



## **Patriarch Bartholomew arrives at Valamo Monastery of the Transfiguration**

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His Holiness Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople, during his official visit to the Russian Orthodox Church, arrived together with his delegation at the Valamo Monastery of the Holy Transfiguration, on May 27, 2010.

The Primate of the Orthodox Church of Constantinople was accompanied by Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk, head of the Moscow Patriarchate's department for external church relations, Bishop Pankraty of Troitsk, abbot of the Valamo Monastery, Archpriest Nikolay Balashov, DECR vice-chairman, and Rev. Igor Yakimchuk, DECR secretary for inter-Orthodox relations.

At the holy gates, His Holiness Bartholomew and his delegation of bishops and priests were welcomed by the monastic community, pilgrims as well as young students of the Missile-Artillery Military School in St. Petersburg. The Patriarch and his Greek delegation were taken to the lower church of the monastery's Cathedral of the Transfiguration to venerate the relics of Sts Sergius and Herman of Valamo and St. Antipa of Valamo and the Valamo Icon of the Mother of God.

Bishop Pankraty welcomed Patriarch Bartholomew and his delegation, saying,

'Your Holiness, Your Eminences, the Valamo monastery is glad to welcome the Patriarch of Constantinople as Primate of the Mother Church of Constantinople. This happens for the first time in the history of the monastery, and in your person we greet the whole Church of Constantinople, her Primates - such great and holy men as Sts Gregory the Theologian, John Chrysostom, and a host of other great saints.

The Mother Church of Constantinople gave Orthodoxy to the Russian people and laid a foundation for church culture. And there is a tradition that the founder of the Valamo monastery was also a Byzantine monk. Our monastery maintains fraternal relations with some monasteries on Holy Mount, such as Vatopedi to which we send our monks for learning the continued monastic tradition of Holy Mount.

We wholeheartedly thank Your Holiness for having undertaken the effort to come here and give us all your blessing. It is a great blessing and a great joy for us. We wholeheartedly greet you and hope that your visit to our Valamo monastery will leave pleasant remembrances in your heart. You are welcome!'

His Holiness Patriarch Bartholomew addressed himself to the abbot and the brethren with words of greetings:

'Your Grace, Bishop Pankraty of Troitsk, Abbot of the sacred Valamo Monastery!

Beloved in Christ Brethren of the Valamo Monastery – hieromonks, hierodeacons, monks and novices!

We send up glory to our God glorified in the Trinity, for He, after a long night of militant atheism, has resurrected the old sacred Monastery of Valamo and within a short time restored it to its former glory, restoring both its buildings and, most importantly, monastic vocations. Certainly, the day of December the 14<sup>th</sup>, 1989, became the day when the right hand of the Almighty, after half a century of forcible closure, began working the miracle of regenerating the monastery, which, since monks first came to Valamo Island on Ladoga Lake, had been for many centuries a bright beacon for Karelia and all the north-western Russia.

Under the protection of the holy miracle-workers Sergius and Herman, the Valamo brethren have selflessly worked under severe conditions to restore the defiled and ruined monastery so that it may be transformed to the glory of our Saviour who transfigured on Mount Thabor and be turned again into a model cenobitic monastery, a foundry of the gospel's chastity, a school of sanctity, a place of spiritual support and care in Christ for thousands of devout pilgrims.

The ever memorable and holy Patriarch Alexy II, who visited this monastery in his childhood and came to feel here the clear presence of God's grace, helped with great love to this God-pleasing task, which he blessed and rewarded by granting the monastery the status of stauropegial in 1990. Indeed, God glorified in the Trinity could not leave without response the continuous prayers for the preservation of the monastery lifted up by the saints who shone forth in this blessed place – by Sts Sergius and his disciple St. Herman, the founders of the monastery, Sts Anthony of Rostov, Arseny of Konevsk, Savvaty of the Solovki, the Venerable Martyr Titus, Sts Herman of Alaska, Antipa of Athos and Valamo and a host of God-enlightened *starets* up to the new venerable martyrs of the 20<sup>th</sup> century – Feofan, Arefa, Jeremiah and others.

We have come from Constantinople and found ourselves facing a great miracle which the Lord has worked here in our days. We are proud of this numerous Christ-loving community which, under the protecting veil of the Most Holy Mother of God and the spiritual guidance of the His Grace Bishop Pankraty, are selflessly working to purify and sanctify souls and bodies, to give spiritual and material support to a great many pilgrims, to encourage the development of church music, to complete the restoration and adornment of the monastery, thus conveying the great message of Christ's love of the whole Holy Rus'. Continue, dear brothers and children in Christ, to perform your sacred feat with

humbleness and patience, be obedient to His Grace Bishop Pankraty and His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia, treat with love “each other and everyone else” (1 Thes. 3:12). Adorn the icon-lamps of your souls with chastity and sanctity and be ready at any moment to meet the Bridegroom Christ! Pray for our common Mother – the Church of Constantinople, in the knowledge that we always pray for you and our love is always with you.

From our heart we thank you, Your Grace the Abbot, for the generous welcome, for the warm words. We thank you for the love that you and your brotherhood have shown towards us. We wish you all that is necessary for salvation, and may Jesus Christ the Archpastor of our faith and our salvation, through the intercession of His Most Holy Mother, support and fortify you and your brethren entrusted to your care.

“Peace to the brothers, and love with faith from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Grace to all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with an undying love” (Eth. 6:23-24). Our patriarchal blessing and prayer be with you all, my dear ones!”

Then His Holiness and his delegation proceeded to the upper church of the Cathedral of the Holy Transfiguration. Patriarch Bartholomew gave his blessing upon the students of the Missile-Artillery Military School and gave them small icons of the Saviour. A photo of His Holiness together with the monastic community was taken at the entrance to the church, after which His Holiness gave his blessing to the pilgrims who assembled in the monastery square.

*DECR Communication Service*

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