Metropolitan Hilarion of Budapest and Hungary officiates at commemoration of the New Martyrs of Jasenovac



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On September 1-2, Metropolitan Hilarion of Budapest and Hungary visited Croatia at the invitation of Bishop Jovan of Pakrac and Slavonia of the Serbian Orthodox Church. His diocese shares borders with Hungary.

In the evening of September 1, a welcome reception was given in honour of the guest fr om the Russian Orthodox Church at the residence of H.E. Jelena Milić, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Republic of Serbia to the Republic of Croatia. Attending the reception were Mr. Ivo Josipović, the former president of Croatia; Archbishop Giorgio Lingua, the Apostolic Nuncio to Croatia; Archbishop Dražen Kutleša of Zagreb, the President of the Croatian Conference of Bishops; Bishop Jovan of

Pakrac and Slavonia; and many members of the Diplomatic Corps.

On September 2, Metropolitan Hilarion officiated at the Divine Liturgy with the blessing of His Holiness Patriarch Porfirije of Serbia at the Jasenovac Monastery, the place of martyrdom of the New Martyrs of Jasenovac.

Concelebrating with His Eminence were Metropolitan Grigorij of Kumanovo and Osogovo of the Macedonian Orthodox Church; the bishops of the Serbian Orthodox Church including Jovan of Pakrac and Slavonia, Sergije of Bihać and Petrovac, Kirilo of Buenos Aires and South and Central America, Nikodim of Dalmatia, Isihije of Valjevo, Metodije of Budimilja and Nikšić, Dimitrije of Zahumlje, Herzegovina and the Littoral, and also Bishop Job of Stuttgart, vicar of the Diocese of Berlin and Germany of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia. The Primates of the Russian and Serbian Orthodox Churches were commemorated at the Liturgy.

Following the divine service, the blessing of bread, wheat and wine took place at the memorial area wh ere the Jasenovac concentration and extermination camp was located during World War II and where Croatian fascists killed tens of thousands Serbs, the majority of victims.

Metropolitan Hilarion greeted all those present and conveyed to them the blessing of His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Rus'. The metropolitan said that the exact number of the Jasenovac victims would hardly become known along with the names of the tortured and killed innocent persons. But to God all people are alive, and no one has ever been erased from prayerful memory of the Church. The martyrs of Jasenovac died an awful death, and the Church holds their sufferings as a great deed. That is why their commemoration day is a church feast rather than a ceremony of mourning.

That same day, Metropolitan Hilarion assisted by Metropolitan Grigorij and Bishop Jovan conducted a blessing of the new research library at the Jasenovac Monastery.

The commemorative events were attended also by Ms. Maja Popović, Serbian Minister of Justice as the personal representative of the President of the Republic. She was accompanied by Ambassador Jelena Milić and by Mr. Dejan Ristić, director of the Museum of Genocide Victims in Belgrade. Among the guests of honour there were H.E. Andrei Nesterenko, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Russian Federation to the Republic of Croatia, state officials, diplomats, and representatives of religious communities in Croatia.

Praying at the divine service were the Jasenovac camp survivors and their descendants from Serbia, Bosnia, Herzegovina, Croatia, Montenegro, Macedonia, and Slovenia.

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Jasenovac was a concentration and extermination camp established by Croatian fascists Ustaše in August 1941. It was located in the territory of the so called Independent State of Croatia near a village of the same name about 90 km southwest of Zagreb and consisted of five sub-camps known by their numbers from I to V.

The New Martyrs of Jasenovac are Orthodox inmates of the camp who had died as martyrs in 1941-45. During World War II tens of thousands Orthodox Serbs were murdered in Jasenovac, many of whom had died for their faith. They were canonized as Martyrs of Jasenovac at the Bishops' Council of the Serbian Orthodox Church. Their names have been included in the calendar of the Russian Orthodox Church to be commemorated on August 31/September 13.

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