



Patriarch Bartholomew visits Hermitage, Cathedral of Our Lady of Kazan and Church of the Saviour-on-the-Blood in St. Petersburg

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On May 29, 2010, the Primates of the Orthodox Churches of Constantinople and Russia and the Patriarchate of Constantinople delegation including Metropolitan Michael of Austria, Metropolitan Irinaios of Myriofytos and Peristasis, Metropolitan Emmanuel of France, Archimandrite Elpidophoros (Lambridianis), chief secretary of the Patriarchate of Constantinople Holy Synod, Archimandrite Vissarion (Komzias), Archdeacon Maxim (Vgenopoulos) and others, together with Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk, head of the Moscow Patriarchate's department for external church relations, went by water from Kronstadt to St. Petersburg.

On the English Embankment, they were met by Metropolitan Vladimir of St. Petersburg and Ladoga, and Bishops Ambrose of Gatchina and Nazariy of Vyborg.

Patriarch Bartholomew and his delegation together with Metropolitan Hilarion and Bishop Ambrose who accompanied them proceeded to the Hermitage, where an excursion was arranged for them in this world-renowned museum.

In the Honored Guests Book, His Holiness Patriarch Bartholomew wrote, "I am amazed at the famous exhibits and warmly thank for the excellent excursion. We have again come to this renowned museum. I wish the city and people in St. Petersburg every blessing from God" and signed "With warmth for you in the Lord, intercessor Patriarch Bartholomew".

After that Patriarch Bartholomew visited the Cathedral of Our Lady of Kazan. He was welcomed at the entrance by Metropolitan Vladimir of St. Petersburg and Ladoga, Bishop Nazariy of Vyborg and the cathedral clergy.

Patriarch Bartholomew bowed before the venerated copy of the Icon of Our Lady of Kazan, which was given to Peter I in 1703 during the construction of the city and placed in the Kazan Cathedral its construction was completed.

The choir sang the hymn "To you as Champion unto victory..." to the Mother of God, and the Greek delegation sang the same hymn in Greek.

The rector of the cathedral, Archpriest Pavel Krasnotsvetov, greeted Patriarch Bartholomew, saying, “Your Holiness, Archbishop Bartholomew of Constantinople and the New Rome and Ecumenical Patriarch, allow me to welcome you to the cathedral and to thank God for having worked a great miracle, the return of the unity of the Orthodox in peace, love, and the spirit of friendship. Christian unity is important today. The world lies in evil, and the Orthodox Church brings the truth to this world.

“The country of Russia has shaken off the yoke of 70 year-long Babylon-like captivity in a false teaching which tempted the ordinary Russian people. Now we enjoy a free opportunity to restore churches, to pray in them and to thank God for having prevented the death of His Church: the gates of hell have failed to overcome it”.

Father Pavel told His Holiness Bartholomew about the construction and decoration of the church and about its shrines. In conclusion of his address he said,

“Your Holiness, we are glad to see you and your fellow-travelers and to greet you on the occasion of the recent Day of the Holy Trinity. When you served together with Patriarch Kirill in Moscow, our hearts rejoiced in the fact that the Patriarch of Constantinople was with us in those holy days. “Is polla eti, Despota! Many years of life to you!”

The Primate of the Orthodox Church of Constantinople, in his address to Metropolitan Vladimir and the congregation, said:

“Your Eminence Metropolitan Vladimir of St. Petersburg and Ladoga, beloved concelebrants, dear children in Christ, I thank God who has vouchsafed to bring me again, after 17 years, to this heroic city. I call this city heroic because we know how much it endured, how much it suffered during the Second World War. During my previous visit to St. Petersburg, the present Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia was our guide. We know that he comes from this city; therefore this city has the full right to be proud of its child. Through our common efforts together with His Holiness Patriarch Kirill, we opened last year a new page in our relations and his invitation and our present visit to the Russian Church are proofs of this new page in our relations.

“We thank His Eminence Metropolitan Vladimir, and since he has recently celebrated his birthday, we wish him long life and many years of fruitful pastoral ministry.

“And upon you all we invoke the grace and intercession of the Most Holy Mother of God. Keep the Orthodox faith as you kept it in hard times. I wish you to remain faithful to your chief pastor, the Most Reverend Metropolitan Vladimir, your Patriarch and to your Church.

In conclusion, I would like to convey to you a blessing of the holy Church of Constantinople”.

Metropolitan Vladimir greeted the high guest in his turn, saying,

“Thank you, Your Holiness, for having undertaken the great effort to come to our northern capital and to pray and to see our churches and monasteries. When we received this cathedral we had to restore it since it had been used as a museum of the history of atheism. We had also to revive worship services and traditions anew. On major feast days this cathedral accommodates 4500 worshippers.

“I recall the words of one writer, who said, ‘Go and tell all that Russia is alive!’ and you are a witness to the fact that we have survived a powerful anti-religious campaign to pray and to life church life again.

“Thank you for your visit and thank you for your primatial blessing. We hope that you will remember us in your prayers. We thank you, Your Holiness, for having made this effort to come to this cathedral and to several churches so that you may have now a fuller idea of how we live and pray”.

Patriarch Bartholomew saw the interior of the Kazan Cathedral, paying special attention to the grave of Field-Marshal Mikhail Kutuzov, a famous Russian military leader.

Then the Primate of the Orthodox Church of Constantinople proceeded to the Cathedral of the Saviour-on-the-Blood to see its unique mosaics and the place where Emperor Alexander II was assassinated. In the sanctuary dedicated to the Holy Resurrection, the Constantinople delegation sang the Easter troparion in Greek.

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