



## **Patriarch Theophilos of Jerusalem meets with the head of the Russian Ecclesiastical Mission in Jerusalem**



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On November 20, His Beatitude Patriarch Theophilos III of the Holy City of Jerusalem and All Palestine received the head of the Russian Ecclesiastical Mission in Jerusalem, Archimandrite Vassian (Zmeyev), accompanied by the Mission secretary, Hegumen Nikon (Golovko).

Taking part in the meeting were also Archbishop Aristarchos of Constantina, Secretary-General of the Holy Synod of the Patriarchate of Jerusalem; Metropolitan Isyhios of Capitolias, treasurer of the Patriarchate of Jerusalem; Archimandrite Vartholomaios, master of ceremonies of the Patriarchate of Jerusalem; Archdeacon Mark (Henderson) and other members of the Brotherhood of the Holy Sepulchre.

Greeting Patriarch Theophilos, Archimandrite Vassian said:

“Your Beatitude, I am greatly honoured by this opportunity to express my respect to you – Patriarch of the Holy City of Jerusalem and All Palestine, Primate of the most ancient Orthodox Church! It is a great blessing to visit the city of Jerusalem and venerate its shrines. And it is a special blessing to serve in Jerusalem where God accomplished our salvation.

“You are the Primate of the Church of Jerusalem – Mother for all Orthodox Churches – and a successor of the holy apostles who founded the first Christian community in Jerusalem. It is from this holy city that the Christian message of peace and love spread across the world.

“Peace and accord are essential for untroubled life and welfare of people. Yet, to our sorrow, tragic developments are taking place these days, claiming the lives of thousands of civilians and leaving churches and monasteries in ruins. The armed conflict in the Holy Land is a cause of affliction and alarm for all Christians. The Russian Orthodox Church and His Holiness Patriarch Kirill express grave concern and pray for peace in the Holy Land. We understand what your thoughts and feelings may be inasmuch as over the recent years the faithful of the Russian Orthodox Church experience the same feelings because of the bitter and sanguinary conflict in the territory of Ukraine. We are grateful to Your Beatitude for your words of support in defence of the Orthodox Christians in Ukraine.

“Unity and accord in the Church are of overriding importance to us. Regrettably, over the past years, a local schism in the Ukrainian Church has turned into a serious threat for the entire Orthodox world. Thanks to the efforts of Your Beatitude and the hierarchs of the Patriarchate of Jerusalem, other Local Churches started directing special attention to the problem.

“The Church of Jerusalem and the Russian Church have good fraternal relations and over the years have successfully resolved many issues pertaining, in particular, to taking pastoral care of pilgrims, upholding Orthodox unity and assisting in overcoming various conflicts and divisions.

“Your Beatitude, allow me to ask for your blessing and prayers as I begin my service in the Holy Land.”

The Primate of the Church of Jerusalem said in reply that he welcomed the opportunity to greet the new head of the Russian Ecclesiastical Mission in the Holy Land and wish him a blessed service.

As Patriarch Theophilos noted, the Holy Land offers a very complex and interesting scene of multicultural and inter-confessional dialogue between different religious and ethnic diasporas. And in this region, the Church of Jerusalem – Mother of all Churches – has been carrying out its apostolic service for two thousand years, helping millions of worshippers undertake salvific pilgrimages to the holy

sites of Jerusalem. At the same time, the Orthodox Church of Jerusalem always maintains brotherly relations with all Orthodox Churches, including the Russian Orthodox Church, as is visibly evidenced by the very existence of the Russian Ecclesiastical Mission in Jerusalem and the Representation of the Church of Jerusalem in Moscow. His Beatitude emphasised that the Patriarchate of Jerusalem and the Russian Ecclesiastical Mission have developed warm and trust-based relations, thanks to, among others, the predecessors of Archimandrite Vassian and staff members of the Russian Ecclesiastical Mission.

When speaking about the worldwide processes of secularization and globalization aimed at restricting the Church of Christ in its influence on people today, Patriarch Theophilos expressed his serious concern about the exacerbated church conflict in Ukraine and noted that it brings pain to every Orthodox Christian. It is a duty of the Church of Jerusalem to receive Orthodox pilgrims from all over the world and take special care of believers coming from Ukraine since they are in need of consolation and grace-giving help.

Patriarch Theophilos also said that the Patriarchate of Jerusalem always opens its doors to the clergy of the Russian Ecclesiastical Mission in order to through joint brotherly efforts overcome the challenges facing the Church today.

To conclude the meeting, Patriarch Theophilos presented Archimandrite Vassian with a pectoral cross.

Later that day, Archimandrite Vassian venerated the Holy Sepulchre shrines, **Press Service of the Russian Ecclesiastical Mission** reports.

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