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Farewell speech of the Serbian Patriarch Porfirije at the funeral of Bishop Atanasije (Jevtic) of blessed repose



With the blessing of the Patriarch, the letter was read by His Eminence Metropolitan Hrizostom of Dabar-Bosnia.

Brothers archbishops, priests, monks and nuns, faithful people of Saint Sava's Herzegovina and all of you, brothers and sisters from various Serbian areas: from Kosovo to Jadovno, from Thessaloniki to Buda, wherever there are Serbian birds, arrived in Trebinje and the Tvrđos monastery to see off our father and Bishop Atanasije on the way from death to life. To eternal life! Even more – countless more – are ourselves who are in the spirit with you and grieve that we cannot receive the last blessing and the last kiss to give. Among them are me, once young and ignorant, and the bishop would say an unknown student of the first year of theology. But – his student, which I am infinitely proud of, and my heart is full when I say it or think about it, and I trust many bishops, priests, monks, who were his students, who listened to him at the faculty in those old years, at public lectures in Belgrade, and also those who serve the Church as lay people, and on Sundays and holidays they flocked to the Vavedenje monastery, where he, together with wonderful professors, served our fathers Amfilohije and Irinej and opened the doors of the Kingdom of Heaven to us on earth.

Having always in his heart Resurrected Jesus, Bishop Atanasije made those holy fathers and teachers of the Church from the apostolic and later times about whom he taught us, not to be some scientific or literary, even if you want theological models, but to be a part of our lives, with him to be with us, not only at lectures, but almost always: and with modest, more monastic than student lunches that he blessed and regularly shared with us in the dining room of the old building of the Faculty of Theology at Kosancicev venac; and when we first climbed after him the Velebit Mountain to pray over the abyss of the Saranova Jama for the martyrs thrown there and to ask them to pray for us; also, the fathers and the apostle Paul were our companions when Father Atanasije revealed to us the Orthodoxy, monasteries and Serbianhood of Dalmatia through Paul's way; when we sang with him, with all our voices, Christ is resurrected in Jasenovac, as well as throughout Kosovo and Metohija, which are our national crucifixion and our national resurrection; and when we first set foot with him on the Holy Mount Athos to meet the ascetics and the holy elders; even when we played football with him in the capital Belgrade, below Kalemegdan, a place consecrated by the sacrifice of Donatus and Fortunato, Hermylus and Stratonicus, deacon Habakkuk and abbot Pajsije, Jasenovac martyrs carried by the Sava and reached the ancient walls; but also to the thousands that the bloody communist terror counted as holy martyrs, in the capital of Serbia, but also in other places. Among them is the uncle of Bishop Atanasije, the priest Milos Jevtic, who was killed on Holy Friday in 1944 with thousands of innocent citizens of Macva and Pocerina on the Sava bridge in Sabac.

Where Bishop Atanasije was, there were also holy fathers and teachers of the Church; there was Christ crucified and resurrected, by whose power Bishop Atanasije encouraged, guarded, raised and fed all who were in trouble.

You Herzegovinians, children of Saint Sava, know that better than all of us what the bishop meant and did for our Fatherland in the unfortunate war. Kosovo-Metohija Serbs know that no less, and we all know that.

Today, we place his body in the Herzegovinian country that he loved so much. But he equally belongs to all our regions, and above all to his native Tamnava, the village of Brdarica, as well as to the entire Sabac-Valjevo region, which he gave us and in which the great saints Abba Justin and Bishop Nikolaj were glorified in the Lord. They, together with Bishop Milutin, who is also from that area, are waiting today, at the door of the immortality of a worthy successor. Bishop Amfilohije, with whom he was friends, from his young theological and monastic years, is also waiting for him there; and he was a collaborator and associate at the Faculty of Theology in the bishopric years that followed.

There, at the gates of heaven, I deeply believe, our patriarchs Pavle and Irinej, and all the holy Serbian archbishops and patriarchs are waiting for him.

I cannot omit one capital fact that the Serbian Church, Serbian culture, Serbian people should be proud of: Bishop Atanasije is, along with the mentioned saints: Justin and Nikolaj, the most prolific and probably the most recognized and most famous Serbian theological and scientific writer in the world. These days and the long-time ahead, his work, like the works of St. Justin and St. Nikolaj, will be interpreted, studied, multiplied, but most importantly, his work and his prayers for us before the throne of Heavenly Father will lead Serbs to the Church of Christ for centuries. We will be, and we will be, while following Bishop Atanasije, we follow Saint Sava, Saint Lazar of Kosovo-Metohija and all the saints from our family.

Today we can all testify together with the words of the Apostle Paul: Bishop Atanasije, you fought a good war, you finished the race; you have kept the faith. Now a wreath of justice awaits you, which our Lord, the righteous judge, will give you.

Eternal remembrance of the blessed and memorable father and brother Atanasije.

Serbian Patriarch Porfirije

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