to think out models for settling the situation in Kosovo and Metochija, but it should be done in such way that each model would have firm guarantees of existence for the Serbian community and sacred sites of the Serbian Orthodox Church. And, of course, the Serbian Orthodox Church should take part in elaborating such model, as she bears spiritual and moral responsibility for the very existence of the Serbian people in Kosovo and Metochija.”

“Meeting with the Primates of the Local Orthodox Churches, I always raise the issue of Kosovo and Metochija, as well as I now raise the issue of the Christian tragedy in the Middle East, caused by wars which threaten the very survival of Christians in the Middle East,” Patriarch Kirill said. “I believe that all Local Orthodox Churches should actively support the position aimed at protection of the Serbian population in Kosovo and Metochija, as well as protection of the Christian population in the Middle East. Our canonical unity should be expressed in public as well. Our brothers’ suffering is an important social and political problem which requires our joint position.”

At the end of the meeting, His Holiness Patriarch Kirill presented the Primate of the Serbian Orthodox Church and the members of the Serbian delegation with awards of the Russian Orthodox Church – “in consideration of their service for the benefit of the holy Church and on the occasion of the 1025th anniversary of the Baptism of Russia.”

His Holiness Patriarch Irinej of Serbia was awarded with the Order of the Holy Prince Vladimir, Equal-to-the-Apostles (1st grade).

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