



Reception in honour of Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople and Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia at St. Alexander Nevsky's Laura

In the evening of 29 May 2010, a grand reception was given in honour of His Holiness Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople and His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia at the Blue Hall of the Metropolitan's House in St. Alexander Nevsky's Laura.

Present at the reception were the Patriarchate of Constantinople delegation, permanent members of the Russian Orthodox Church Holy Synod, diocesan bishops, governmental officials and clergy of the St. Petersburg diocese.

Metropolitan Vladimir of St. Petersburg and Ladoga greeted the two primates and presented Patriarch Bartholomew with a cross and two pectoral icons.

Speaking in response, Patriarch Bartholomew said:

“Your Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia, Your Eminence Vladimir, pastor of this God-saved city, most reverend fellow-archpastors, dear fathers and concelebrants, dear children in the Lord, since our visit to the most holy Russian Orthodox Church is drawing to an end, I would like to sum it up and to express the experience of our stay in three points.

What we have seen and felt in the days of our blessed stay here is another testimony to the most profound faith of the pious Russian people. We have felt this devotion, not superficial but really a feat of spiritual piety of all beginning from old women to the smallest children. The most pleasant and comforting is the fact that the leadership of this country cherish the Orthodox faith and are guided by what lies in the heart of the Russian people.

Another point is beauty. Wherever we have been, whatever we have seen – all was beautiful beginning from works of art to flower bouquets in Orthodox churches. When some time ago my brother Patriarch Kirill and I visited the grave of Fyodor Dostoyevsky, I remembered the words that beauty will save the world. And this beauty is really deeply engraved in the soul of these people.

And the third point we have seen is the Russian people's love of music. Everywhere we heard beautiful choirs, even when two or three people sang they formed a choir. Therefore I would like to say before you

all that Russia radiates harmony; everything here points to the refinement and nobility of the Russian soul.

Allow me to believe these virtues of the good Russian people to be the heritage and virtues of all the Orthodox. Thank you all. We thank God for all that He has granted the Russian people. We thank you for having preserved and multiplied the talents which have been given you by God!"

Among those who spoke were Leningrad Regional Governor V. Serdiukov, Bishop Ambrose of Gatchina, rector of St. Petersburg Seminary and Theological Academy. St. Petersburg Legislative Assembly Chairman V. Tiulpanov, Archpriest Bogdan Soiko, rector of the Naval Cathedral of the Epiphany.

The children's choir of the Cathedral of Our Lady of Vladimir gave a recital of church music, singing also in Greek.

In conclusion of the reception, His Holiness Patriarch Kirill made a speech. He said:

"I would like to warmly thank Your Holiness for your good words. Your feelings are very fine. They help you to see the reality you come in touch with not only with your mind but also with your heart. And in your words you have reflected the impression you have got after your stay in Russia during the last week. The impression you have shared with us moves our hearts.

Indeed, when visits are made – and I felt it sharply while on a visit to Constantinople – many historical moments and today's situations in the life of the Church are felt completely anew, creating a realistic and very important picture. Such visits give an opportunity to feel and understand what is impossible to understand from books. Books do not convey people's facial expressions when they are listening to the words of a visiting Primate. Books cannot convey the spiritual atmosphere that is very clearly understood by our hearts.

This is why the mutual visits of primates of Churches are so important. At least I catch myself at the thought that, though I have already visited Constantinople many times, having visited the Holy Church of Constantinople as Patriarch, I saw what I had never seen before and felt in my heart what I had never felt before.

I hope that you have acquired a new experience from your coming in touch with Russia. Your first visit took place in the remote year 1993. It was a very hard year, a time of a deep and dangerous civil conflict when the whole political system of the Soviet Union collapsed for good and we found ourselves on the brink of a civil war. Perhaps, you had somewhat different impressions of our country and our Church at

that time.

Now we have entered a very favourable period, and you have been able to feel these changes clearly and sharply. Today the country's highest authorities are not ashamed of demonstrating their sincere commitment to Orthodox traditions, being profoundly believing people. Today all the problems, which only yesterday were on the agenda of church-state relations, are being resolved; today people realize ever more clearly how important it is to relate their religious and spiritual tradition with today's economic and political development.

In a sense we are walking along a path which we have never traversed before. Before there were Orthodox rulers but no free Church. The Church was part of the state apparatus and could not be the authority's coworker and participant in equitable dialogue with it. Beautiful churches were built; there were many of them, but the Church had no independent position on any socially significant issue.

Today the Church is fully autonomous from any political influences. We are in dialogue with all the political forces, trade unions, creative unions and various institutions of the civil society, and in this dialogue we represent our Christian Orthodox understanding of history and the present developments in our country. Certainly, of special importance is cooperation with the state authorities both on federal and local level".

After expressing gratitude to Metropolitan Vladimir of St. Petersburg and Ladoga for the fruitful dialogue with the municipal and regional authorities and for the warm welcome, His Holiness Kirill continued,

"Tomorrow we will celebrate with God's help the Divine Liturgy in the largest church of the Orthodox world – St. Isaac's. We will certainly remember Russia's glorious past.

I ask you to pray tomorrow for the Russian Church of today, for our people in their very difficult historical journey. Our journey does not fully coincide with the path followed by European countries and countries in the American continent because, developing modern technologies and modernizing the country, we have a firm wish to remain an Orthodox country. And if we manage to remain an Orthodox country, while being a very modern one, it will be very important for the whole world. I can also say that in our country there are many various religions, and an Orthodox country does not imply a state in which other religions could not use their rights and freedoms. Having experienced too much when freedom of religion was suppressed, we insist today on religious freedom for others, while being convinced that this religious freedom should not change the religious identity of our country. That is why we strongly resist any attempts to change the religious identity of our country and feel that we are succeeding in it with God's help.

Once again I would like to thank you, Your Holiness, and wish you God's help in your work so that peace and love may be fortified in relations between the Orthodox Churches of Constantinople and Russia. I believe in the unity of Holy Orthodoxy and together with you, Your Holiness, I am ready to work for the consolidation of this unity. Many years of life be to Your Holiness and all the honorable members of your delegation!"

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