Metropolitan Hilarion leads worship at Shroud of Turin

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Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk, head of the Moscow Patriarchate's department for external church relations, who is on a visit to Italy with the blessing of His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia, officiated at martins at the Shroud in the cathedral of Turin, on 17 May 2010.

The DECR chairman was assisted by Archbishop Feofan of Berlin and Germany, Archbishop Innokenty of Korsun, administrator of the Moscow Patriarchate parishes in Italy; Archbishops Kirill of Yaroslavl and Rostov, Feognost of Sergiev Posad and Yelisey of Surozh, as well as Bishop Michael of Geneva and Western Europe (Russian Church Outside Russia), about one hundred priests and deacons from Russia and countries of the far and near abroad.

Over 800 pilgrims from Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova, Italy, Germany, Great Britain, France, Spain, Portugal, Switzerland and other countries came to the solemn service at the Shroud of Turin.

Present in the cathedral were Cardinal Severino Poletto, Archbishop of Turin, and clergy of the archdiocese. Before the service, Cardinal Poletto greeted the DECR chairman, bishops and clergy and numerous pilgrims. He reminded the congregation that His Holiness Kirill came to venerate the Shroud of Turin ten years ago when he was Metropolitan of Smolensk and Kaliningrad and officiated at vespers at the shrine. The Archbishop of Turin asked to convey the best wishes to His Holiness.

After the service, Metropolitan Hilarion addressed himself to the pilgrims with an archpastoral word:

There are many proofs of this shrine's authenticity. But what is the most important thing for us is the church Tradition which testifies that this relic has been preserved from the earliest centuries of Christianity. The Shroud, in which the body of our Lord Jesus Christ was wrapped during the burial, is mentioned in all the four Gospels. Certainly, the Evangelists would not have mentioned this cover if it had not been kept by the faithful as a great shrine from the earliest Christian times. Later we heard a story of our Saviour's image not made with hands. It used to hang over the church gates in Edessus and later was brought to Constantinople. It disappeared subsequently without trace in the era of crusades. And some time later, already in the West, this Shroud reappeared.

We will never know whether the Shroud of Turin is that Not-Made-With-Hands Image Christ. It is known however that for centuries the Shroud was kept folded in such a way that people could see only the face of our Saviour, not his whole body impressed on the Shroud. So quite probably the Not-Made-With-Hands Image from Edessus is that same Shroud at which we are praying today. Even if it is a different image, we know from the Gospel According to St. John, which you have heard just now, that along with the Shroud there was also a Veil, which was put on Jesus' face during the burial.

Standing before this shrine, we remember first of all the suffering and death of our Lord Jesus Christ. We have come here today from different countries – Russia, Ukraine, Moldova, Belarus, from all over Italy, from France, Great Britain, Spain, Portugal. One can innumerate many countries from which Orthodox pilgrims have flocked over here. What moved us when we were coming here, taking upon ourselves the burdens of journey? – The love of Christ. We have come here to worship our divine Saviour and to pray at this great shrine for ourselves and for our loved ones, to ask blessing from our Lord Jesus Christ who ascended the Cross for the sake of each of us, suffered, died and rose from the dead.

Today we have heard the Gospel telling us about the death and resurrection of our Saviour. We have heard the words from the divine service of the Great Saturday when the Church praises our Saviour who died for us and descended into hell for our sake. Every human word becomes silent at this great shrine; here every human vanity stops. All our problems, concerns and passions go to the background because here we stand before our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, who was crucified and who died for people. We feel his presence among us and ask him not to deprive us of his grace.

Ten years ago the Lord vouchsafed me a chance to visit this holy church and participate in vespers led by the then chairman of the Department for External Church Relations and the present Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia. Ten years later I am happy to be here again and to pray before this greatest Christian shrine together with an assembly of Russian Orthodox bishops and pilgrims from many countries of the world.

Metropolitan Hilarion warmly thanked the Archbishop of Turin Cardinal Poletto for the permission to celebrate an Orthodox service in the church and presented him with an image of our Saviour produced by the Moscow Patriarchate's art shops.

DECR Communication Service

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