Russian and Bulgarian soldiers who fought for liberation of Bulgaria are commemorated on Shipka Pass



On 3 March 2021, the Day of the Liberation of Bulgaria fr om the Ottoman dominion, Metropolitan Kiprian of Stara Zagora invited archimandrite Vassian (Zmeyev), rector, and archpriest Yevgeny Pavelchuk, secretary of the Representation of the Russian Orthodox Church in Sofia, to take part in the celebration of the 143rd anniversary of the victorious end of the Liberation War of 1877-1878 celebrated as a Bulgarian national holiday.

Metropolitan Kiprian officiated at the thanksgiving prayer service at the cathedral church in Stara Zagora. Concelebrating were archimandrite Bogoslov (Dimitrov), protosyngel of the Stara Zagora metropolis, archimandrite Vassian (Zmeyev), rector of the Russian Orthodox Church's Representation in Sofia, and clerics of the diocese.

Attending the service were representatives of civil authorities Mr.Krasimir Valchev, minister of

education and science of the Republic of Bulgaria, Ms. Ivanka Sotirova and Ms Milena Zheleva, Stara Zagora's deputy mayors.

After the prayer service the participants in the celebration proceeded to the Church of the Nativity of Christ on the Shipka Pass wh ere the Russian soldiers are buried who gave their lives for the liberation of Bulgaria. Hieromonk Pankraty (Guzov), hegumen of the Monastery of the Nativity of Christ on the Shipla Pass and the brethren celebrated requiem service for the Russian and Bulgarian soldiers.

Metropolitan Kiprian celebrated the thanksgiving prayer service at the monastery church together with archimandrite Bogoslov and archimandrite Vassian. Attending the service were Kazanlak's Mayor Galina Stoyanova, Shipka's Mayor Vasilka Panayotova, and many pilgrims.

After the prayer service, Metropolitan Kiprian addressed those gathered with an archpastoral homily, saying in particular: "God's grace and faith served as spiritual bonds which our forefathers gained through suffering and passed on to us as a dream that has come true for the Bulgarian people. The 3rd of March is a holy national holiday! Today we express our gratitude to all soldiers who died during the Russo-Turkish war for the liberation of Bulgaria. Many words have been said about this date. Many words are being said today in memory of this great victory that has brought light to the Bulgarians, who, suffocating from pain, endured five hundred years of foreign yoke with dignity and gave life to future generations.

"Let us pay tribute to the memory of our Bulgarian fathers and mothers, brothers and sisters, volunteers and civilians who died as martyrs for our life and celebration on the 3rd of March! Let us do honour to the thousands of Russian soldiers, both known and unknown, who liberated our suffering Motherland and defended the Orthodox faith in Christ! Let us pay homage to all those who shed their blood and sacrificed their lives for our Fatherland!"

Metropolitan Kiprian noted with gratitude the decision of the Bulgarian Council of Ministers led by Mr. Boyko Borisov to carry out restoration works at the Church of the Nativity of Christ on the Shipka Pass "that will for centuries remind us of the great battle and the unity of the Bulgarians and Russians consolidated by the Orthodox faith in Christ. Today we have gathered together at this church in the name of our brotherhood and love," he said.

The hierarch thanked the Kazanlak municipality for the restoration works completed on the eve of the Liberation Day.

"Looking at the memorial church, we will always remember the events about which we have read. This church testifies to the historical truth. The remains of the known and unknown soldiers are laid to rest in

the church's crypt," Metropolitan Kiprian said in conclusion.

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The Church of the Nativity of Christ on Shipka Pass is a bright symbol of the Bulgarian-Russian brotherhood. It was built for the commemoration of the Russian soldiers-liberators and the Bulgarian volunteers on the donations collected in Russia and Bulgaria. The construction began on the initiative of Ms. Olga N. Skobeleva, the mother of General Mikhail D. Skobelev, a hero of the Liberation War. The consecration of the church on 27 September 1902 coincided with celebration of the 25th anniversary of the Battles on Shipka Pass.

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