



Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk takes part in celebration in honour of New Martyrs of Batak

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May 17, 2011, the Bulgarian Orthodox Church celebrated the memory of the Holy New Martyrs of Batak in the city of Batak, diocese of Plovdiv. The celebrations were attended by hierarchs and clergy of the Bulgarian Church as well as guests from the Local Orthodox Churches of Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch, Serbia, Romania, Cyprus, Greece, Albania, Poland, Czech Lands and Slovakia and America.

The Russian Orthodox Church was represented by Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk, head of the Moscow Patriarchate's department for external church relations. He was accompanied by Archpriest Igor Yakimchuk, DECR secretary for inter-Orthodox relations, Hieromonk Zotik (Gaevsky), acting treasurer of the Moscow Patriarchate Representation in Sofia, Hierodeacon Igor (Kopeikin), assistant to the DECR chairman, and Mr. L. Sevastyanov, executive director of the St. Gregory the Theologian Charity.

The Divine Liturgy was celebrated in the city's central square. It was led by Metropolitan Nikolay of Plovdiv.

After the service, the guests were invited to dinner. Greeting Metropolitan Nikolay, the DECR chairman said in particular,

"I am glad to come to Bulgaria, to meet with His Holiness Patriarch Maxim and to participate today in the great event celebrated by the Bulgarian Church – the divine service in honour of the canonization of the Holy Martyrs of Batak and Novosel.

What is believed to be a tragedy to human measures is seen by the Church as a triumph of God's glory and power, a triumph of the human spirit. Martyrdom has always inspired the faithful of the Church. It is not accidental that Tertullian said that the blood of martyrs is the seed of Christianity.

We in the Russian Orthodox Church know from our own experience the great power of the intercession of martyrs. In the 20th century, many scores and hundreds of thousands of Orthodox Christians in Russia and other countries under the canonical jurisdiction of the Russian Orthodox Church suffered for Christ. Today they are canonized as saints, and we can feel their intercession in the life of our countries, and evidence to it is the revival of our Church which has involved millions of people.

Therefore, today's church celebration is a very important event in the cause of the revival of spiritual life in Bulgaria. Martyrs show us a feat of confession and standing for the faith. We know from the history of their lives that no threats or suffering could shake their faithfulness to Christ, although, as is known, freedom was offered to these people in exchange for their betrayal and prosperity was offered them in exchange for their rejection of Christ. However, they preferred death to a life according to the laws of this world. They are awarded with God's glory and canonized today as saints for their feat of martyrdom and confession".

Addressing Metropolitan Nikolay, His Eminence Hilarion expressed the wish that the Martyrs of Batak, who have shown forth in the Metropolia of Plovdiv, may always be guiding stars for the faithful of the holy Church of Bulgaria, and said:

"We should remember that the times of martyrdom and confession never end for the Church. The Church has lived in various periods of history, also in situations of open persecution and temporary interruptions of persecution. Our time is not easy either as the blood of Christians including Orthodox is poured in various parts of the world today. Quite a number of Christians become confessors and martyrs for the faith of Christ even today. What happened here in 1876 is repeated again and again in various countries of the world. But we should remember: the power of God will always overcome human infirmity, and the gates of Hades will not overcome the Church of Christ. We should consolidate our inter-Orthodox unity because this unity is our power".

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