Metropolitan Hilarion's visit to Ravenna

[gallery]

Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk, head of the Moscow Patriarchate's department for external church relations, who is in Italy with the blessing of His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia, visited Ravenna on 15 May 2010.

In the 5th century Sant'Apollinare in Classe, the DECR chairman celebrated the Divine Liturgy, assisted by Archimandrite Mark Davitti, rector of the Moscow Patriarchate parishes in Bologna and Ravenna, Archpriest Nikolay Makar, rector of St. Ambrose of Milan's Parish in Milan, Hegumen Philip Vasiltsev, rector of St. Catherine's, Rev. Dimitry Sozonenko, DECR acting secretary for inter-Christian relations, and clergy of the Moscow Patriarchate's Italian Deanery.

After the service, Metropolitan Hilarion addressed the congregation with an archpastoral word:

Dear Father, Brothers and Sisters, on the day when the Holy Church commemorates St. Athanasius the Great, Archbishop of Alexandria, and the holy passion-bearers Boris and Gleb, our Lord was vouchsafed us to celebrated the divine Liturgy in this holy church where the honorable relics of the holy martyr Appolinarius, an associate of the apostles and the first bishop of Ravenna, lie in rest. I am very glad that our pilgrimage to holy places in the Italian land begins here, in Ravenna, where the heritage of the early undivided Church has survived engraved in churches and wall images.

When I first came to Ravenna many years ago as still a hieromonk and student of Oxford University, I was struck by precisely this church of Sant'Apollinare in Classe. The holy image in the sanctuary apse, as I see it, is unparallel in the early Christian art in its power of influence and theological substance. Then, as a student, I felt a wish to celebrate the Divine Liturgy here one day. And today this wish I cherished for many years has come true.

What does the holy image we contemplate today tell us? First of all, it tells us about the Lord's Transfiguration, but it does so in a symbolical language which was easily understood by early Christians but which is not so intelligible for modern people who are accustomed to very concrete and very simple representations of what they should see or feel. The composition is centered on the Cross in a circle with the Latin inscription *salus mundi* above it, which means 'salvation of the world'. It symbolizes the Lord Jesus Christ. On the left of the Cross we see one lamb and two lambs on its right. These are three apostles who ascended the Transfiguration mount together with our Saviour – Peter on the left and Jacob and John on the right. In the clouds above we see half figures of Moses and Elijah who appeared

before our Lord when He transfigured before his disciples. However, central to the composition are St. Appolinarius and twelve lambs, who I believe symbolize his flock, with the lambs coming to him as pastor who knows his lambs by names and with them listening to his voice and following him (see, Jn. 10:14-16).

This striking composition reveals to us an image of the transformed world as God Himself wanted to see it. It is a world different from the one we live in. We live in a world where human passions and lust prevails, where sin rules, where crimes are committed every day, where people do evil, destroying one another physically and spiritually.

However we see what kind of a world in which we live should be. Its image is the Church, and this composition reminds us of the Church and the Eucharist. It is not accidental that there is another composition on its right, where we see Melchizedek who brings bread and wine, Abraham who sacrifices his son Abel, and Abel who brings to God a sacrificed lamb. All they are assembled around an altar, symbolizing nothing other than the Eucharistic repast.

This whole composition with St. Appolinarius at the head, who lifts up his hands in prayers for his flock, is an image of the Eucharist, while the Eucharist itself is an image of the transformed world.

When we assemble in a church of God where the Divine Liturgy is celebrated, the bishop or the priest who celebrates it is like St. Appolinarius depicted here. The flock who come to church is like the twelve lambs next to him. The church of God is like the transformed world with its blue sky, stars, green grass and plants and with the Cross of Christ who rules amidst this world.

Such is the wonderful church in which the Lord has vouchsafed us to celebrate this Divine Liturgy today through the intercession of St. Appolinarius.

I would like to thank Archbishop Giuseppe Verucci of Ravenna for having permitted us to celebrate here. I thank the rector of our parish in Ravenna, Father Mark, for having prepared this divine service and for the work he carries out in this city and in Bologna. I thank all the clergy who have assembled here today and all of you, dear Brothers and Sisters. I call upon you to preserve firmly the Orthodox faith.

In Ravenna we see the heritage of the early undivided Church. The church mosaics in Ravenna have preserved for us the image of that Church in which people, in the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace (Eph. 4:3), confessed the love of God and were united around one Eucharistic cup. In our time, Christians in East and West are divided but we believe that spiritual unity, to which our Lord Jesus Christ has called us and which is revealed in full measure in the holy Eucharist, is the goal of our journey on earth.

I greet you all, dear Fathers, Brothers and Sisters, on this day on which we continue to celebrate the Ascension of the Lord. I wish you all God's help so that the Lord may protect you against any evil, so that the Most Holy Mother of God may protect you with her honorable veil and so that the holy martyr Appolinarius, the first bishop of Ravenna, who is venerated both in the Catholic and the Orthodox Church, may be our heavenly patron and intercessor.

The DECR chairman thanked Archbishop Verucci of Ravenna for the opportunity to celebrate the Divine Liturgy at the relics of the first bishop of Ravenna, St. Appolinarius.

Then Metropolitan Hilarion and Archbishop Verucci visited the Moscow Patriarchate's Parish of the Intercession in Ravenna, where the DECR chairman was warmly welcomed by the rector of the parish, Archimandrite Mark Davitti.

Following that, Archbishop Verucci gave lunch in honour of Metropolitan Hilarion and his delegation. After the lunch, the DECR chairman presented the archbishop of Ravenna with a pectoral cross produced by the Moscow Patriarchate's art shops.

Later that day His Eminence Hilarion visited the 5th-6th century architectural monuments in Ravenna, including San Vitale, Sant'Appolinare Nuovo, Mausoleum of Galla Placidia and 'the Orthodox Baptistery'. In the Cathedral of the Resurrection, the DECR chairman and his party prayed before the honorable head of St. Appolinarius.

In the evening, the DECR delegation departed to Milan.

DECR Communication Service

Source: https://mospat.ru/en/news/57260/