Metropolitan Varsonofy of St. Petersburg and Ladoga visits Serbia and Montenegro



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On May 15-20, Metropolitan Varsonofy of St. Petersburg and Ladoga made a trip to the Serbian Orthodox Church with the blessing of His Holiness Patriarch Kirill. The visit was made with the purpose to bring to Serbia a shrine with the relics of the saints of the Kiev Caves and of St. Lazarus as a gift to the Serbian Patriarchate, website of the St. Petersburg Metropolia reports.

Metropolitan Varsonofy was accompanied by clergymen of the Diocese of St. Petersburg, including Rev. Pavel Yermoshkin, protodeacon Andrei Levin, and deacons Mikhail Aksenov and Ilya Andrianov. The delegation also included Mr.Mikhail Kiyko, vice president of Sistema Public Joint Stock Financial Corporation, and Mr. Alexander Zvyagintsev, secretary of the Union of Writers of Russia.

Upon arrival in Belgrade, the delegation visited the Krušedol Monastery dedicated to the Annunciation of the Virgin Mary and prayed in its main church, venerating the relics of St. Angelina of Serbia and other shrines. At the Grgeteg Monastery, Metropolitan Varsonofy and members of the delegation were welcomed by Archimandrite Dosifeje (Milkov), abbot of the monastery.

The next day, Metropolitan Varsonofy and his suite visited Montenegro. They were accompanied by archpriest Ostoja Knežević, secretary of the Metropolia of Montenegro and the Littoral, a graduate of the St. Petersburg Theological Academy. At the Monastery of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Cetinje, they met with Metropolitan Joanikije of Montenegro and the Littoral. A prayer service was celebrated at the reliquary with the right hand of St. John the Baptist and the relics of St. Peter of Cetinje. The hand was presented to Emperor Paul I by the Order of Malta in 1799. When the units of the White Army were leaving Russia in 1919, they took the shrine with them to save it fr om the Bolsheviks.

“In these bright Paschal days, when we are imbued with the light of God, you have given us even more joy, the joy of fraternal meeting and brotherly love,” said Metropolitan Joanikije. “By your visit you continue our long-standing spiritual and cultural ties, reminding us of wonderful meetings of the past centuries and close relations between the Serbian and Russian Orthodox Churches during the past three hundred and fifty years. Among all the Serbian Church metropolias, the small but historically significant Metropolia of Montenegro and the Littoral has had, perhaps, the most intense ties the Russian Church.”

Metropolitan Joanikije noted that the Serbs who held government employment or served in the Russian Army found their final rest at the Alexander Nevsky Lavra in St. Petersburg. Serbia remembers students who became outstanding bishops in our country, who received education at the St. Petersburg Theological Academy. In our time, overburdened with many hardships and problems, it is necessary to stand firm in mutual brotherly love and offer up our common prayers for God’s mercy.

As a token of the meeting, Metropolitan Varsonofy presented Metropolitan Joanikije with a souvenir Paschal egg, a pectoral cross and a panagia and received an icon of St. Peter of Cetinje and a pastoral staff as a reciprocal gift.

The guests visited the monastery church history museum, exhibited in which among other things are liturgical items – gifts fr om the Russian emperors and empresses.

On May 17, Metropolitan Varsonofy celebrated the Divine Liturgy at the Ostrog Monastery with the blessing of the head of the Metropolia of Montenegro and the Littoral. The service was celebrated at the cave church of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary in the cell of St. Basil of Ostrog.

Concelebrating were archpriest Ostoja Knežević, secretary of the Metropolia of Montenegro and the Littoral, Rev. Pavel Yermoshkin, and clergy of the monastery. The guests were met at the entrance to the monastery by its abbot, archimandrite Sergije, and the brethren.

His Holiness Patriarch Kirill, His Holiness Patriarch Porfirije of Serbia, and Metropolitans Varsonofy and Joanikije were commemorated during the divine service.

The guests expressed gratitude for the opportunity to share the great Paschal joy with their brothers in faith. Metropolitan Varsonofy said in his sermon: “This joy is spreading through the whole earth. In tens of thousands of churches and monasteries there sounds the exclamation 'Christ is Risen!’ that is filling our souls with joy. The Lord has conquered death. We are not afraid of it, as it is our dormition. We know that all the dead will rise. Our Churches – Russian and Serbian – have undergone many ordeals, but we have always been together.”

Metropolitan Varsonofy venerated the relics of St. Basil of Ostrog.

The pilgrims also visited the Piperska convent, wh ere they venerated the relics of St. Stefan Piperskog together with hegumeness Helena. While drinking tea on the veranda, Metropolitan Varsonofy talked with the sisters about spiritual life.

Afterwards, the guests visited the Cathedral of the Resurrection of Christ in Podgorica and were greeted by its rector, archpriest Nikolaje. The cathedral was consecrated in 2013 with the participation of His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Rus'. While singing Paschal stichera, the pilgrims prayed at the revered shrines and venerated the tomb of Metropolitan Amfilohije of Montenegro and the Littoral (+2020) in the lower church.

According to Serbian church tradition, Metropolitan Varsonofy made an inscription on the flyleaf of the altar Gospel.

Metropolitan Varsonofy had a talk with H.E. Vladislav Maslennikov, Ambassador of the Russian Federation to Montenegro.

During their stay in Montenegro, the Russian delegation visited the ancient city of Kotor and the churches of St. Nicholas of Myra in Lycia and of St. Luke located in the old part of the city as well as the Roman Catholic cathedral of St. Tryphon, wh ere pilgrims venerated a particle of the martyr’s relics.

On May 18, Metropolitan Varsonofy took part in the Patriarchal service at the Cathedral of St. Sava in

Belgrade. His Holiness Patriarch Porfirije of Serbia was assisted by the assembly of hierarchs of the Serbian Orthodox Church who attended the session of the Bishops's Council held from May 14 to 17.

Also concelebrating were Bishop Stefan of Remesiana, representative of the Serbian Patriarch to the Patriarch of Moscow and All Rus'; archpriest Vitaly Tarasjev, rector of the Metochion of the Russian Orthodox Church in the Serbian capital; Rev. Pavel Yermoshkin, and protodeacon Andrei Levin.

On behalf of His Holiness Patriarch Kirill, Metropolitan Varsonofy made a donation of the shrine with particles of the relics of the saints of the Kiev Caves and of St Lazarus to the Serbian Church.

Attending the service were H.E. Alexander Botsan-Kharchenko, Ambassador of the Russian Federation to the Republic of Serbia, as well as the organizers of the delivery of the relics – Mr. Mikhail Kiyko, vice president of the Sistema corporation, his assistant Mr. Vladimir Vysotsky, and Mr.Alexander Zvyagintsev secretary of the Union of Writers of Russia.

Metropolitan Varsonofy conveyed greetings and good wishes from the Primate of the Russian Orthodox Church to His Holiness Patriarch Porfirije and said that the purpose of his visit with the blessing and by instruction of His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Rus' was to bring the shrines as a gift to the Serbian Church and the fraternal Serbian people.

He said: "This event takes place at the church of St. Sava, which is truly an adornment not only of Serbia, but of the entire Orthodox world. It is a great honor and joy for us to celebrate the divine service today with you and with the bishops of the Serbian Church. I see in this God's providence that shows special bonds of brotherhood, unity and love between our peoples. We sincerely thank you for the opportunity to make a pilgrimage to the shrines of this ancient land, to meet with clergy, monastics, and God-loving laypeople.

"We deeply felt Serbia's cordiality and hospitality, faithfulness to God, brotherly love and the unwaveringly kind attitude to Russia. We are united not only by centuries-old relations. We have one faith, the same values and the same destiny to be fraternal Orthodox people and together bring witness to Christ and His Holy Church."

The hierarch of the Russian Orthodox Church emphasized: "We have one and the same mission, which is to keep our Orthodox faith and stand firm in it. Together we are defending our values and traditions, families, youth, children, that is, our future. Together we hold out against sin, which in various devious devices is trying to find way into the life of our peoples, cast roots and make us forget our history, our background, and our native land. It is for this purpose that the lands of our ancestors are being taken away from those who have been living there for centuries. We see this happening in the time-honoured

Serbian land in Kosovo and Metohija. We wholeheartedly share your grief for this region.”

Metropolitan Varsonofy gratefully mentioned His Holiness Patriarch Porfirije's strong stand on defending canonical foundations of the Orthodox Church and countering the forces that are breaking them, thus confusing the family of Local Churches.

He added: “Thank you for your support of the persecuted Ukrainian Orthodox Church, its clergy and laity, who are enduring hardships, imposed by the authorities and schismatic structures and are being deprived of their shrines and churches.”

Having expressed cordial gratitude for attention and warm welcome, he wished Patriarch Porfirije “God’s all-powerful help in bearing the heavy Patriarchal cross, strength and joy in the risen Lord” and presented the Primate of the Serbian Church with a patriarchal pectoral set – a panagia and crosses and received a panagia as a reciprocal gift.

On May 19, Metropolitan Varsonofy of St. Petersburg and Ladoga and his suite visited the church of the Holy Trinity of the Metochion of the Russian Orthodox Church in Belgrade. The guests were greeted by its rector, archpriest Vitaly Tarasjev, who told them about the history of the metochion.

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