

CHURCH NEWS

HIS BEATITUDE METROPOLITAN JONAH, OCA DELEGATION CONTINUE VISIT TO GEORGIAN CHURCH

On Thursday morning, October 15, 2009, following visits to the office of International Orthodox Christian Charities and the US Embassy in Georgia's capital, His Beatitude, Metropolitan Jonah of All America and Canada and the delegation of the Orthodox Church in America, with the exception of the Very Rev. Kishkovsky, who stayed behind to attend to personal business, departed Tbilisi for Western Georgia.

Along the way, Metropolitan Jonah and those accompanying him stopped at the Monastery of the Holy Cross at Djvari, which is a World Heritage Site of UNESCO, to visit the monastery church and venerate the holy icons and items within, including a particle of the Holy and Life-giving Cross of the Lord.

Following this short time for prayer, the delegation left for Batumi, a four hour journey by car. Along the way, Metropolitan Jonah and those accompanying him stopped at the Patriarchal Residence for lunch after venerating the relics and the icons in the church there.

Afterwards, Metropolitan Jonah, the accompanying hierarchs of the Georgian Orthodox Church, and the OCA delegation visited the 11th century Gelati Monastery, where they were met by His Eminence, Metropolitan Kallistrat of Kutasi, who warmly welcomed the them and personally took them on a tour of the monastery, widely known for its 13th century frescoes. Also, this monastery is the burial site of Saint David the Builder and many other Georgian kings.

The delegation continued its journey to the seaside town of Batumi. Upon his arrival, Metropolitan Jonah visited Holy Annunciation Cathedral where he concelebrated a Doxology with the diocesan hierarch, His Eminence, Metropolitan Dimitri. Following the Doxology, Metropolitan Jonah gave an interview for local television, in which he spoke of the significance of his visit.



On Friday, October 16, 2009, His Beatitude, Metropolitan Jonah of All America and Canada, by invitation of His Eminence, Metropolitan Dimitri of Batumi and Lazeti, visited several parishes, monasteries and social institutions of Batumi during his short stay there as a guest of the Georgian Orthodox Church.

The day began with the celebration of a Service of Intercession before a wonderworking icon of Saint Nicholas of Myra and Lycia in one of the city's parish churches. From there, Metropolitan Jonah and those accompanying him went to the burial place of the Holy Apostle Matthias, where they entreated the saint's intercession before the Throne of God.

Afterwards, Metropolitan Dimitri took Metropolitan Jonah and those accompanying him to a church he is building on the border with Turkey. The host hierarch also explained that the Diocese of Batumi, in addition to ministering to the spiritual needs of the people, is concerned for their physical welfare as well. Hence, he arranged visits to two diocesan orphanages and one nursing home for the elderly and infirm. Both social institutions, run by the local Orthodox Church, have chapels inside their main buildings, in which the residents can regularly participate in the Divine Services and receive the Sacraments of Confession and Holy Communion.

Metropolitan Jonah was interviewed by local television stations during his visit to the parishes, monasteries and orphanages in Batumi. In the interviews, he constantly stressed how impressed he is with the blessed work being accomplished by the Almighty God through the hands of Metropolitan Dimitri for the good of people in need. He also expressed his thankfulness to His Holiness and Beatitude, Catholicos-Patriarch Ilia II of Georgia, for his kind invitation to visit the Georgian Orthodox Church.

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INDIVIDUAL VS. COMMUNION

In this present «Age of Self» our language is filled with phrases that glorify personal choice above all other values: «self-determination,» «self-knowledge,» «self-esteem,» «self-help,» even «do-it-yourself.» Salvation is based upon the notion of «participation» in God. We believe God is certainly a personal God, but we believe that none of us is saved in isolation from others. We are saved together in Christ in His Church. In Orthodox cultures the encounter with God and the flash of insight that conveys religious meaning occurs not so often in private reflection as in encounter with another.... It emerges through the act of embrace. Not only have we been created with the same image of God, but we are inter-connected with each other as we grow in Christ-likeness. Saint Paul says we are «members one of another» in the Body of Christ. (Ephesians 4.25) Therefore, we embrace and are embraced because we are related to one another in Christ in a profound way. As the Body of Christ, we partake of the ultimate meal together at our Divine Liturgy. It is no coincidence that it is called «Holy Communion» because through the Holy Spirit we actually become the Body of Christ in this sacramental act of communion with God and with other Orthodox Christians. The Church is neither a building nor an institution. It is the people of God, both clergy and laity, in Eucharistic communion with one another, through the Holy Spirit in Jesus Christ.

In the early Christian world, Christians stood out from the rest of their culture by their unusual love for each

other in their communities. This was not a simple matter of good feeling, but a way of being together — a way of prayer, and a way of living in the world, rooted in their experience and understanding of God, who had come to them in Jesus Christ. This Christian love, virtue, and prayer spilled over into how they interacted with the rest of the world, outside their Christian community. But in the sixth century, St. Dorotheus of Gaza (Abba Dorotheus) needed to remind some of the monks at his monastery in the Egyptian desert what they were all about. He did this with an exercise in geometry, specifically the forming of a circle. He said:

«Draw the outline of a circle. The center point is the same distance from any point on the circumference. Suppose that this circle is the world and that God is the center; the straight lines drawn from the circumference to the center are the lives of human beings. Let us assume for the sake of analogy — that to move toward God, then, human beings move from the circumference along the various radii of the circle to the center. At the same time, the closer they are to God, the closer they become to one another; and the closer they are to one another, the closer they become to God.»

Love stands at the heart of the Christian life. This is not an abstraction, but must be a concrete part of our daily lives. Saint John the Evangelist hits this nail on the head: «If someone says, 'I love God,' and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he

has not seen? And this commandment we have from Him: that he who loves God must love his brother also.» (1 John 4.20)

But our society in the twenty-first century tells us to move away from the center — away from God — away from one another. It tells us to stay mad at someone in righteous indignation instead of humble reconciliation. It tells us to take «time for me.» The problem of individualism shows itself in a society that tells us our bubble bath is more important than someone else in need. St. Dorotheus' diagram works here in reverse too. If you follow a single line from the center out to the edge again, you notice that all the lines become farther apart as they go away from the center. This, St. Dorotheus says, is because of the very nature of love.

«The more we are turned away from and do not love God, the greater the distance that separates us from our neighbour. If we were to love God more, we should be closer to God and through love of Him we should be more united in love to our neighbour; and the more we are united to our neighbour the more we are united to God.»

Unlike our society, our Fathers and Mothers among the Saints tell us that the «Life in Christ» is selfless — it sees not ourselves at all, but Christ alone, and it sees the image of Christ in the other.

Based on materials from pravmir.com

