

Patriarch Daniil welcomes Ecumenical Patriarch to Bulgaria, calls for stronger Orthodox unity



Patriarch Daniil of Bulgaria welcomed His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I on Sunday at St Alexander Nevsky Cathedral in Sofia, emphasising the importance of unity in the Orthodox faith and the spiritual legacy of St John of Rila.

The Ecumenical Patriarch visited Bulgaria to take part in celebrations marking 1,150 years since the birth of St John of Rila and 1,080 years since his repose.

After the Divine Liturgy on 18 October, Patriarch Daniil highlighted the anniversary's significance for the Bulgarian people and thanked the Ecumenical Patriarch for his participation.

"Sharing joy always doubles it, making it even fuller and more perfect," Patriarch Daniil said.

He explained that this was especially true of the Church's joy, which springs from Christ, the Founder of the Christian faith, Who calls His disciples to rejoice (Matthew 28:9).

The Bulgarian Patriarch described this fullness of joy as a fruit of unity in the faith

and of the spiritual bonds that have united the Orthodox Churches throughout the centuries.

St John of Rila's legacy of Orthodox faith

Reflecting on the spiritual inheritance left by St John of Rila, Patriarch Daniil emphasised that the saint's greatest gift was not material wealth or earthly honour, but fidelity to the Orthodox faith.

"The venerable saint does not bequeath to us earthly riches, human glory or fleeting greatness. He leaves us what is most precious: the purity of the holy Orthodox faith, preached by the Holy Apostles, confessed by the Holy Fathers and affirmed by the Holy Ecumenical Councils."

Patriarch Daniil stressed that this faith is not a human institution that can be altered according to changing circumstances, but divinely revealed truth entrusted to the Church for the salvation of the world.

He also recalled St John of Rila's spiritual testament, in which the saint urged his disciples to preserve the faith received from the Holy Fathers and to live in harmony and unity of mind.

According to the Bulgarian Patriarch, fidelity to this tradition forms the foundation of genuine ecclesiastical unity.

He explained that Church unity is more than outward agreement or the result of human negotiations. Rather, it is a gift of the Holy Spirit, expressed through a shared commitment to truth, love and the faith of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church.

Unity must be grounded in truth and love

Patriarch Daniil also reflected on the divisions affecting the contemporary world and their consequences for the life of the Church.

He emphasised that Christian unity cannot be separated from truth, while fidelity to the Orthodox faith must never become a cause of hostility between brothers.

In his address, the Patriarch warned against turning zeal for the faith into an occasion for division, condemnation or mutual estrangement.

He stressed that overcoming difficulties and divisions requires humility, repentance, fraternal dialogue and, above all, shared fidelity to the teaching received from the Holy Apostles and Fathers.

Patriarch Daniil also underlined the responsibility of bishops and priests to seek and preserve the unity of the Church, particularly at a time when divisions are becoming increasingly pronounced.

Ecumenical Patriarch's visit to Bulgaria

In the concluding part of his address, Patriarch Daniil thanked Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I for joining the celebrations honouring Bulgaria's patron saint.

He expressed gratitude for the joy of praying together and offered a prayer for closer relations between their Churches.

"We thank Your All-Holiness for your presence and for the joy we have shared in prayer on this memorable day."

He prayed that, through the intercessions of St John of Rila the Wonderworker, the fraternal relations between the two Churches would be strengthened and their commitment to Christ's truth and Orthodox unity renewed.

The celebrations honouring St John of Rila culminated on Monday, 19 October, with a concelebrated Divine Liturgy at Rila Monastery.

Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I and Patriarch Daniil of Bulgaria, together with hierarchs of the Holy Synod of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church, celebrated the service.

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