



Metropolitan Hilarion celebrates Divine Liturgy at Catacombs of St. Priscilla in Rome

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On September 28, 2011, the commemoration day of the Holy Protomartyr Nicetas, Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk, head of the Moscow Patriarchate's department for external church relations, celebrated the Divine Liturgy in the Catacombs of St. Priscilla in Rome. The service was organized with the support of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity.

Addressing the worshippers after the service, Metropolitan Hilarion said in particular,

'We have celebrated the Divine Liturgy in the Roman catacombs which remind us of the life of the early Christian Church in this city called eternal. It was sanctified with the feet of Sts Peter and Paul and became the capital of the Christian Church as early as the 1st century. During the Divine Liturgy today, we recalled how the first Christians prayed in these catacombs at a time when the Church was still small and persecuted, when to be a Christian meant to perform the feat of confession and to be ready to assume suffering and death every day.

'Many thousands of Christians were buried in these catacombs, and celebrating the liturgy here we feel their presence and their prayer. At the same time, we feel the link between the past centuries and the present century because the Church which exists today is the same Church which existed almost two thousand years ago; and the Holy Spirit Who worked at that time, works today too, and the Divine Liturgy celebrated today is the same liturgy which was celebrated at that time. And the Body and Blood of Christ of which we partake today are the same Body and Blood which our Saviour Himself offered to His disciples during the Last Supper.

'As St. Paul, who ended his days in this sacred city, has reminded us today, *As we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone*, and especially to those who are of the household of faith (cf. Gal. 6:10), that is, to those who share the Christian faith. Having prayed in these underground walls, let us leave with the thought that the Lord gives us an opportunity to do good, especially to those who are of the household of faith, and to all people around us'.

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