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Tens of thousands of Belgrade citizens in the Saviour’s Day procession



Neither strong rain deterred tens of thousands of Belgrade citizens from participating in the solemn procession on the occasion of their city’s patronal feast day.

Since the night when the relics of Saint Justin of Ćelije and the icon of the Mother of God of the Sign were solemnly welcomed and brought into the Church of Ascension, streams of faithful people have been flocking to venerate them. This was also the case on the day when the Church celebrated the Savior’s Day – the Ascension of the Lord, and the city of Belgrade celebrated its patronal feast day. Already in the early afternoon hours, the area around the Church of Ascension was filled with devout people. Soon, the central streets of the city became too narrow to fit thousands upon thousands of faithful, for whom neither heavy rainfall was an obstacle to join the dense procession together with several hundred priests, elite units of the Army and Police, members of all Belgrade church choirs and cultural-artistic societies, catechists, and hundreds of pupils from Belgrade elementary schools.

The bell toll of the Church of Ascension marked the arrival of His Holiness Serbian Patriarch kyr Porfirije, under the canopy carried by members of the Serbian Army guard. At the same moment, the relics of Venerable Justin of Ćelije and the

wonderworking icon of the Mother of God of the Sign, were placed in an honorary position in the procession. Following the Head of the Serbian Orthodox Church in the prayerful order were: the First Hierarch of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia Metropolitan Nicholas of Eastern America; and other Hierarchs of that Church, Mark of Berlin and Germany, Gabriel of Montreal and Canada, Irenei of London and Western Europe, and Job of Stuttgart; as well as Serbian Bishops, Jovan of Šumadija, Gerasim of Upper Karlovac, Siluan of Australia and New Zealand, Isihije of Valjevo, Aleksej of Hvosno, Ilarion of Novo Brdo, Nektarije of Jegar and elected Bishop of Britain and Ireland, Dositej of Lipljan, and Petar of Toplica. Immediately behind His Holiness in the procession were the President of the Government of the Republic of Serbia Mr. Miloš Vučević, the President of the Temporary Authority of Belgrade Mr. Aleksandar Šapić, the Minister of Economy Mrs. Andrijana Mesarović, the Minister for Family Care and Demography Mrs. Milica Đurđević Stamenkovski, the Minister without Portfolio Mr. Nenad Popović, the Director of the Administration for Cooperation with Churches and Religious Communities Mr. Vladimir Roganović, the Director of the Office for Public and Cultural Diplomacy Mr. Arnaud Gouillon, the Advisor to the President of the Government Mr. Nikola Banjac, the State Secretary Mrs. Sanja Lakić, and the Archbishop of Belgrade Ladislav Nemet.

With the blessing of His Beatitude the Patriarch, leading the Saviour's Day procession with the Great Cross of the Lord in his hands was Mr. Nikola Stanić from Derventa, the best student of the Saint Sava Theological Seminary in Belgrade, followed by the Police Orchestra which provided a special solemn tone to the procession. Passing through Kneza Miloša and Kralja Milana streets, the Saviour's Day procession stopped at Slavija Square, where Patriarch Porfirije read a chapter from the Holy Gospel, and then, via Liberation Boulevard, reached the Church of Saint Sava on Vračar, where an akathist to our Venerable Father Justin of Ćelije was served, after which the spiritual leader of all Orthodox Serbians, His Beatitude Patriarch Porfirije, delivered a sermon, which we bring forth in its entirety:

– Brothers and sisters, today is the day of salvation! Today is the day of celebration and joy! Today is Savior's Day, the Lord's day, the Feast of our eternal salvation, the event when the Savior once and for all moved and transferred our eternal homeland from earth to heaven and placed human nature on such great dignity, on the throne at the right hand of the Heavenly Father. Therefore, it is no wonder that knowing this truth, the Nemanjićs dedicated the greatest holy sites and endowments precisely to Savior's Day, nor that the patronal feast day of our capital city is on this day of Salvation. On this joyful occasion, an abundance of grace and blessings has poured out on us and this city because with us are the

wonderworking relics of Saint Abba Justin of Ćelije and the wonderworking Kursk-Root icon of the Most Holy Theotokos.

Welcome to us, our Holy Father Justin! Welcome to this great, festive day of yours and our capital!

We all rejoice immeasurably because your preaching of the Risen Christ and the transformed world resounds louder and clearer than ever throughout Belgrade, which you sanctify by leading this procession, not only testifying to Christ but also bringing Him to us and bestowing Him upon us in this holy cell-like reliquary. Today, our Holy Father, after eighty years, you once again meet here with the wonderful, wonderworking image of the Most Holy Mother of God, which originated in the city of Kursk, in Russia. This icon of the Theotokos, escaping destruction from the communists, found a brief period of peace between the two world wars in our capital, in Belgrade. And when the Bolshevik wave of godless communism reached Serbia, you, Father Justin, were forced to replace the university lecture hall, the pulpits of Belgrade's churches, the podiums of the capital's halls and schools, after numerous sufferings and life-threatening situations, with the altar of the humble mountain monastery of Ćelije, from where you imparted your fiery and prophetic word about the Savior of mankind and of the world to the Serbian people, reaching even the distant corners and becoming joy, comfort, and light to the world.

And the wonderworking Kursk icon of the Mother of God, called of the Sign, went precisely there, in that distant world of wandering on the western regions, as the greatest relic of the Russian diaspora. From there, today, from America, with the kindness and love of His Eminence Metropolitan of New York and Eastern America Nicholas, the First Hierarch of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia, who is with us these days, comes into this prayerful, festive procession, into our procession and into the Church of Saint Sava to meet with Venerable Father Justin of Ćelije, and for us to venerate them this evening and in the coming days with prayerful reverence, to pray to the Lord Christ for peace and good to our people, but also peace to all people and all nations, peace to the whole world.

Today, terrible demonic forces and storms whirl through the world, forces that have the potential to destroy it, to destroy the civilization as we know it. These forces place our Serbian Orthodox people under great and constant trials, with all kinds of threats and pressures. However, let us keep in mind, brothers and sisters, that every trial, even the greatest one for individuals and nations, has a spiritual basis, that it is a consequence of spiritual illnesses, and that the war destruction, the greatest temptation for mankind, is the consequence of the greatest spiritual downfall.

Therefore, in order to resist all trials, on a personal, family level, on the level of the nation, fighting for existential security, safety, and progress, we must first and foremost engage in spiritual struggle. Therefore, the Lord has given us the opportunity to gather on the day of His Ascension, the patronal feast day of the capital city of the Serbian people, before the wonderworking icon of the Mother of God and around Venerable Father Justin of Ćelije, our Abba, and together ask for his warm intercessory prayers to the Ascended Lord and His Mother.

Brothers and sisters, to have such a Feast as the patronal feast day of the capital represents both a special blessing and honour, but also a responsibility and calling not only for those who live in it, but for our entire nation. We are all different, but these differences are God’s gift. They are given to us so that we may complement and enrich each other, so that we may be stronger and more capable of overcoming every trial and evil within and around us together. We all must strive to be better, to be as God wants us to be, as it is written in the Holy Gospel, as the commandments of God teach us. Therefore, we need Christ and His Gospel, something our people have always known, and something we, gathered here, also know. That is us. That is our commitment. Because of that, the path and goal of man, his measure and purpose, have their foundation and criteria, not in passing and ephemeral things, but in eternal and divine ones.

These heavenly, eternal principles are revealed and recorded in the Gospel. They simply and clearly reveal to us who man is, what man is, what his true nature and ultimate purpose are; what a healthy and authentic man is and what relationships among people should be like; on what values an authentic community rests. Only when we respect and apply these principles in our lives do we truly love God and truly love every other human being. This eternal word of God, the word about God and man in the Gospel, cannot be amended; it is absolute. Nothing can be taken away from it or added to it; it cannot and should not conform or adapt to the spirit of any era. On the contrary, time and space, all creation, man, humanity, should be transformed in the spirit of the Gospel.

We know that there are ideologies and ideas that would like to tailor the word of God to their own measure. These are ideas and ideologies distant from the Gospel, often opposed to the Gospel. However, every idea and ideology that does not have its basis and source in the word of God, in the word of Christ, by nature misuses the true value and meaning of man and is not ours. We know very well who we are and what we are. We are Orthodox Christians, we are the children of Saint Sava, Saint Bishop Nikolaj, Saint Justin, and all the saints from our kin. We will not deviate from that. We will not deviate from what is ours and what we are.

Let the Lord our Savior always be our mirror and measure. If Christ is the point of support and criterion, if He is the goal and meaning, if He is foremost, we can be sure that everything else will be in its place. Therefore, let us always remember the resounding words of Saint Abba Justin, with which he reminded and comforted his people, and which he reminds and comforts us today: All for Christ, Christ for nothing!

To all of you, brothers and sisters, I congratulate this wonderful day of the Lord, the day of Salvation, the feast day of our capital city Belgrade, which may God preserve and bless forever along with all other cities and places! May God bless all our brothers and sisters wherever they live, and all people and nations of the world, especially those with whom and alongside whom we live. Let us remember Christ’s clear word, the golden rule: Whatever you want people to do to you, do also to them. Therefore, whatever we want for ourselves, let us also want for others. May peace, comfort, and every blessing of God be with all of you. Happy holiday! May the Lord grant you many years!

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