

Consecration of the Cathedral of the Dormition of the *Theotokos* in Sofia, Bulgaria

On Saturday, May 15, 2011 (Old Style), the Consecration of the Cathedral of the Dormition of the *Theotokos* in Sofia, Bulgaria, was celebrated with great solemnity. This magnificent Church was constructed in the mid-1990s after the Consecration of His Eminence, Bishop Photii of Triaditza to the episcopacy by His Eminence, Metropolitan Cyprian of Oropos and Phyle, First Hierarch of the Holy Synod in Resistance, and the Holy Synod, in order to cover the spiritual needs of the Old Calendarist flock in Bulgaria and, as well, to provide it with an organizational structure.

Bishop Photii, who is fluent in Greek, possesses an impressive academic formation in both



theology and classical philology, having studied both subjects at the University of Sofia, where he was also an assistant professor prior to his Consecration as a Bishop. With God's help, he has organized an Old Calendarist diocese in his country with exemplary skill, and with the support of outstanding clergy he labors soberly and methodically for the spiritual cultivation and growth of his flock, endeavoring to offer an effective witness in the context of a

moderate Orthodox and God-pleasing resistance.

Representatives of our Sister Old Calendar Churches in Greece and Romania and of the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad (ROCA) were invited to take part in this joyous and historic event, and they responded to the invitation with delegations from each respective Church:

- from Greece, Their Graces, Bishop Ambrose of Methone and Bishop Klemes of Gardikion, along with a group of ten faithful and four clergy (Archimandrite Athanasios, Archimandrite Glykerios, Father Bitalios Almanides, and Father Nikolaos Matsioulas);

- from England, Archimandrite Alexis, Abbot of the Brotherhood of St. Edward, in Brookwood;

- from the U.S.A., representing our Bishops, who were impeded by ill health and pastoral commitments from attending, Archimandrite Akakios, Abbot of the St. Gregory Palamas Monastery, Protopresbyter Father David Cownie,





Father Jerome Zubricky, and the serving Priest of the Convent of St. Elizabeth the Grand Duchess, Father George Mavromatis;

- from Romania, His Grace, Bishop Glicherie of Iași, together with two Archimandrites and a Presbyter;

- from the ROCA, His Grace, Bishop Georgiy of Bolgrad and Bilgorod-Dnistrovskiy and Mother Alexandra, Abbess of the Convent of St. John of San Francisco in Odessa, Ukraine.

On the afternoon of the eve of the Consecration, Vespers and Matins of Saturday were chanted according to the Slavic *Typikon* of the Bulgarian Church.

On Saturday morning, May 15/28, the Service of the Consecration was celebrated (7:30-9:30), with Bishop Photii as principal celebrant and with the participation of the aforementioned four Hierarchs, more than thirty Presbyters, four Deacons, and many Subdeacons and assistants. A large crowd of faithful was in attendance, and the Cathedral's magnificent mixed choir chanted from the balcony according to the Bulgarian tradition, with its beautiful and lofty Slavic and Byzantine choral features.



After the reading of the Third and Sixth Hours (9:30-10:00), there followed the festal Divine Liturgy, which ended at 1:30 p.m. A large crowd of faithful communed of the Holy Mysteries, which were administered from two Chalices.

Bishop Photii then concluded the liturgical festivities with a special homily written for the occasion (*see below*). In addition, His Eminence expressed warm thanks to all who had come for this sacred occasion and to all who had contributed



to its preparation and worked hard to ensure that everything went smoothly, and especially to the more than sixty industrious and talented Mothers and Sisters of the Convent of the Protection of the *Theotokos* in Kn-yazhevo, near Sofia.

- Among the gifts offered by Bishop Photii as a blessing to his official guests was the second volume of his pastoral writings—a book beautiful in appearance and content—entitled *In Written Letter and Spoken Word* (in Bulgarian), consisting of fifty wonderful homilies and articles by His Eminence from the years 2005 and 2006.

- Following the services for the Consecration, a festive meal was provided for the clergy and for the faithful who had come from far away at a restaurant near the Cathedral.

Altogether, the Consecration service was a wonderful experience of Grace, brotherhood, and unity, under the Protection of the Mother of God and with her blessing!

Sermon by His Eminence, Bishop Photii of Traditza On the Occasion of the Consecration of the Cathedral

Sofia, Saturday, May 15/28, 2011

Christ is Risen!

*“Will God indeed dwell with men upon the earth?
If the heaven and the heaven of heavens will not suffice Thee,
how much less this House that I have built in Thy Name?” (III Kings 8:27)*

*Your Graces, Reverend Fathers,
beloved brothers and sisters in Christ!*

If Solomon, in ancient times, exclaimed these words with sacred awe, then we, the new Israel, ought to thank our Creator and Savior, as is meet, with even greater devoutness. For for us men and for our salvation He has deigned to dwell in Churches constructed by us in the fullness of His Divinity, unlike in the era of the Old Testament, when He was completely unapproachable or only in rare instances disclosed visible images of His Glory. What is more ineffable to us? The majesty of God, which infinitely transcends the cognitive capacities of every created mind, or the love of God and the boundless condescension of the Lord to us, which fills the Angelic Powers with reverent awe? Here, in the Temple of the Living God, He Himself, Who is everywhere present, out of His love for us dwells by His Grace, as though in His own house. According to the soul-profitng words of St. Philaret, Metropolitan of Moscow, “just as the whole body is filled with the power of



the spirit, so everything in the Church is replete with the power of God. God, Who manifested Himself in the flesh, is not only made manifest here, but also offers His Divine Flesh as food. Here, the Holy Spirit breathes through the Mysteries. The fullness of Divinity was so abundant in the Body of Christ that ‘the whole multitude sought to touch Him: for there went virtue out of Him, and healed them all’ (St. Luke 6:19)—the mere touch of the fringe of His garment healed the woman with an issue of blood. Likewise in the Church, a mere touch of faith in what

is sacred can prompt a release of healing power for both soul and body. Everything visible that is performed herein—sacred rites, images, and ceremonies—resembles a sacred garment of Christ woven by the Church, imbued with His invincible power, and offering benefits and salvation to all who draw near and touch it with faith.”

But how are we to respond to the love of God, to the infinite mercy of God to us, to the inexhaustible benevolence of God, which makes every Orthodox Church a treasury of heavenly blessings, rendering it an antechamber of the blessedness of eternity, where time and eternity, past and present, the earthly and the heavenly, man and God, meet? Let us never be like those who say: “We have built a Church to God, we visit it on feast days, and so we have fulfilled our obligation. We have rendered to God the things of God, and now we will render to ourselves what is ours” (St. Nicholas of Serbia). Senseless words! Can it be that God needs the Church and needs our presence in Church, and that we fulfill our obligation to God by entering the Church, only thereafter to give ourselves what is ours, that is, to live like all other people? God forbid! It is we who need the Church, not God. It is we who need this precious gift, not the Giver of the gift. It is we who need the spirit and life that issue forth from the treasury of Grace which is the Church—we, not God! What need has He of the hand that builds a Church, “He for Whom,” according to St. Nicholas of Serbia, “a grain of sand is not too small and the starry universe is not too broad”? “When you build Him a house,” continues the Saint, “you build of yourself with His own means. . . . When you build the best you can for Him, you set an example for your soul, showing it what it should build within itself. When you build for Him better than for yourself, you set an example for your soul, showing it that it ought likewise to become a stronger, more splendid, and more radiant habitation than what the body needs, and even than the body itself. . . . The Lord pours forth abundant Grace and descends into Churches made by human hands in order to meet with our souls.”

Let us make haste, dearly beloved, to encounter God, to thank Him for vouchsafing us to consecrate this Church that is worthy of our love, to pray to the Immaculate Mother of God, to whom this Church is dedicated—in memory of Her Life-Giving Dormition. Let us pray that She will send down eternal blessings upon all who serve, pray, labor, and offer gifts in this, Her Church, that She will send down eternal blessings upon us all. Yes, eternal blessings indeed, since—in the words of St. Gregory Palamas, which are replete with heavenly theological insight—the Holy Virgin is “the source, the fount, and the root of inexpressible blessings. . . . Thus, since through Her alone

was He [Christ] made manifest on earth, did He dwell among men, and did He visit us, He Who was invisible to all before that time, so it is that, in the subsequent age, every luminous Divine ascent, every revelation of the Divine Mysteries, every kind of spiritual gift is, without Her mediation, beyond the capacity of created beings to comprehend.” So, may She offer to her Son and our God the ancient words of Solomon, that they might become and constitute our sincere and fervent prayer: “Yet, O Lord God of Israel, Thou shalt look upon my petition, to hear the supplication and the prayer, which thy servant prayeth to Thee in Thy presence this day, that Thine eyes may be open to this House day and night, even toward the place whereof Thou didst say, ‘My Name shall be there,’ to hearken to the prayer which Thy servant prayeth at this place day and night. And Thou shalt hearken to the supplication of Thy servant, and of Thy people Israel, which they shall pray toward this place; and Thou shalt hear in Thy dwelling-place in Heaven, and Thou shalt do and be gracious unto them” (III Kings 8:28-30). *Amen.*

