



Seventeen centuries of the proclamation of the Edict of Milan were marked by a liturgy, conducted by Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, in front of the Church of the Holy Emperor Constantine and Empress Helena in Nis, during the central commemorative ceremony of the 1700th anniversary of the Edict of Milan.

The liturgy, held in the Serbian, Greek and Russian languages, was co-served by Patriarch Theophilos of Jerusalem, Patriarch Cyril of Moscow and all Russia and Serbian Patriarch Irinej, as well as local church archbishops, bishops of the Serbian Orthodox Church and the clergy.

The ceremony marking 17 centuries of the Edict of Milan was attended by Serbian President Tomislav Nikolic, Republic of Srpska (RS) President Milorad Dodik, Serbian Prime Minister Ivica Dacic, members of the Cabinet, the Serbian Armed Forces, the diplomatic corps, representatives of Christian churches and other religious communities, ecclesial associations, Prince Aleksandar Karadjordjevic and his wife Katarina, representatives of the host city, social and political life of this part of Serbia.

At St. Sava's Park in front of the church, a large number of believers and citizens gathered to follow the liturgy, while many stood in long lines to venerate and kiss the relics in the church - the particles of the Holy Cross and the hand of John the Baptist.

Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew and the Serbian Patriarch Irinej said at the end of the liturgy that the Edict of Milan represented a turning point in the history of mankind, Christianity, man and life.

The Serbian Patriarch said that the event had changed the face of the world and divided it into two eras, the pagan and the Christian one.

In his sermon, the Ecumenical Patriarch said that the duty and obligation of the Orthodox believers is to "re-examine ourselves, our testimony, our longing and our faithfulness to the power of the Cross."

"What the soul is to the body, Christians are to the world," said Bartholomew, and pointed to the occurrence in the so-called countries of the Western civilization, which were once Christian, but

which are now rapidly going down the path of secularization and de-Christianization, which is why, he added, they are the ones we need to reiterate and expose the truth about the Cross, the power and wisdom of God.

The unification of European nations in our times, human rights, social responsibility of the state, equality among people, religious tolerance, all this as contents of the Edict of Milan were inspired by the principles of the Holy Gospel, Bartholomew said.

It is impossible to put into practice the principles of the Edict of Milan if we do not have a constructive dialogue with the modern man in today's mutually divided world, which despite its divisions is seeking to find a way out through peaceful dialogue and reconciliation, Bartholomew stated.

"Precedence is given to the peaceful coexistence among people. It is not allowed to foster religious fanaticism that has done great harm in the past, and is doing it even today, and thus it is necessary to put into action the proclamation that wars are not a religious duty, that indifference that accompanies them is also not allowed.

There are peaceful ways of resolving interpersonal differences and those who say otherwise do not reflect the true will of God, said the Ecumenical Patriarch.

The liturgy was finished by presenting the Order of St. Emperor Constantine the Great to heads and church dignitaries, government representatives, Ambassadors serving in Serbia, the representatives of ecclesial associations, and individuals who have contributed to the marking of the 17 centuries of the Edict of Milan.

The Order of St. Emperor Constantine the Great was awarded to President of Serbia Tomislav Nikolic, President of the Republic of Srpska Milorad Dodik, President of Montenegro Filip Vujanovic who did not attend the ceremony, as well as the First Deputy Prime Minister Aleksandar Vucic who did not attend the liturgy either, the Minister of Foreign Affairs Ivan Mrkic, General of the Serbian Armed Forces Ljubisa Dikovic, HRH Prince Aleksandar Kardjorjjevic and others.

The Liturgy and ceremony in Nis were guarded by some 1,000 police officers and special unit members and covered by more than 50 accredited media representatives.