



## **Metropolitan Anthony of Volokolamsk makes pilgrimage to Hamatoura Monastery in Lebanon**



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On 9<sup>th</sup> March 2024, Metropolitan Anthony of Volokolamsk, chairman of the Moscow Patriarchate's Department for External Church Relations, who is visiting Lebanon with the blessing of His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Rus', went on pilgrimage to the ancient Hamatoura Monastery of the Dormition of the Most Holy Theotokos.

Metropolitan Anthony was accompanied by Metropolitan Silouan of Byblos, Botris and Dependencies (Mount Lebanon); Metropolitan Nifon of Philippopolis, representative of the Patriarch of Antioch and All the East to the Patriarch of Moscow and All Rus'; Mr Alexander Rudakov, Ambassador Extraordinary

and Plenipotentiary of the Russian Federation to the Republic of Lebanon; Archimandrite Philip (Vasiltsev), representative of the Patriarch of Moscow and All Rus' to the Patriarch of Antioch and All the East; Archimandrite Seraphim (Shemyatovsky), rector of the Moscow Metochion of the Orthodox Church of the Czech Lands and Slovakia; Archpriest Igor Yakimchuk, DECR deputy chairman; and Deacon Nikolai Vasin, secretary to the DECR chairman.

Met by the abbot of the monastery, Archimandrite Jacob Khanna, and its brethren, the pilgrims proceeded to the Holy Dormition Cathedral where a thanksgiving moleben was celebrated.

Archimandrite Jacob addressed the guests with a welcome speech, in which he emphasized that people living under the omophoria of the Orthodox Church of Antioch and the Russian Orthodox Church have been linked for centuries by fraternal bonds. He also mentioned that in times of his predecessor, Archimandrite Panteleimon of blessed memory, the Hamatoura Monastery had received particles of the holy relics of Saints Sergius of Radonezh and Seraphim of Sarov – true models of monastic life.

Metropolitan Anthony of Volokolamsk expressed his joy at the opportunity to visit Lebanon's holy sites, including the Hamatoura Monastery, notable for its ancient history and monastic traditions. "It is a great joy and blessing that we can now be here, in the blessed Lebanese land as envoys of His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Rus'. We have arrived in Lebanon to take part in tomorrow's celebrations that will mark a joyous occasion for the local Russian-speaking community. With God's help, we will consecrate a church which thanks to the love and generosity of Metropolitan Silouan will be provided for the use of the Russian faithful residing in Beirut," the DECR chairman said.

He also pointed out that the good brotherly relations between the Churches of Antioch and Russia are steeped in history, and added, "Together, our two Churches have undergone many afflictions and shared a lot of joyful moments. For many centuries, we have been supporting each other. I hope and believe that our eventful visit, brief as it is, will make its small contribution to further progress of our bilateral relations, becoming yet another sign of love between the Russian Church and the Church of Antioch, which is a martyr and confessor, the Church where Christ's disciples were first called Christians." He also asked his companions and the brethren of the monastery to "pray for Russia and the Russian Orthodox Church as it is going through a difficult period in its history," "while our brothers and sisters in Ukraine are suffering from outright persecutions," he added.

While in the monastery, the pilgrims saw ancient frescoes in the Dormition Church dating back to the 6th – 8th century, visited the Churches of St Paisios of the Holy Mountain and Archangel Michael, and venerated the relics of the Venerable Martyr Jacob and other martyrs of Hamatoura. The guests also visited the ancient cave Church of St. John the Baptist.

After the brotherly repast and exchange of gifts, Metropolitan Anthony thanked the abbot and the brethren for their warm welcome and asked them to pray for the unity of the Church, as well as for the Orthodox Christians in Ukraine “where bishops are being imprisoned because they remain loyal to the canons and unmask falsehoods, where churches are being taken away from priests and parishioners, where authorities promise to ban the Ukrainian Orthodox Church.”

To conclude their pilgrimage, Metropolitan Anthony and other delegation members visited the Skete of the Holy Great Martyr George the Victory-Bearer.

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