

THE ALEXANDRIAN PATRIARCH IN THE THEBAID OF THE NORTH

On 19th August 2015, His Beatitude Theodoros II, Pope and Patriarch of Alexandria and All Africa, flew in a private jet to the city of Arkhangelsk in Northern Russia, following a fraternal invitation from Kyrill, the Most Holy Patriarch of Russia, in order to conduct the feast of the Saints Savatios and Zosima, founders of the Holy Monastery of the Transfiguration in Solovskii.

His Beatitude, who was accompanied by His Grace Meletios Bishop of Naucratis, was welcomed at the Arkhangelsk Airport by the local Metropolitan Daniel, the Mayor of the district Mr. Igor Orlov, and the rest of the authorities as well as crowds of reporters, to whom His Beatitude gave an interview during in which he praised the fraternal ties between the Alexandrian Church and the Patriarchate of Moscow particularly with the Primate of the Russian Church, His Beatitude Kyrill. He also mentioned President Vladimir Putin and the significant role which he has undertaken for the protection of Christians in the Middle East.

Following a brief rest, His Beatitude, accompanied by the Mayor of Arkhangelsk and other authorities from the district as well as Senior clergy of the Moscow Patriarchate, departed in a smaller aircraft for the Solovskii Islands and the Monastery which is on the White Sea, on the Northern Russian coast, further on from which lies the frozen Arctic.

After the welcome by the Hegumen Archimandrite Porphyrios, a Doxology was sung at the Monastery Chapel, with the participation of pilgrims from many places in Russia, who visit the monastery in the summer months.

He was then shown around the Monastery, admired the vast building as well as the beauty of the area, and was then shown the photographic exhibition dealing with the period when the monastery was turned into a place of imprisonment and

martyrdom for 80,000 Christians of whom 40,000 died a martyr's death by the atheistic regime, after the October revolution.

With great emotion he saw among the photographs of the prisoners the late grandfather of Patriarch Kyrill, who was detained in the detention centres of Solovskii.

Finally, it should be noted that the island complex of Solovskii, apart from the three large islands and the hundreds of smaller ones, includes over 300 lakes with a total area of 347 sq. km. and the distance from the northern polar circle is only 100 km. Throughout the region there are several hermitages, cells, sketes and monastic dwellings, the most important being the Monastery of the transfiguration which was built in the 15th century.