

In Trabzon, Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew Presides Over Great Vespers for the Dormition of the Theotokos



TRABZON, Turkey — Yesterday evening, His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew presided at the Great Vespers for the Dormition of the Theotokos at the Santa Maria Catholic Church in Trabzon.

In his homily, His All-Holiness highlighted not only the meaningful meeting point of different cultures and faiths in Trabzon, but also the unifying love of the Theotokos herself, drawing upon Orthodox iconography and a legend dating back to the 5th century.

“What characterizes the Virgin Mary in the iconography of our Church,” said His All-Holiness, “is the royal robe that she wears as the heavenly queen.” In one story, two noblemen from Constantinople returned from the Holy Mount with just this robe, which was then placed in the Church of St. Mary of Vlaherna.

“This means that the Silk Road through Trabzon and the red robe of the Theotokos are strangely interconnected in the story of Trabzon and in the house of Christians,” the Ecumenical Patriarch continued. “Just as our two sister churches— Roman Catholic and Orthodox— are inseparably connected by our devotion to and veneration of the Theotokos....

“The Theotokos is not so much an exception of inhumanity as she is an example for humanity. And the robe is not so much a sign of authority as it is a symbol of humility. Her robe is a soft consolation for our weaknesses and failures. It is a soothing comfort for our conflicts and divisions, and it is a healing protection for all those who are still suffering and dying in Ukraine.”

The Ecumenical Patriarch expressed his gratitude to the Apostolic Vicar of Istanbul, the Apostolic Bishop of Anatolia Paulo Bizzeti, who also offered remarks after the service, the parish priest, and the Sisters of the Incarnate Word of Christ for their support and organization of the ecumenical event.

His Eminence Archbishop Elpidophoros of America, in attendance at last night's vespers, will join the Ecumenical Patriarch at the sixteen-centuries-old Panagia Soumela Monasteries— located high in the Pontic mountains— to concelebrate a historic Divine Liturgy on the Feast Day of the Dormition.

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