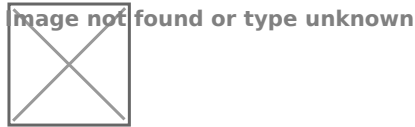


St John of Rila honoured 1,080 years after his repose, Bulgarian Patriarch calls him ‘source of hope’



Saint John of Rila was commemorated on Wednesday at Rila Monastery in Bulgaria, marking 1,080 years since his repose in the Lord.

On this occasion, His Beatitude Patriarch Daniil of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church highlighted the saint's spiritual legacy, describing him as "a source of hope, spiritual help, an example and a guide for our lives".

Celebrations began on the eve with an All-Night Vigil attended by hierarchs, clergy, and numerous faithful. During the same period, Rila Monastery received the wonderworking Hawaiian Iveron Icon of the Mother of God for veneration.

A testimony for the Bulgarian people

The Divine Liturgy on the feast day was celebrated by His Beatitude, who emphasised that the repose of Saint John of Rila 1,080 years ago had in no way diminished his work among those who seek his intercession.

"For 1,080 years, he has remained an undisputed authority for every person who has encountered his life, who has visited this place and had the opportunity to see with their own eyes, to touch with their hands and to venerate his holy relics, and to receive into their soul something of the mercy, grace and blessing that the saint asks of God for us all."

The Primate of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church also noted that Rila Monastery has remained a point of reference for the Bulgarian people throughout some of the most difficult periods of their history, while the veneration of Saint John continued uninterrupted during both Ottoman rule and the communist regime.

"Saint John of Rila is a unifying factor, a centre of unity for our entire people," His Beatitude said.

A call to follow the saint's example

The Patriarch of Bulgaria emphasised that Saint John of Rila's ascetic struggle should not be regarded as a model beyond the reach of contemporary people: "He did nothing impossible."

"He lived a rigorous, strictly ascetic life, but he continually emphasised to his disciples that it is not he, but the Lord, who accomplishes within us the work of purification and the salvation of our souls."

"It is important to remember how Saint John became worthy of the gift of this grace – through repentance, prayer, faithfulness to Christ and patience," His Beatitude added.

The Primate of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church encouraged the faithful to follow Saint John's example and seek his intercession.

"Let us always remember him in our prayers and petitions, turning to him for help, support, guidance and the enlightenment of our minds and hearts."

"By honouring and following him, we shall see the work of reconciliation and unity accomplished by Saint John and bequeathed to us in his testament, as well as how, through his help, evil and opposing forces are dispersed from our souls and hearts."

A celebration of communion

Several hierarchs of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church, as well as clergy from other Orthodox Churches, took part in the services dedicated to Saint John of Rila.

At the conclusion of the Divine Liturgy, Bishop Evlogiy of Adrianople, Abbot of Rila Monastery, highlighted the celebration's communal character.

"The fact that for more than a thousand years the memory of Saint John of Rila has been preserved, celebrated and honoured confirms his great holiness and the fact that he is not only a Bulgarian saint, but also a great Pan-Orthodox saint."

A special feature of the celebrations was the presence of the wonderworking Hawaii Icon of the Mother of God, which was placed in the monastery's main church for veneration.

Father Nectarios Youngson of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia (ROCOR) expressed his gratitude for the icon's reception in Bulgaria and for the hospitality extended throughout the pilgrimage.

As a token of gratitude, Patriarch Daniil presented him with a reproduction of the Eleusa Icon of the Mother of God kept at Bachkovo Monastery. Father Nectarios, in

turn, presented Rila Monastery with a copy of the precious icon.

The events marking 1,080 years since the repose of Saint John of Rila also included the presentation of a special issue of the Bulgarian magazine LIK, dedicated to the venerable saint, along with other commemorative and cultural events organised at the monastery.

Photo: Bulgarian Patriarchate

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