Patriarch Porfirije: Kosovo and Metohija are our spiritual Jerusalem



“What is the most important for us is that Kosovo and Metohija are our spiritual Jerusalem”, His Holiness Patriarch Porfirije stressed answering questions fr om a correspondent of the Russian Mezhdunarodnaya zhizn (International life) magazine. He noted that just as millennia after the exodus, the Jews in the diaspora used to say, ‘See you next year in Jerusalem’, so the Serbian youth greet each other with words ‘See you next year in Prizren’, thus showing that they cherish the memory of the fact that Prizren is a city of Serbian kings, the capital city, the city of King Dušan. “For everybody to know that, for instance, the value of the Church of Our Lady of Ljeviš named so after a medieval toponym cannot be measured by any earthly treasures”, His Holiness continued.

At the same time, the Primate of the Serbian Church pointed out this greeting is no call to a conflict or aggression, “Our way is the way of our state, our people and the Church; it is the way of dialogue, peaceful co-existence, respect for every person, for all positive human beliefs. However, it does not mean that the Church shows any relativism on this issue. With regard to the issue of Kosovo and

Metohija, the promised Serbian land, the Church, and personally the Patriarch, seek, in direct, systemic and manifold ways, to exert influence on the spirit of time, on the very essence of the people, on total social, political and cultural circumstances in the state so that the nature of young generations' discourse expressed in the maxim 'See you next year in Prizren' may remain a constant paradigm".

He expressed profound gratitude "for the support in the struggle for justice and peace, for Kosovo and Metohija, to the Russian State, which unhesitatingly sets a veto in the UN Security Council, to the Russian Orthodox Church, other Local Orthodox Churches and the Churches in Greek and Slavic worlds, as well as to Pope Francis".

Speaking about his own impressions of his recent trip to Kosovo and Metohija, Patriarch Porfirije drew a parallel between the religious life in that region and the religious life in Western Europe, "In the southern Serbian region, many churches are destroyed, looted, defiled and therefore stand empty. In Europe, there are also a considerable number of empty churches; with the only difference that they are not destroyed, not defiled by those who do not wish Christ and His Church. Churches, in which the Liturgy was served for centuries, are now transformed into restaurants, shopping centres, tourist sites, discotheques and similar places of mass entertainment".

"May be this is exactly what has given rise to indifference towards the destruction of churches in that part of Europe, towards the sufferings of Christians", His Holiness presumed.

He related with bitterness that the 14th century monastery Mušutište, in which he was ordained in 1985, turned out totally destroyed by locals in 1999. Destroyed was also the parish church, also dated back to the 14th century; all the Serbian houses were burnt down. "The Serbs driven away fr om the Mušutište village, if obstacles are not put in their way, come every year to the ruins of the church, in which I was ordained on Pentecost; the church was dedicated to the Holy Trinity, and the Divine Liturgy is celebrated in it. Such is the picture of the religious life in Kosovo and Metohija. Wh ere the church was not destroyed or burnt sown, if local authorities not oppose to it, the liturgy is celebrated once a year - on the day of the saint it is dedicated to. On this day, the faithful get together".

In the north of the Kosovo region wh ere the Serbian Orthodox people have remained an absolute majority, the church life can be said to go on normally, just as in all other regions of Serbia, the Republic of Serbian Montenegro, etc.", His Holiness stated.

He also mentioned the situation in the so-called Serbian enclaves where the Albanian population prevails, but stressed, "Actually, these are real ghettos". He believes such ghettos to be the greatest shame for the Europe of the 21st century. The Patriarch noted that the religious life in these ghettos does existed: each enclave has a priest who celebrates in the church on continuing bases. "One can say, the

services are held as usual. Only this ‘usual’ is to be understood very and very conditionally, as the everyday life is closed within the enclave, sometimes in one or two streets, and it is very risky to come out, especially for women and children”, the Primate of the Serbian Church said.

The organization and maintenance of religious life in that region is a great merit of Bishop Teodosije of Raska-Prizren and the monastics, clergy and faithful, His Holiness Patriarch Porfirije of Serbia stated.

DECR Communication Service

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