



Metropolitan Hilarion begins his visit to Lithuania

On 10 March 2010, Metropolitan Hilarion, chairman of the Moscow Patriarchate Department for external church relations, arrived in Vilnius at the invitation of the chairman of the Seim of the Lithuanian Republic Irena Degunete to take part in the celebration of the 20th anniversary of the independence of Lithuania. Metropolitan Hilarion was met at the airport by Metropolitan Chrysostom of Vilnius and Lithuania and archpriest Vladimir Selyavko.

Metropolitan Hilarion proceeded to the Monastery of the Holy Spirit where he took his monastic vows twenty-three years ago and was ordained hierodeacon. The brethren met the Metropolitan at the main church of the monastery. He venerated the relics of the holy martyrs Anthony, John, and Eustathius of Vilno and other holy places of the monastery.

Metropolitan Chrysostom of Vilnius and Lithuania addressed the high guests:

"Your Eminence, beloved in the Lord Metropolitan Hilarion:

We all, who have gathered at this holy monastery in the Cathedral of the Holy Spirit, greet you wholeheartedly. You have begun your ministry here as a monk and presbyter. Over the years you have ascended on the steps of episcopal ministry and have become metropolitan of the Russian Orthodox Church and appointed to the responsible post of the head of the Moscow Patriarchate Department for external church relations.

There is no doubt that your life and ministry have been influenced by the spiritual milieu in which you were beginning your monastic life, being filled spiritually by the martyrs Anthony, John, and Eustathius of Vilno. God has endowed you with many talents, which you are multiplying while serving the Church of Church and God's people.

Your ministry is particularly important to us and to this holy monastery, as you are a spiritual representative of our little flock in Moscow. For us, the Orthodox Christians of Lithuania, Moscow is the place where the Primate of our Church lives and works. The first visit of His Holiness Patriarch Alexy II of the blessed memory had been a great joy for us. We fell prayers and care for us of the Primate of the Russian Orthodox Church.

This spiritual link is very important to us. We live amidst brothers and sisters belonging to the Catholic and other Christian confessions, but we see that the modern world is hostile to anything that is Christian,

spiritual and moral. Therefore, we need communion with the plenitude of our Church; we rejoice in it and are spiritually encouraged by it.

We wish you, beloved Vladyka in the Lord, success in your noble ministry. May the intercession of the martyrs of Vilno be with you so that you fulfill your ministry in the Church in good health, multiplying your talents while serving God and people."

Metropolitan Hilarion, chairman of the Moscow Patriarchate Department for external church relations, said in his address:

"Your Eminence, dear fathers, brothers, and sisters:

First of all I would like to convey to you blessings and greetings of His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia, upon whose blessing I have arrived in Lithuania. This is not a church visit, as I was invited by the chairman of the Seim of the Lithuanian Republic. I accepted the invitation gladly as it gives me an opportunity to come again here and be within the sacred walls of the monastery where my monastic life and my ministry to the Church began twenty-three years ago. It was with a feeling of inner trembling that I crossed the threshold of this church, venerated the Cross of Christ, and prayed at the relics of the martyrs Anthony, John, and Eustathius of Vilno, the intercessors for the Lithuanian and Russian land.

"Twenty-three years ago, I had been laying prostrated in this church before archimandrite Nikita, the then abbot of the monastery, tonsured me. The first days and months of my monastic life passed here, and here I was ordained hierodeacon. I cherish memory of my spiritual making in the Vilnius Monastery of the Holy Spirit and in Lithuania. I remember the late hierarchs and cherish loving and respectful memory of Archbishop Viktorian (Belyaev) of Vilnius and Lithuania, who invited me, a very young man, to come to the monastery for short periods of time. Later I came here to take my monastic vows and to begin my ministry to the Church. I remember the late brethren of the monastery who instructed me during the first days and months of my monastic life. I thank them all and also all those who are living and working here."

Metropolitan Hilarion thanked the head of the Vilnius and Lithuania diocese of diocese for his confidence in him, expressed, for instance, in appointing him rector of the Cathedral of the Annunciation in Kaunas. "You have been serving in Lithuania over twenty years and have gained love and respect of your flock and the entire Lithuanian society," the DECR chairman continued addressing Metropolitan Chrysostom.

In memory of his visit to the monastery, Metropolitan Hilarion presented panagia to Metropolitan

Chrysostom, and the library of the monastery – his book entitled "Orthodoxy" issued by the Moscow Sretensky monastery in 2009 with the blessing of His Holiness Patriarch Kirill.

In conclusion of his address, Metropolitan Hilarion called on all those present to continue their zealous and tireless ministry to the Church. Reminding them of Metropolitan Chrysostom's words of the Orthodox Christians living in the country surrounded by people belonging to other Christian confession, Metropolitan Hilarion underscored:

"It is not easy to carry the cross of witnessing Orthodox faith, being always conscious of the truth of Orthodoxy and at the same time treating representatives of other confessions with respect, persuading them not by high-sounding words, but by the way of life. This is required of the monks who should be 'the light of the world' (cf. Mt 5:14), of the clergymen. And of all Christians, as the Lord has called all of us for apostolic ministry irrespective of the place we occupy in the Church."

Metropolitan Hilarion and Chrysostom together with the brethren proceeded to the burial place of Archbishop Viktorin (Belyaev) of Vilnius and Lithuania and sang "Memory Eternal" to the late archpastor.

The hierarchs continued their talk at the repast in the chambers of the head of the Vilnius and Lithuania diocese.

That same day, the DECR chairman visited the Cathedral of the Dormition of the Mother of God and St. Nicholas' church in Vilnius. He also prayed before the icon of Our Lady of Ostrobrama.

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