

HIS BEATITUDE THE PATRIARCH OF JERUSALEM VISITS THE CHURCH OF SERBIA-MONTENEGRO

On Friday, the 10th/23rd of September 2016, His Beatitude the Patriarch of Jerusalem began His visit to Serbia-Montenegro, accompanied by the Elder Secretary-General, Archbishop Aristarchos of Constantina, Archbishop Makarios of Qatar and Archdeacon Markos, departing from Ben Gurion airport via El Al airlines.

The Patriarch responded to the invitation of H.B. Patriarch Irinej of Serbia and Metropolitan Amfilohije Radovic of Montenegro to participate in the Inter-Orthodox celebrations on the 1000th anniversary from the martyr's death by decapitation, in 1016, of St John Vladimir, ruler of Zeta and Duklja, honoured by the Orthodox for his many miracles. Dedicated to his memory, a church has recently been inaugurated in the city of Bar, Montenegro.

Patriarch Theophilos landed in Belgrade at 11.45 am of Friday the 10th/23rd of September 2016. From there He boarded an internal flight for the city of Tivat, where He was warmly welcomed by Metropolitan Amfilohije of Montenegro. From the airport, after one hour's drive through picturesque verdant and seaside landscapes, they reached the Monastery of the Nativity of Theotokos in Cetinja, See of the Holy Metropolis of Montenegro.

There, His Beatitude was warmly welcomed in indescribable joy by priests in sacerdotal vestments, nuns and the faithful, mostly mothers with their children, eager to receive the Patriarch's blessings.

Putting on a mantle, His Beatitude then entered the ancient

chapel of the Nativity of Theotokos, venerated the relic of the hand of John the Baptist and the relic of the body of Hosios Peter of Serbia and was then hailed by Metropolitan Amfilohije as the first Patriarch, successor of St James the Brother of God, Who has brought the grace of the Holy Sepulchre to the Metropolis of Montenegro and the entire Church of Serbia.

In replying, His Beatitude said He is not the first Patriarch to visit Montenegro, the first being John the Forerunner, hailing from the desert of the river Jordan, still present amongst us by means of His holy relic.

After brief repose, His Beatitude was welcomed to the Church of the Resurrection, restored two years ago, a large construction with fine marble on the columns and floor, imitating the Church of the Resurrection in Jerusalem, and the Beautiful Gate of the Bema in the entrance to the Aedicula of the Holy Sepulchre, to remind the faithful of their ancient faith, as remarked by Metropolitan Amfilohije .

The Byzantine decoration of the Church depicts the triumphant Church, living on earth.

Addressing the Metropolitan and guests, Patriarch Theophilos said that His visit continues the very ancient tradition connecting the Mother of Churches, namely the Patriarchate of Jerusalem, to the Patriarchate of Serbia and the exchange of pilgrimages between the two.

"We carry with Us the grace of the Holy Lands", said the Patriarch, "to comfort, strengthen and heal the country and Church of Serbia from the damages, attritions and destruction brought upon it by this century's dark forces".

On the conclusion of the Patriarch's address, countless faithful rushed to receive His blessings with faith, respect, joy and exultation.

The Patriarch spent the night at the Holy Trinity Monastery in Ostrog.

In the morning, accompanied by Metropolitan Amfilohije, the Patriarch walked to the rock-strewn chapel of the Presentation of Theotokos to the Temple, wherein the relics of the Serbian Hosios Basil of Ostrog is kept. To this day, both Christians and heterodox ask for his wondrous mediation.

From there, His Beatitude walked to a recently-built chapel to venerate the relics of Neomartyr Stanko the Serbian and of the leaders of Montenegro, executed in 1945 by the Bolsheviks for protecting the holy relic of Hosios Basil.

During lunch, the Monks of St Basil Monastery offered His Beatitude an embroidered icon of Theotokos and St Basil, as well as 10.000 euro for the restoration works on the Aedicula of the Holy Sepulchre.

Then, Patriarch Theophilos visited the Zdrebaonic Monastery where the relic of Hosios Arsenius of Serbia, Second Archbishop of the Church of Serbia, are kept.

There, His Beatitude was warmly welcomed by nuns and the faithful before being courteously hosted to a reception.

The Patriarch went on to visit the Chapel of St Nikolas Vranjina, a dependency of the Holy Sepulchre.

From there, He boarded a boat and sailed to Vizpazar, a small port and seaside settlement.

There, His Beatitude and Entourage met with Patriarch Irinej of Serbia and Prelatic and Hieratic Representatives of the Orthodox Churches meant to attend the church inauguration the next day. After lunch, Patriarch Theophilos was driven to Bar, Montenegro, where, in the evening, He attended a traditional music event dedicated to the 1000th anniversary of the death of St John Vladimir.

The day closed with an official dinner hosted at the hotel by Metropolitan Amfilohije.

From the Secretariat-General

