Church for Russian Orthodox community consecrated in Lebanon

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On 10th March 2024, while in Lebanon, Metropolitan Anthony of Volokolamsk, DECR chairman, took part in the celebrations marking the lesser consecration of the Holy Annunciation Church in Jal El Dib, provided by Metropolitan Silouan of Byblos, Botris and Dependencies (Mount Lebanon) for the use of the Russian-speaking Orthodox Christians in Lebanon.

Metropolitan Anthony officiated at the consecration that was followed by the Divine Liturgy celebrated by the Russian hierarch together with Metropolitan Silouan of Mount Lebanon and Metropolitan Nifon of Philippopolis, representative of the Patriarch of Antioch and All the East to the Patriarch of Moscow and

All Russia.

Among other concelebrants were Archimandrite Philip (Vasiltsev), representative of the Patriarch of Moscow and All Rus' to the Patriarch of Antioch and All the East, rector of the Russian Orthodox Church's Metochion in Beirut; 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 clergy of the Patriarchates of Antioch and Moscow.

The Liturgy was celebrated in the Arabic and Church Slavonic languages.

Attending the divine service were Mr Alexander Rudakov, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Russian Federation to the Republic of Lebanon; Mr R. El Khoury of the Lebanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs; Mr Yegor Skopenko, executive director of the Foundation for the Support of Christian Culture and Heritage; Lebanese politicians and public figures, and Russian citizens residing in Lebanon.

After the Liturgy, Metropolitan Silouan of Mount Lebanon greeted all those present. In his speech, he pointed out that the restoration of the Holy Annunciation Church in Jal El Dib had been a matter of particular concern for His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Rus', who had taken upon himself the task of getting the work completed. Metropolitan Anthony of Volokolamsk, chairman of the Moscow Patriarchate's Department for External Church Relations, and Metropolitan Nifon of Philippopolis had also made their contribution, facilitating the restoration works, Metropolitan Silouan noted.

As a token of his gratitude, he presented a gift to the DECR chairman.

Metropolitan Anthony conveyed to all those present blessings and congratulations fr om His Holiness Patriarch Kirill.

"This is a great festive occasion. We have celebrated the Divine Liturgy in the newly consecrated church wh ere thanks to you, dear Metropolitan Silouan, your Russian-speaking flock can now gather for worship," Metropolitan Anthony said.

It is important to any believer who is living far from his/her homeland to be able to come to the church of God, speak to a priest, partake of the holy sacraments and attend divine services, Metropolitan Anthony pointed out. "You yourself served abroad for a long time and therefore know that sometimes we have to conduct public worship in rather difficult circumstances," he added addressing Metropolitan Silouan, "Indeed, there are times when we can pray in magnificent beautiful church buildings. Yet, often our priests and parishioners have to rent premises which are by no means suited for worship, to bring all the

necessary utensils with them and take them away immediately after the service. Thanks to you, Vladyka, now the Russian community in Beirut can feel at home in this church, and the Russian Orthodox Church is deeply grateful to you for that."

Metropolitan Anthony also warmly thanked a delegation of the Foundation for the Support of Christian Culture and Heritage which had been eager to respond to His Holiness Patriarch Kirill's request by taking an active part in the reconstruction of the church.

To conclude his speech, the DECR chairman once again thanked Metropolitan Silouan for attending to the needs of those numerous members of his flock who come from the countries within the canonical territory of the Moscow Patriarchate. "They see in you a caring and loving father. And this church has become yet another visible sign of your love," Metropolitan Anthony added.

The Russian hierarch presented an icon of the Annunciation of the Most Holy Theotokos to the local community and a holy panagia to Metropolitan Silouan of Mount Lebanon.

The Liturgy was followed by a reception. Addressing its guests was Mr Dmitry Zelenin, warden of the Russian Orthodox Church's Metochion in Lebanon, journalist and head of the Lebanese office of ITAR-TASS News Agency.

As Mr Zelenin emphasized, the restored church is supposed to become the centre of spiritual life for the local Russian-speaking community. "Children from Lebanese-Russian families will be able to study the Russian language at the Sunday school, learn more about the Russian history, geography, literature and art," he said.

"We know that there are many people in Lebanon who have warm and friendly feelings towards Russia. We sincerely appreciate that. Yet, it is one thing to express sympathy and another to make practical efforts to strengthen the ties between our two peoples and Churches," the warden added, "Metropolitan Silouan drafted the restoration project himself and got the work done. Russia's Embassy in Beirut and the Department for External Church Relations in Moscow approved of the project and coordinated the efforts, making sure that it is successfully completed."

That same day later, Metropolitan Anthony of Volokolamsk visited the city of Zahleh. Together with Metropolitan Antonios of Zahleh, Metropolitan Silouan of Mount Lebanon and Metropolitan Nifon of Philippopolis, he celebrated a moleben to the Most Holy Mother of God in the Church of the "Unexpected Joy" Icon of the Most Holy Theotokos. The church building is under construction through the efforts of Metropolitan Nifon, a native of Zahleh.

Metropolitan Nifon invited the hierarchs for dinner. Among other invitees were Mr Alexander Rudakov, Russian Ambassador to Lebanon; members of the Lebanese parliament; Mr Abou Fadel, secretary general of the Orthodox Liqaa (“Orthodox Gathering”); Mr Jacques Sarraf, honorary consul of the Russian Federation in Lebanon; and Mr Nicolas Nahas, advisor to the Prime Minister of Lebanon.

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