16/02/2019

Sretensky Orthodox monastery as a meeting between human and divine



Established more than 600 years ago, the Sretensky monastery in the centre of Moscow was a place of imprisonment and execution of those persecuted for their political or religious beliefs during repressive Soviet times.

Right beside the monastery reborn in mid-1990s, modern Orthodox Theological seminary has been founded, and impressive monastery church dedicated to New Martyrs and Confessors of the Russian Orthodox Church has been built recently.

The site was visited by the World Council of Churches general secretary during his visit to Moscow in January 2019 on the occasion of the 10th Anniversary of Patriarch Kirill's enthronement in the Russian Orthodox Church.

Monastery at the meeting point

The name of the monastery, derived from the Russian "sretenie", points to a meeting that occurred in the same area centuries ago. According to historical

references, one of the most famous Orthodox icons – Our Lady of Vladimir – was moved from Vladimir to Moscow in August 1395 and miraculously saved the capital from the imminent invasion of emperor Tamerlane's army.

In the place where the icon was greeted by Moscow's inhabitants, the wooden church was built, and a men's monastery – carrying the name "Sretensky" – was founded.

Although the Sretensky monastery became one of the main Orthodoxy centres in Moscow by the 20th century, in 1925 the monastery was closed down and most of its buildings were destroyed. The site was turned into imprisonment camp, were people persecuted by Soviet regime were tortured, executed and buried.

The Church of the Meeting of the Icon of Our Lady of Vladimir was the only building not dismantled. Its unique frescoes from 1707 survived thanks to the layers of paint and wallpaper with which they were covered during Soviet times when the building was used as a dormitory.

Seminary training Christ's disciples

The Sretensky Theological Seminary, one of the main Orthodox higher education institutions in Moscow, was founded in the monastery's territory in 1999. The former school building is turned into a modern state-of-the-art training centre for the future clergy of the Russian Orthodox church.

Tradition meets high-tech in the lobby of seminary, where the panoramic fresco "Christ and his disciples" is accompanied with a touchscreen device enabling viewers to click on a particular figure to learn more. Among the disciples, saints and martyrs, one can spot several Russian Orthodox authorities as well as famous Russian writers like Dostoyevski or Gogol. "They were disciples too", tells the guide of seminary.



Currently there are around 200 students in the seminary, which offers accredited bachelor's and master's degrees in theology. Besides studying in the well-equipped classrooms and taking active part in the monastic prayer life, students are encouraged to stay in a good physical shape in the seminary's sports hall.

Church dedicated to martyrdom and resurrection

The newly built monastery church with its impressive silhouette standing out in this part of the city, Lubyanka, was completed in 2017, and dedicated to the recent martyrs of the Russian Church persecuted right there.

The bright cathedral's building symbolizes the victory of Christ's resurrection over death and evil, therefore its full name, "Church of the Resurrection of Christ and the New Martyrs and Confessors of the Russian Orthodox Church."

The first divine liturgy and the consecration of the church in May 2017 was led by Patriarch Kirill, and was attended by the president of Russian federation, Vladimir Putin.

"The place where the monastery is built, is a former place of imprisonment, suffering and the martyrdom of many confessors – hierarchs, priests, lay people. To

build a church dedicated to their faithfulness, courage and spiritual riches, asking for their prayers, was our ultimate calling”, recalls Metropolitan Tikhon (Shevkunov), superior of the Sretensky monastery who supervised the construction process of the new church.

As a result of competition between new Russian architects, the design and interior of the newly built church opens the more contemporary page in the Orthodox architecture in Russia. Thanks to the digitally controlled internal climate system, it does not matter at all that it is freezing cold in the streets of Moscow today.

(By Ivars Kupcis, who is the communication officer for the World Council of Churches)