Metropolitan Anthony of Volokolamsk attends service at the Lesnovo monastery



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On 12th January 2023 the chairman of the Department for External Church Relations of the Moscow Patriarchate Metropolitan Anthony of Volokolamsk, who was visiting the Republic of North Macedonia with the blessing of His Holiness the Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia Kirill, stayed at the Lesnovo monastery. He participated in the Divine Liturgy in the monastery Church of Saint Michael on the feast day of Saint Gabriel of the Holy Mountain and bishop of Velica, who is especially venerated in this monastic house.

The liturgy was headed by the Primate of the Macedonian Orthodox Church of the archdiocese of Ohrid His Beatitude the Archbishop of Ohrid and Macedonia Stefan. Concelebrating with him were: the

metropolitan of Volokolamsk Anthony; the metropolitan of Bregalnica Hilarion; advisor to His Holiness the Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia archpriest Nikolai Balashov, who was accompanying the chairman of the DECR on the trip along with deputy chairman of the DECR archpriest Igor Yakimchuk, the dean of the metochion of the Russian Orthodox Church in Sofia archimandrite Vassian (Zmeyev) and aid to the chairman of the DECR Father Alexander Yershov, clerics of the Rumanian Orthodox Church archpriest Viorel Daniel Pasmangiu, archpriest Ioan Danci and hieromonk Luca (Niculcea), as well as the abbot of the monastery hegumen Damascene (Bogdanovsky).

Praying in the church were the Russian ambassador to the Republic of North Macedonia S.A. Bazdnikin, monks and nuns fr om the Rumanian and Macedonian Orthodox Churches, pilgrims and numerous parishioners.

In his sermon His Beatitude Archbishop Stefan particularly emphasized the historical significance of concelebration of the Macedonian bishops with the Russian bishops, which happened for the first time in 1962 when in the Ohrid Church of the Most Holy Mother of God there concelebrated the blessedly-reposed Primates His Holiness the Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia Alexis I, His Holiness the Patriarch of Serbia Herman and the Archbishop of Macedonia Dositheos. Archbishop Stefan greeted the arrival of the metropolitan of Volokolamsk Anthony “to a land whence there was sent forth Slavonic literary texts to the land of the Russians more than 1100 years, to the land of churches monasteries and crosses, to the land wh ere more than a hundred years there came in search of refuge fr om the Bolshevik persecution many Russian monks, to the land wh ere there lived the great Russian saint, renowned throughout all of the Orthodox world, John of Shanghai, to a land which, though territorially small, is rich in history, to a land where ecclesiastical autocephaly has only recently been granted for a second time, yet in which the history of the Church goes back to antiquity.”

The Archbishop requested that his gratitude be conveyed to His Holiness the Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia Kirill for his recognition of the autocephalous status of the Macedonian Orthodox Church of the Archdiocese of Ohrid and expressed the hope that in God’s good time he would be able to concelebrate with the Patriarch of Russia.

After the service the bishops and clergy venerated the relics in the church of Saint Gabriel of the Holy Mountain and bishop of Velica.

Receiving the Russian delegation in the guest hall of the monastery, the metropolitan of Bregalnica Hilarion warmly thanked the metropolitan of Volokolamsk Anthony for visiting the renowned ancient monastery and requested that his deep gratitude be conveyed to the Primate of the Russian Orthodox Church for his love of Macedonia and for the great deed of recognizing the autocephalous status of the Macedonian Orthodox Church of the Archdiocese of Ohrid. In his reply the chairman of the DECR said

that we would forever keep in his heart memories of the monastery and that its remarkable holy objects and wonderful frescoes would forever be linked in his memory of how it was in this monastery that he first had the opportunity to concelebrate with Macedonian bishops at the Divine Liturgy: “We prayed that this day would come, we laboured in as far as we could for this, and we are happy that today we have become participants in this feast of faith.”

Metropolitan Anthony thanked metropolitan Hilarion for his love and hospitality and also congratulated him on his fiftieth birthday by presenting him with a gift of an encolpion of the mother of God.

Then the guests of the Russian Orthodox Church, headed by the metropolitan of Volokolamsk Anthony, were invited to a monastic repast, after which they viewed the sites of the monastery, in particular the memorial museum of Saint Gabriel of Velica, as well as the graves of Russian monks who lived and prayed here in the twentieth century.

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Lesnovo monastery is located between the cities of Kratovo and Zletovo in the Republic of North Macedonia. According to tradition, the monastery was founded in the eleventh century by the Venerable Gabriel of Lesnovo. The monastery enjoyed the patronage of Dušan the Mighty, King of Serbia and the Greeks, during whose reign in 1342 a stone cathedral church was built in the monastery dedicated to the Archangel Michael and adorned with frescoes that are famous throughout the world. A number of renowned literary monuments were made within the wall of Lesnovo monastery, including the Synaxarium and Menaion of 1342 and the Paraneisotis of 1353.

In the sixteenth-century the assembly of monastery buildings was reconstructed and renewed, but after a fire in the seventeenth-century the monastery buildings were neglected and restored only in the nineteenth century. In the twentieth-century the Church of Saint Michael was a parish church. Monastic life was revived in 1974. The monastery is also the residence of the metropolitan of Bregalnica Hilarion.

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