



## Hierarch of Georgian Church celebrates Divine Liturgy in Moscow church taking pastoral care for Georgian Orthodox diaspora



On April 18, 2021, the 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday of the Great Lent, the commemoration day of St. Mary of Egypt, Metropolitan Nicholas of Akhalkalaki, Kumurdo and Kars (Georgian Orthodox Church), with a blessing of His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia, presided over the Divine Liturgy at the St George church in Bolshaya Gruzinskaya Street in Moscow, which takes pastoral care of the Georgian Orthodox community in Moscow.

Metropolitan Nicholas's concelebrants were Archpriest Nikolay Balashov, vice-chairman of the Moscow Patriarchate Department for External Church Relations; Archpriest Feodor Krechetov, rector of the church of Great Martyr George the Conqueror; Archpriest Kakhaber Gogoshvili, a cleric of the Georgian Orthodox Church; and the parish clergy.

After the service, Archpriest Nikolay Balashov conveyed to the hierarch of the Patriarchate of Georgia best regards from His Holiness Patriarch Kirill and DECR Chairman Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk.

The Very Reverend Father Nikolay also read out a congratulatory message from His Eminence Hilarion to Metropolitan Nicholas of Akhalkalaki, Kumirdo and Kars on the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his episcopal consecration, which was performed on the 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday of the Great Lent in 1996. "The time of your episcopal consecration was a time of new challenges and great hopes for the holy Georgian Church in restoring her power after decades of atheistic persecutions", the message read, "you helped justify these hopes by your long-standing sacrificial archpastoral service, by restoring ancient churches and building new ones, by admonishing the clergy and strengthening the flock - all this for the sake of making the domain of the Mother of God, the sacred land of Iberia, flourish again with the faith of Christ and devotion".

"The Russian Church highly appreciates your contribution to the building of Orthodox unity, to the strengthening of our relations with the Georgian Orthodox Church, to the sustaining of an atmosphere of mutual understanding and trust between our two Churches", Metropolitan Hilarion stated and wished His Eminence Nicholas fortitude from the Lord in his archpastoral work, as well as peace and joy in Jesus Christ.

On his part, Metropolitan Nicholas expressed gratitude for the warm congratulations on so significant a date for him. He also stressed that he was grateful to the Primate of the Russian Orthodox Church "for the possibility for the Georgian flock to live far from their homeland without feeling like strangers"

His Eminence gave a high value to the work of Archpriest Feodor Krechetov, rector of the St. George church in which pastoral care is given to the Georgian Orthodox community residing in Moscow. "I am seeing joyful faces of our parishioners", he said, "It cannot be otherwise indeed because Christianity is a religion of joy. We rejoice in having the door to the Heavenly Kingdom open for us, it only takes our desire. Joy is tangibly present in this church, and I am very grateful to the Russian Orthodox Church for it".

In his homily, Metropolitan Nicholas spoke about the feat performed by St. Mary of Egypt whose memory is honored by the Church on that day. "Though we belong to different Local Churches, it is a relative division; it is a division made only on the earth. We all are members of the one Catholic, Holy and Apostolic Church", he said in conclusion, stressing the need to guard the unity of Orthodoxy.

*DECR Communication Service*

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