



Metropolitan Hilarion celebrates Divine Liturgy at Xenophontos Monastery

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On October 25, 2010, Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk, head of the Moscow Patriarchate's department for external church relations, celebrated the Divine Liturgy at St. George's Cathedral of Xenophontos Monastery built in 1809. He was assisted by members of his delegation in holy orders, as well as the abbot of the monastery, Archimandrite Alexis, and clergy of the monastery.

After the service, the Russian Orthodox pilgrims venerated the shrines of the monastery, among them a part of the Lord's Cross and the right hand of St. George.

Speaking during the common meal, Metropolitan Hilarion said:

'For us, pilgrims of the Russian Orthodox Church, it was a special joy to celebrate the Divine Liturgy at your cathedral. The memory of St. Philopheus Kokkin we celebrate today takes us back to those remote times when relations between the Church of Constantinople and the Church of Russia were no less close than they are now. Patriarch Philopheus was a co-worker of St. Gregory Palamas whose ideas he shared. He was one of those hierarchs of the Church who zealously defended the Athonite monastic tradition.

At that same time, Russia developed a monastic life and Hesychast tradition of her own. St. Sergius of Radonezh, called the abbot of the Russian land in Russia, was its principal mouthpiece. Patriarch Philopheus knew about him and blessed him for establishing a coenobitic monastery by sending him an authorization and a paraman cross, which is found in St. Sergius' Laura of the Trinity to this day. Thus, the Russian monastic tradition received a blessing from the Holy Patriarch Philopheus.

We have in our pilgrims group a successor to St. Sergius, Archbishop Feognost, the abbot of St. Sergius' Laura of the Trinity.

We heard from the *Life* of St. Philopheus Kokkin about the difficulties experienced at that time by the holy Church of Constantinople and the attempts made to find a common language with the Latin Church. We also heard about how the Pope of Rome sent his legates to Constantinople to conclude *Unia* and how the hierarchs of the holy Church led by St. Philopheus defended Orthodoxy during that period so difficult for Orthodoxy.

Meanwhile, the unity of the Orthodox Church existed throughout the world, also far beyond the bounds of Constantinople. In remote Russia, an ecclesial and monastic life was built with the direct participation of Patriarchs of Constantinople.

We know from the history of the Church of Constantinople that Patriarchs had different positions at different times. There were those of them who, like St. Philopheus Kokkin, were glorified for their defence of Orthodoxy. But there were also those who, submitting to political influences and circumstances, signed the *Unia*. This fact was known in Russia, and the developments in Constantinople could not but affect the life of the Russian Church. It became autocephalous due to the then historical circumstances, namely, due to the fact that the Patriarch of Constantinople did sign the *Unia*. But later Patriarchs of Constantinople recognized the Russian Church as autocephalous, and she turned from a beloved daughter into a beloved sister.

Today, these events seem to be very remote, but the relationships established at that time have remained. These are relations between the hierarchy of the Church of Constantinople and the Moscow Patriarchate, and these are relations between the monastic communities of the two Churches. And today just as at that time, Mount Athos is a place where Orthodox people and Orthodox monks of various nationalities meet. Just as at that time, Mount Athos is a place where not only Greeks but also Russians, Ukrainians, Moldovans, and people of other nationalities are performing their monastic feat. Pilgrims from the Russian Orthodox Church come to Mount Athos as before to be nourished with spiritual wisdom and to come to know the monastic tradition which has given to the world such great saints as Philopheus Kokkin and Gregory Palamas. The same tradition has spiritually nourished the Russian monasticism.

I thank you, Father Abbot, for the hospitality you have offered. I thank the monastic community of the monastery for common prayers and hope that Mount Athos will remain what it has been for over one thousand years – a place to where those who seek ascetic life flock, where the luminaries of Orthodox faith will shine forth brightly, where the monastic tradition will be preserved and handed over from generation to generation’.

Having given his archpastoral blessing to all the participants in the repast, Metropolitan Hilarion and his delegation, accompanied by Abbot Alexis, saw the old cathedral painted in 1544 by icon-painter Antony of the Cretan Schools and the oldest part of it dating back to the 10th century.

Then the pilgrims saw the museum of Xenophontos Monastery with its rich collection of Byzantine antiques and, having bid warm farewell to the monks, proceeded to Monastery ‘Philopheus’.