



## **Metropolitan Hilarion celebrates at Agia Sophia in Athens**

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On September 23, 2012, the 16<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost, Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk, head of the Moscow Patriarchate's department for external church relation, who is on a visit to Greece with the blessing of His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia, led the celebration of the Divine Liturgy in Agia Sophia at Psychiko, Athens. Among his concelebrants were clergy of the diocese of Athens, Greek Orthodox Church, Archpriest Igor Yakimchuk, DECR secretary for inter-Orthodox relations, and Hierodeacon Ioann (Kopeikin), assistant to the rector of the Sts Cyril and Methodius Post-Graduate and Doctoral School.

Among the worshippers were Bishop Gabriel of Diablo, chief secretary of the Greek Orthodox Church's Holy Synod, Attica Mayor K. Maniotis, Psychiko Mayor P. Ksiridakis, and Mr. F. Voskresensky, second secretary of the Russian embassy in Athens.

After the liturgy, Metropolitan Hilarion said a thanksgiving at the relics of the Holy Martyrs Faith, Hope and Charity and their mother Sophia.

Bishop Gabriel greeted the DECR chairman on behalf of His Beatitude Hieronymus, Archbishop of Athens and All Greece. He warmly thanked Metropolitan Hilarion for the celebration of the Divine Liturgy. He also mentioned the visit made by Archbishop Hieronymos to the Russian Orthodox Church a few months ago and the warm welcome accorded him by the church authorities and ordinary people, which was a confirmation of lasting relations between the two Churches.

The Greek hierarch also thanked His Eminence Hilarion for the visit, which is a support to the Greek people at a time of crisis, and informed the congregation about the financial support raised with the

blessing of His Holiness Patriarch Kirill by the faithful in Russia and handed over to the Greek Orthodox Church for charitable purposes. Bishop Gabriel asked to convey to His Holiness Kirill and the Russian Orthodox Church the love, respect and gratitude of the Greek people for the devotional and material support given to the Greek Orthodox Church, thus manifesting unity in Christ and true Christian love.

Speaking in response, Metropolitan Hilarion said:

'First of all, I would like to greet you all on behalf of His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia. Several months ago, he was delighted to welcome His Beatitude Hieronymus, Archbishop of Athens and All Greece. And Archbishop Hieronymus invited His Holiness to come to Greece on a reciprocal visit. I am here today as his precursor in order to prepare his way and make his paths straight (sf. Mt. 3:3).

'From television and other mass media we all have heard reports about the financial crisis experienced by Greece today, and when we come here we see the signs of this crisis as once overcrowded restaurants are empty and the whole way of life of the Greek people is stamped with sadness and depression.

'I would like to say that in the beginning of the 90s our Russian people went through a much more severe economic and financial crisis when people's salaries decreased not two or three times but dozens times. At that time, people lost overnight all the savings they had accumulated during their lives. At that time, many people found themselves without livelihood and hope for the future.

The Lord however helped us to survive that crisis. And what helped people most of all at those hard times was the Orthodox faith – the faith that the Lord defeats every human weakness and turns every evil into good and helps us to endure hardships. The spiritual richness we partake of through the Orthodox Church, her worship services and especially her holy liturgy and participation in the Holy Mysteries of Christ, help us to survive material poverty and material hardships.

'I would like to say once again today that the Russian people have always been and will be together with the Greek people, in both happy and hard times, in the days of prosperity and the days of crisis. We as your brothers and sisters and Christ are ready to share your hardships and to help you survive this crisis as much as we can. I very much hope that the visit of His Holiness Patriarch Kirill to Greece will become another expression our Church's the deep love of your Church and our people's love of your people.

'I would like to wish God's help and sound health to His Beatitude Hieronymus and God's help to all the hierarchs of the Greek Orthodox Church, all the clergy, monastics and lay people. May you find spiritual strength to endure hardships with trust in God and His Most Holy Mother, and may she protect you against every evil and cover you with her honourable omophoros. Amen.'

As a token of the liturgy celebrated by Metropolitan Hilarion in Agia Sophia, its rector, Archimandrite Joannikios, presented him with a pectoral icon and a bishop's mantle.

*DECR Communication Service*

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Source: <https://mospat.ru/en/news/53690/>