



Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk and Archbishop Innokenty of Vilna and Lithuania celebrate Divine Liturgy in Vilnius

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In the evening of May 12, 2012, Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk, head of the Moscow Patriarchate's department for external church relations, arrived in Vilnius, with the blessing of His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia. He was met at the airport by Archbishop Innokenty of Vilna and Lithuania and Russian Ambassador V. Chkhidvadze.

On May 13, they celebrated the Divine Liturgy at the cathedral church of the Monastery of the Holy Spirit in Vilnius. They were assisted by the brethren of the monastery. Among the worshippers was the head of the Russian diplomatic mission in Lithuania.

After the liturgy, the hierarchs prayed at the relics of the Martyrs of Vilna.

Then Archbishop Innokenty addressed Metropolitan Hilarion from the ambo with words of greetings. He underscored the special importance that the diocese of Vilna and Lithuania had for the metropolitan who used to be a novice in the Monastery of the Holy Spirit. 'Already in his youth you showed such understanding qualities as steadfastness in the faith and courage. People in the places you used to serve remember you with warmth and love', he said.

In his response, Metropolitan Hilarion spoke about his emotions as he crossed the threshold of the church in which he had taken monastic vows and had been ordained as deacon. In that church he celebrated his first liturgies as deacon and later as priest. 'I will always cherish the tender memories of the first months and years of my monastic youth and important church service linked with this monastery. So, I come here not as a guest but I come to my home monastery in which I started monastic life', he said.

He also conveyed to the faithful a blessing from Patriarch Kirill, whose book 'Freedom and Responsibility' in Lithuanian will be presented to the public in Vilnius. 'The Primate of our Holy Church will certainly visit the God-saved diocese of Lithuania to celebrate the Divine Liturgy here and to lift up a prayer for our millions-strong multinational Church before the relics of the great men of God, the holy

martyrs Anthony, Ioann and Eustathius', he said.

After this exchange of greetings, Metropolitan Hilarion delivered a homily on the Gospel's Reading of the day (Jn. 4:5-42), in the light of which he said in conclusion: 'Each of us should look at his or her own life. We cannot behold the future but we can look into the past and assess the events of our life and realize that there is nothing accidental but everything in our life is logical and that the Lord leads us through our life, saving from death and putting us again and again on the path of salvation when we divert into the ways of slyness. It is this faith that strengthens us in our life journey and enables us to look into the future without fear and apprehension. We know: if the Lord led us before He will lead us further on; if He saved us before He will do the same further on... Let us then ask the Lord to bring to the saving Orthodox faith those who are outside it, doing all we can to make these people come to the church of God and share with us the joy of communion with God'.

In the evening the two hierarchs attended the closing concert of the 14th International Festival of Russian Church Music in Lithuania organized by the Vilnius-based Society of Russian Music with the support of the St. Gregory the Theologian Charity and the diocese of Vilna.

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