# Primates of Russian and Georgian Orthodox Churches celebrate at Assumption Cathedral in Moscow Kremlin

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On January 23, 2012, the commemoration day of St. Philip of Moscow, His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and His Holiness and Beatitude Patriarch-Catholicos Ilia II of All Georgia celebrated the Divine Liturgy and a thanksgiving to St. Philip at the Cathedral of the Assumption at the Moscow Kremlin.

Among their concelebrants were Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk, head of the Moscow Patriarchate's department for external church relations, Archbishop Arseny of Istra, and Archbishop Mark of Yegoryevsk, head of the office for Moscow Patriarchate's institutions abroad.

Assisting the celebrants were also Metropolitan Nikoloz of Akhalkalaki and Kumurdo, Metropolitan Theodore of Akhaltsikhe and Tao-Klarjeti, Metropolitan Dimitri of Batumi and Lazeti, and Metropolitan Gerasime of Zugdidi and Tsaishi, head of the Georgian Patriarchate's foreign department (Georgian Orthodox Church), as well as Archbishop Niphon of Philippopolis, Representative of the Patriarch of Antioch and All the East to the Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia.

Among those who concelebrated were also Archpriest Vladimir Divakov, patriarchal secretary for Moscow, Protopresbyter George Zviadadze, rector of Tbilisi Theological Academy, Archpriest Nicolay Balashov, DECR vice-chairman, Archimandrite David (Chincharauli), Archimandrite Vakhtang (Liparteliani), and Archimandrite Tikhon (Shevkunov), secretary of the Patriarchal Council for Culture.

There were two choirs – the choir of the Sretensky Monastery and the Patriarchal Choir of the Georgian Orthodox Church.

Among the worshippers were Lebanon's President M. Sleiman, President of the Russian Rail-Ways joined-stock company V. Yakunin, Presidential Commissioner for the Child's Rights P. Astakhov, Chief Medical Officer G. Onischenko, and President of the International Pubic Foundation for the Unity of Orthodox Nations V. Alekseyev.

After the Divine Liturgy, the heads of the Russian and Georgian Churches said a thanksgiving at the shrine with the relics of St. Philip of Moscow.

Then Patriarch Kirill addressed the congregation with a homily on the feat performed by St. Philip, Metropolitan of Moscow. He also congratulated the winners of the Patriarch Alexy II Prize 'For Outstanding Work to Consolidate the Unity of Orthodox Nations and to Promote Christian Values in the Life of Society'. The awards were presented the day before at the Church of Christ the Saviour's Hall of Church Councils.

'It is a special day today as we honour in this church His Holiness and Beatitude Ilia, Catholicos-Patriarch of All Georgia, who has won the prize of the International Foundation for the Unity of Orthodox Nations. With its prize the Foundation awards people from various countries and walks of life for their efforts to assert Christian values and peace among people thus promoting unity, among others, of Orthodox nations. I cordially congratulate you, Your Holiness and Beatitude', the Patriarch said.

He emphasized that the prize was awarded to Catholicos-Patriarch Ilia for his long selfless service. 'In your service you have repeatedly reflected the feat of St. Philip. As a bishop he did not offend anybody, nor did he make resounding statements but presented symbolically the position the Church should have presented. Like him, you, without any conflict either with the authorities or the people, have managed to express symbolically and verbally the truth of God. The Orthodox people of Georgia heard your quiet voice, and perhaps thanks to you and the Church, the Georgian society has not fallen into the nightmare of civil confrontation and war. They have had enough strength to preserve their internal freedom from any coercion and any untruth. With great hope we look at what is going on in Georgia today, hoping that the political changes will also result in changed relations between our fraternal countries and peoples.

And from this historic ambo I can testify that in these changes there is a great contribution Your Holiness and Beatitude have made together with your episcopate, clergy and devoted people, together with your intelligentsia and all those who listen to the voice of their Patriarch', Patriarch Kirill said.

He also congratulated Lebanon's President M. Sleiman as another winner of the International Foundation for the Unity of Orthodox Nations, saying, 'Your Excellency is in your way a unique political leader as you are the only Christian who is president of an Arab country. Russia has historically maintained good relations with the Arab world, supporting the Arabs in their just struggle, including for a fair settlement of the Palestinian problem, and for many other problems involved in the life of the Arab people in North Africa and the Middle East. Today, Arab countries are going through a difficult period in their historical existence. Nobody knows as yet what the so-called 'Arab Spring' will end in, but it is already known what enormous human losses these bloody changes in the life of Arab people have led to'.

Patriarch Kirill stressed that 'Today our heart empathizes with the people of Syria, your neighbours with whom Lebanon is closely tied. We especially sympathize with Syrian Christians who are killed today in their own homes by those who claim the right to assert democracy in Syria, killed only because they are Christians. These people burst into Christian homes and kill their dwellers who have no arms in their hands and drive away old people and children. The television brings us these nightmarish pictures of the tragedy of the Syrian people. Many in Syria are members of the Orthodox Church of Antioch. They are our brothers and sisters. Quite recently, during my visit to Syria, I could see these faces. And how terrible it is to realize that many of those who prayed together with me and Patriarch Ignatius, who looked with joy at the celebration of the two Orthodox Churches, are no longer live in the wide world – they have been killed in a terrible war waged today in the territory of Syria'.

Having noted Mr. Sleiman's concern for the preservation of unity of the Lebanese society, Patriarch Kirill remarked, 'It is certainly you principal responsibility as president. But at the same time, as a Christian you assert through all of your work the importance and highness of Christian moral principles both in life and politics'.

Addressing Mr. Yakunin as another prize-winner, Patriarch Kirill stated that he was well-known both inside and outside Russia, among other things, for his manifold activities in charity and his contribution to the development of humanitarian programs. Mr. Yakunin is head of the St. Andrew the First-called Foundation's Centre of Russia's National Glory. Among the projects implemented with Mr. Yakunin active involvement is the Dialogue of Civilizations Forum aimed to establish intellectual and cultural dialogue with people of various nationalities. 'During the globalization when everything is merged, when there is a threat of destruction of national and religious traditions, your efforts have a special importance', Patriarch Kirill testified.

At a request by the Georgian Patriarchate, Patriarch Kirill conveyed to Catholicos-Patriarch Ilia a little shrine with a particle of the relics of the Holy Prince Alexander Nevsky, 'so that the faithful of the Georgian Church may lift up prayers for the Russian land and the Iberian land, for our peoples and so that through the intercession of this saint the Lord may help to develop relations between our countries and peoples'.

In his response, the Primate of the Georgian Orthodox Church expressed joy over the fact that he could celebrate together with the Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia in the old Cathedral of the Assumption.

Speaking about the complex events of the last decades which had a negative impact on relations between Russia and Georgia, Patriarch-Catholicos Ilia II testified that the only way that invariably ties the peoples of the two countries were good fraternal relations between the Russian and Georgian Orthodox Churches. 'We thank the Lord for having called us to this unity', he said.

The head of the Georgian Church presented Patriarch Kirill with an icon of the Mother of God and an icon of St. Nina Equal-to-the-Apostles, noting that the siege of Leningrad was lifted 68 years ago, on her commemoration day. 'Many year of life to you, Your Holiness. May God's mercy preserve you and your Church and your faithful for many years', His Beatitude Ilia exclaimed.

Patriarch Kirill thanked His Beatitude Ilia for the gifts, saying, ‘Yes, on the commemoration day of St. Nina Equal-to-the-Apostles, on January 27, the siege of Leningrad was lifted. I was born soon after that event in the city on the Neva. And on January 27, 2009, the commemoration day of St. Nina, I was elected to the Patriarchal throne of Moscow. Thus, for me the memory of this saint is associated with very important events in the life of my parents who survived the siege of Leningrad and in my own life. Thank you, Your Holiness, for this gift. Before it I will pray for the Georgian Church and for the Russian Church, for the city of St. Peter, and will ask that the Lord may help me in my service through the intercession of St. Nina Equal-to-the-Apostles.

During the fraternal repast that followed, Catholicos-Patriarch Ilia II invited Patriarch Kirill to visit Georgia. The head of the Russian Orthodox Church accepted the invitation with gratitude.

*DECR Communication Service*

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