His Holiness Patriarch Kirill celebrates Paschal prayer service in the Chernobyl Zone

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On 26 April 2011, His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia and His Beatitude Metropolitan Vladimir of Kiev and All Ukraine arrived in St. Elijah's church in Chernobyl, the only working church in the Zone of Alienation of the Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant. At the entrance they were met by the Russian and Ukrainian Presidents, Dmitry Medvedev and Viktor Yanukovich.

The Primate of the Russian Orthodox Church celebrated Pashcla prayer service and addressed those gathered in the church, 'bearing the stamp of the Chernobyl disaster, in which the strength of spirit, courage and intensity of faith were displayed so vividly," His Holiness said and added, "This church has been preserved by intensity of faith and has become a symbol of victory over terrible disaster."

In remembrance of his visit to Chernobyl His Holiness presented rector of the church, archpriest Nikolai Yakushin, with an icon of the Saviour-Not-Made-by-Hand, saying, "May this icon remind you of this day in history, and may your flock, while praying before it, long with faith to the Lord, as the Lord always gives one what he asks with longing of his heart."

His Holiness Patriarch Kirill greeted the Russian and Ukrainian Presidents, whom he was "so glad to see together in the church," and the archpastors who have arrived in Chernobyl from Russia, Ukraine and Belarus to mark the anniversary of the nuclear disaster.

The Primate of the Russian Church blessed the bells brought to St. Elijah's church as a gift with his blessing. Russian and Ukrainian Presidents, His Holiness Patriarch Kirill, and His Beatitude Metropolitan Vladimir rang the largest bell.

Addressing those gathered from the steps of the church, His Holiness said he was confident that the Chernobyl tragedy should urge the people of Russia, Ukraine and Belarus to unity. "May this wonderful example of people's solidarity remain in our memory and encourage us to maintain our brotherly relations. May the frontiers between our states never divide fraternal nations of Ukraine, Belarus and Russia. We believe that the Lord will be gracious to us and help us arrange our life in peace and prosperity. May the Lord keep Ukraine, Russian Federation and Belarus and the people living in them and protect them from sorrows and trials that could demand human sacrifice. We shall faithfully remember all those who had laid down their lives to save this land from the terrible deadly danger."

His Holiness donated a set of liturgical vestments to the church.

His Beatitude Metropolitan Vladimir awarded His Holiness with the Order of St. Theodosius of Chernigov.

The participants in the commemoration proceeded to the memorial to the first victims of the Chernobyl disaster, said the requiem litany and sang “Memory Eternal!” Russian and Ukrainian Presidents, His Holiness Patriarch Kirill and His Beatitude Metropolitan Vladimir laid flowers to the monument, and all those present sang Paschal troparion “Christ is risen from the dead, trampling down death by death and on those in the tombs bestowing life.”

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St. Elijah’s church was first mentioned in the chronicles of the 16th century. Since then, it was destroyed and rebuilt several times. The church was closed after the disaster in April 1986, but was opened in 1994 at the request of the plant’s staff. An icon called “The Chernobyl Spas (Saviour)” was pained for the church in commemoration of the victims and for the health of the survived.

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