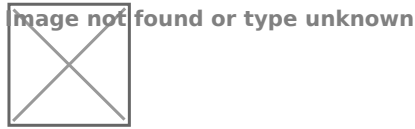


Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew in Sofia: True faith seeks communion and lives in unity



His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I delivered a message on Sunday at St Alexander Nevsky Patriarchal Cathedral in Sofia, where he joined Patriarch Daniil of Bulgaria for the Divine Liturgy.

“True faith seeks communion, is confirmed through encounter and lives in unity. This is precisely what we are doing today: we visit one another, listen to one another and pray together, lest we should be running in vain (cf. Galatians 2:2).”

The Ecumenical Patriarch visited Bulgaria at the invitation of the Holy Synod of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church to celebrate the 1,150th anniversary of the birth of St John of Rila and the 1,080th anniversary of his repose.

He noted that this was his first official visit to Bulgaria since Patriarch Daniil’s election as Primate of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church.

“Today we come at harvest time, to see how God has blessed what was then sown with prayer,” he said, recalling his presence at Patriarch Daniil’s election and enthronement in 2024.

Reflecting on the death of Patriarch Neophyte and the subsequent election of his successor, the Ecumenical Patriarch drew a parallel with the Gospel account of Christ raising the widow’s son at Nain.

“Two and a half years ago, the Church in Bulgaria also stood like a grieving widow beside the deathbed of her departed Primate. The clergy and the people wept like orphaned children. And the compassionate Lord said to her too: ‘Do not weep.’ He granted her a new shepherd after His own heart.”

Ministry and unity

Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew praised Patriarch Daniil’s ministry during his more than two years as head of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church.

“We have come to know at close hand your prayerful disposition, the simplicity and

straightforwardness of your words, and your paternal care for your flock.”

Recalling 30 June 2024, when he attended Patriarch Daniil’s election and enthronement, the Ecumenical Patriarch referred to the words of his predecessor St Photius the Great, addressed to ruler Boris-Michael:

“Virtues must be firmly rooted in faith, and through both the virtuous person must be brought to perfection.”

He also expressed his appreciation for the close relationship that had developed between the two Primates.

“You are, for the Mother Church of Constantinople and for Our Modesty personally, a fellow worker for the Kingdom of God and a consolation,” he said.

The Ecumenical Patriarch emphasised the spiritual and historical bonds between the Churches of Constantinople and Bulgaria.

“The light of faith, which was sent forth from the City of Constantine through Sts Cyril and Methodius and their disciples and shone here, was not our own possession. It was a gift of Christ, which we received in order to pass it on.”

He explained that the Mother Church does not bring her children riches of her own, but the Gospel received through the revelation of Jesus Christ.

“For this reason, her motherhood is not authority, but ministry and responsibility.”

The example of St John of Rila

Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew presented St John of Rila as a model of humility, spiritual simplicity and faith for the Bulgarian people.

“He abandoned everything, hid himself in the caves and forests of the mountain, refused the ruler’s gold, and yet, although hidden from the world, he was revealed as a beacon for the entire Bulgarian people and for all Orthodoxy.”

The Ecumenical Patriarch also highlighted the enduring presence of St John of Rila in the religious and everyday life of Bulgaria.

“Your churches are full today, and the image of St John of Rila now accompanies not only the prayers but also the daily life of every Bulgarian, appearing on the country’s new currency. It is a silent confession that the true treasure of your people is its saints.”

Concluding his address, Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew invoked the

intercessions of the Mother of God, St Luke the Apostle and Evangelist, Sts Cyril and Methodius, St John of Rila and all the saints of Bulgaria.

“May the all-good God protect your God-preserved country and grant peace to our troubled world.”

The celebrations honouring Bulgaria’s patron saint culminated on Monday, 19 October, with the Divine Liturgy at Rila Monastery, celebrated by Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I and Patriarch Daniil of Bulgaria.

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