



Primates of Orthodox Churches of Constantinople and Russia visit St. Nicholas' Naval Cathedral in Kronstadt

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The Primate of the Orthodox Church of Constantinople completed his visit to Valamo early in the morning on May 29, 2010. His Holiness Bartholomew was seen off at the pier by Bishop Pankraty of Troitsk, abbot of the Valamo Monastery of the Holy Transfiguration.

At the Priozersk pier, Patriarch Bartholomew and his delegation were met by Bishop Ambrose of Gatchina, vicar of the St. Petersburg diocese and rector of St. Petersburg Theological Schools. From that point His Holiness and his delegation went to Kronstadt, accompanied by Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk, head of the Moscow Patriarchate's department for external church relations, Archpriest Nikolay Balashov, DECR vice-chairman, Rev. Igor Yakimchuk, DECR secretary for inter-Orthodox relations, and other staff members of the DECR.

At the entrance to the Naval Cathedral of St. Nicholas the Miracle-Worker, His Holiness Bartholomew was welcomed by Patriarch Kirill, Metropolitan Vladimir of St. Petersburg and Ladoga, and Bishop Sergiy of Solnechnogorsk, director of the Moscow Patriarchate's administrative secretariat.

His Holiness Bartholomew was greeted by Ms. Svetlana Medvedeva, chair of the Patrons Board of the Designated Program for Spiritual and Ethical Culture of Russia's Younger Generation and member of the patrons board for the restoration of St. Nicholas's Naval Cathedral. The wife of the Russian President spoke about the progress made in the restoration of the cathedral, which is a monument to Russia's naval glory.

During the restoration, the stage, which had been put in the place of the sanctuary, was removed together with the floors, which had been built in after the church was closed, and the arches and the cupola drum were opened. Before the arrival of the two primates, an image of an iconostasis was projected to a white canvass at the place where the sanctuary used to be and an image of the Saviour was projected to the vault of a sanctuary apse.

Ms. Medvedeva said in particular that she was closely following the visit of His Holiness Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople to the Russian Orthodox Church and that the visit she believed made a considerable contribution to the development of inter-Orthodox relations.

Addressing Ms. Medvedeva, the Primate of the Orthodox Church of Constantinople said, 'Our meeting with you is a continuation of the meeting with the Head of the Russian State Mr. Medvedev, which took place a few days ago'.

Then Patriarch Kirill celebrated a brief thanksgiving to St. Nicholas the Miracle-Worker.

A documentary about the history of the construction, the defilement and regeneration of the Naval Cathedral was shown to the two primates. After that, they surveyed the restoration work.

After the tour, the two Patriarchs and Ms. Medvedeva were greeted by children, winners of the prizes of the art contest 'the Naval Cathedral in Children's Eyes'.

At the cathedral square where Kronstadt people assembled and the Kronstadt garrison servicemen of the Baltic Navy were lined up, Patriarchs Bartholomew and Kirill stopped at the monument to Admiral Makarov. Addressing the gathering, Patriarch Kirill said:

"I wholeheartedly greet you all! I am glad to meet you in this legendary square of the cathedral, a spiritual symbol of Russia's might, a spiritual symbol of the Russian Navy's greatness. It was from these walls that our pious ancestors committed to the Fatherland used to go to sea. Without hesitation they gave their lives for and defended the freedom and independence of our homeland. They did so in old times, they did so in the formidable years of the Great Patriotic War, the 65th anniversary of which we have just marked.

Today the church is being regenerated. It is reviving as a real symbol of the revival of the people and the country, it is reviving together with a revival of the might of the country's Armed Forces, which keep up not only the security of the homeland but also her dignity. I call upon you all to serve the Fatherland not sparing your lives, to serve like our great fathers, grandfathers and great grandfathers did, who, faithful to their oath, were always ready to give their lives to the Motherland. May the Lord preserve you, helping you to grow in spirit and military power. May the Lord protect our Armed Forces against any occasion in which they would have to participate in any military campaigns, so that the blood of our people may not be shed, so that peace and justice may be present in the life of humanity today. But always and in any situation the country should be able to rely on those who are ready to serve her even up to death.

Once again I greet you on the occasion of this remarkable event, and may God's blessing be with you all and with people of legendary Kronstadt and with all those who are present today in this square to meet the Patriarch. Today we have with us in this square our high guest – His Holiness Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople, who has come to Russia for an official visit on my invitation. The

cathedral in the center of Kronstadt, which we have now before our eyes, was built in the image of the Cathedral of St. Sophia in Constantinople. It was in that cathedral that the ambassadors of Prince Vladimir saw for the first time an Orthodox liturgy and, astounded at the sight, came back to Kiev and said to the prince, 'We did not know where we were – on earth or in heaven'. And then the wise prince decided that the people be baptized and become Orthodox.

And today I cordially greet you, Your Holiness, as a living bearer of the Tradition of ancient Byzantium, and rejoice in the opportunity to be together with you in our historic St. Nicholas's Cathedral and in this square. You are welcome to Russia's northern capital!"

Then there was a march of the guards of honour.

DECR Communication Service

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