Pilgrimage Trip of the Monastic Delegation of the Moscow Patriarchate to the Christian Shrines of Egypt Begins



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On May 28, 2024, with the blessing of His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Rus' and at the invitation of His Holiness Patriarch Tawadros II of the Coptic Orthodox Church, a delegation of monastics fr om the Russian Orthodox Church arrived in Egypt. The purpose of the visit is to explore sites associated with the history and flourishing of Christian monasticism and to become acquainted with the contemporary life of the male and female monasteries of the Coptic Church.

The visit is part of the ongoing development of interaction between the Russian Orthodox Church and the Coptic Church within the framework of the relevant Commission for Inter-Church Dialogue and is part of a program of mutual visits by representatives of Russian and Egyptian monasticism implemented in recent years.

The delegation is led by Metropolitan Isidore of Smolensk and Dorogobuzh. It includes Bishop Anthony of Volgodonsk and Salsk; Archimandrite Philip (Ponamarchuk), abbot of the Nikolo-Shartomsky Monastery of the Shuya Diocese; Hieromonk Stefan(Igumnov), DECR Secretary for Inter-Christian Relations; Igumen Dionysius (Shlenov), abbot of the St. Andrew's Stavropegic Monastery in Moscow; Igumen Sergius (Kuksov), abbot of the David's Hermitage of the Podolsk Diocese; Igumen Daniel (Tsupikov), abbot of the Gorno-Nikolsky Monastery of the Bryansk Diocese; Igumen Nicholas (Zolotov), abbot of the Spaso-Preobrazhensky Avraamiev Monastery of the Smolensk Diocese; Hieromonk Melchizedek (Skripkin), monk of the St. John the Theologian Monastery of the Ryazan Diocese; Hieromonk Mark (Akhmathanov), staff member of the Department for External Church Relations; Priest Lev Garin, assistant to Metropolitan Isidore of Smolensk and Dorogobuzh; and Abbess Agnia (Sudarikova), head of the Holy Trinity Belopesotsky Monastery of the Podolsk Diocese. The delegation is also joined by the representative of the Coptic Church in Russia, Hieromonk Daud el-Antoni.

At Cairo Airport, the delegation was met by Bishop Severius, abbot of the Monastery of St. Thomas and the Monastery of St. Victor in Khatatba, and representatives of the Patriarchal Commission for Monasteries and Monasticism of the Coptic Church.

On the first day of their stay in Cairo, the delegation visited the Embassy of the Russian Federation, wh ere they met with the Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Russian Federation to the Arab Republic of Egypt, G.E. Borisenko.

Metropolitan Isidore of Smolensk and Dorogobuzh conveyed the greetings of His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Rus' to the head of the Russian diplomatic mission, thanking the Embassy and personally G.E. Borisenko for their assistance in the projects of the Russian Orthodox Church in Egypt, including the development of contacts with the Coptic Church and the activities of the Patriarchal Exarchate of Africa. In turn, G.E. Borisenko noted the importance of the mission carried out by the Moscow Patriarchate in African countries, promoting inter-Christian and interreligious dialogue and strengthening the traditionally fraternal ties between Russia and the Arab Republic of Egypt. During the extended conversation, many issues of mutual interest were discussed. The meeting was also attended by Archpriest Alexei Mashkov, head of the parishes of the Russian Orthodox Church in Egypt; M.Y. Kovalyuk, Third Secretary of the Embassy of the Russian Federation in Egypt; and representatives of the Coptic Patriarchate – Bishop Severius, Hieromonk Daud el-Antoni, and Dr. A. Milad.

The Russian pilgrims then visited the historic Christian center of Cairo, where they saw great Christian shrines: the grotto where, according to tradition, the Holy Infant, His Most Pure Mother, and Saint Joseph hid fr om their persecutors for three months. A church, one of the earliest in the Christian Church, was built there in 58 AD. Above it, the Church of the Martyrs Sergius and Bacchus was erected in the 4th century, wh ere parts of their holy relics are kept, and it also contains a 4th-century baptistery. Among the places visited by the pilgrims were the Church of Saint Barbara, where part of her relics are kept, as well as the relics of the martyrs Juliana and Damiana, Isidore of Chios, and other saints; the famous Coptic "Hanging" Church ("Muallaqa"); and the Monastery of Saint George (Mar Girgis), where the delegation was solemnly received by Abbess Thekla and the sisters.

The delegation then visited the Church of the Holy Virgin in Maadi, built on the spot where the Holy Family managed to escape their persecutors during their journey through Egypt by crossing to the other side of the Nile. In 1976, a miracle occurred at this site: a wave brought a Bible to the shore, open to the page with the words "Blessed is Egypt My people" (Isaiah 19:25); according to tradition, it was also there that Pharaoh's daughter found the basket with the infant Moses.

In the evening, there was a meeting with Bishop Theodosius of Giza, who hosted a solemn dinner in honor of the guests from Russia.

The visit will continue with a meeting with His Holiness Patriarch Tawadros II, visits to the monasteries of the Nitrian Desert, the monasteries of Saint Anthony the Great and Saint Paul of Thebes in the Eastern Desert near the Red Sea, the El-Muharraq Monastery of the Holy Virgin in Assiut, and the holy sites and historical and cultural landmarks of Christian Cairo and Upper Egypt.

Also participating in the delegation's visit to Cairo is N.V. Dmitrievskaya, co-chairman of the International Public Organization "Union of Orthodox Women" and member of the Public Chamber of the Russian Federation, who arrived in Egypt to negotiate the opening of a representative office of the Union of Orthodox Women in the country.

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