



Metropolitan Hilarion concelebrates Divine Liturgy in Cappadocia

[gallery]

On 27 June 2010, Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk, head of the Moscow Patriarchate's Department for External Church Relations, concelebrated the Divine Liturgy with His Holiness Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople, His Beatitude Pope and Patriarch Theodore of Alexandria and All Africa, and His Beatitude Archbishop Hieronymos of Athens and All Greece. The Liturgy was celebrated at the Church of the Great Martyrs Ss Theodore Tyron and Theodore Stratelates in Malakopi (Derinkuyu).

The monastic choir of Xenophontos Monastery sang during the divine service.

In his homily delivered after the Gospel reading His Holiness Patriarch Bartholomew welcomed Metropolitan Hilarion as a wonderful theologian who has dedicated his studies particularly to St. Gregory the Theologian and remarked that Metropolitan Hilarion and his suite have arrived for pilgrimage to the holy sites of Cappadocia with the blessing His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia. The Primate of the Orthodox Church of Constantinople added that in 2007 His Holiness, who was Metropolitan of Smolensk and Kaliningrad at that time, took part in the similar pilgrimage.

His Beatitude Archbishop Hieronymos of Athens and All Greece and Metropolitan Hilarion addressed the Primate of the Local Orthodox Churches, bishops, clerics, monks and laymen at the end of the service. Metropolitan Hilarion said:

"I wholeheartedly greet you all who have gathered in this holy church on behalf of His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia and on my own behalf.

"Cappadocia is a holy land to the members of the Russian Orthodox Church. Ss. Basil the Great, Gregory the Theologian and Gregory of Nyssa, who were great fathers, pillars of the Church and universal theologians. Had shone forth in this land. Monks and nuns had lived here throughout centuries 'in caves and holes in the ground' (Heb 11:38); the blood of martyrs and confessors had been shed here.

"Cappadocia is a much suffered land, as its churches, once magnificent and beautiful, have fell in desolation.

"We were persecuted for our faith for seventy years of godless power in Russia. Many churches were blown up or ruined, monasteries were closed, and priests were shot to death or exiled. No one could imagine twenty-five or thirty years ago that church life in Russia will be revived, the churches of God will be built and adorned, and hundreds of new monasteries will open their gates to monks and nuns. Yet, God has performed a miracle, and the Orthodox faith that has lived in human hearts has been revived in Russia.

"We believe that the light of Christian faith will be rekindled in this holy land.

"I cordially greet all whose predecessors lived in this land and those who have come here to honour their memory.

"I join His Holiness Patriarch Bartholomew in calling you to cherish memory of the land of your forefathers, to pass your love of this land to your children and grandchildren and to come here again and again. Do not let the churches in this land to turn into ruins even if they are not used for intended purposes at present.

"Give support to your Patriarch who come here every year to celebrated in the churches of this holy land,

"Your Holiness! I wholeheartedly thank you for an invitation to make pilgrimage to the churches and monasteries of this land together with you.

"Please accept a modest gift, my book about St. Gregory the Theologian in the French language, as a token of our pilgrimage. An ancient countenance of the Saint, survived at a church in Cappadocia by a miracle, is on the cover. May the prayers of St. Gregory, your predecessor at the Patriarchal throne of Constantinople, help you in your primatial ministry."

Archpriest Nikolai Balashov, deputy chairman of the Moscow Patriarchate' Department for External Church Relations, was among the concelebrants.

The Divine Liturgy being over, His Holiness Patriarch Bartholomew conducted a requiem litia for Orthodox Christians who lived in Cappadocia.