

28 July 2013

**Statement of H.E. Mr. Vuk Jeremić,
President of the 67th Session of the General Assembly,
on the Occasion of the 1025th Anniversary of the Christening of Rus'**

Your Eminences,
Your Grace,
Distinguished members of the clergy,
Dear Parishioners and Friends of St. Vladimir's Memorial Church,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am truly humbled by the invitation to participate in the marking of the one-thousand twenty-fifth anniversary of the baptism of the Holy Prince Vladimir of Novgorod and Kiev, the event that stands at the very foundation of our common identity.

In embracing the Light of the Gospels, Vladimir accepted not only the spiritual tenets of the Christian faith, but a moral philosophy founded on love and forgiveness—not just for one's friends, but enemies as well.

No longer a pagan chieftain, he incessantly sought peace, raising his sword only as a last resort. In the latter years of his reign, he lived in harmony with all his neighbors—a model Christian sovereign greatly admired by his successors.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Just as Vladimir's conversion enlightened the people of Rus' in 988, so did the baptism in 1193 of a prince of Serbia, Rastko Nemanjic, bring the message of the New Testament to many of the Slavs who had settled in the Balkans.

Our brethren from the East played a singular role in this historic turning point. Young Rastko was tonsured with the name Sava by a Kievan abbot on the Holy Mountain of Athos—in a monastery established by Vladimir a century earlier.

Saint Sava became the founder of the Serbian Orthodox Church. Together with his father and brothers, he also founded a Medieval Serbian state, which at its peak ruled over much of Southeast Europe—before being overwhelmed by the Ottomans at the fateful Battle of Kosovo, in 1389.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

For more than 800 years, our respective Churches have continued to act as the custodians of our spiritual ties, nurturing a common culture that is more than the sum of its individual parts—a faith shared by fraternal peoples, reinforced by the fact that we continue to pray in the same language, use the same liturgical books, and venerate the same saints.

I believe Sava's baptism also represents the origin of the special relationship between our respective nations.

The Eastern Slavs have been Serbia's staunchest supporters throughout history. Our wars of liberation against the Ottomans in the 19th century would not have succeeded without their political and military assistance. Our renewed independence would not have been consolidated without their diplomatic backing. Our national liberations in the First and Second World Wars would not have been possible without their selfless sacrifices. And the spirited defense of our territorial integrity in this century would have been largely futile without their unwavering support.

Such repeated expressions of *sabornost* in the tradition of Vladimir will never be forgotten by the people of Serbia. I am confident that we shall continue to stand together in the succession of the ages to come.

Dear Friends,

On this very special day, we also celebrate 75 years since this beautiful church was consecrated.

At the end of my remarks, I would like to pay tribute to its deceased community elders—people like Archbishops Vitaly and Nikon, as well as Ivan Mikhailovich Plishevsky and Protojerej Boris Kizenko. I believe the latter's daughter, Nadia—who has contributed so much to the study of Russian history in this country—is here with us today.

Allow me to wish *mnogayaleta* to the entire congregation, and to thank you once again for inviting me to participate in this feast of St. Vladimir the Great, Equal-to-the-Apostles.

Let us continue to pray to him that he may grant us the strength to live according to the Truth that he saw as he emerged from the Kievan baptismal font—a Truth that today's Scriptural reading reminds us is “not by the hand of man, [...] but the revelation of Jesus Christ.”

Thank you for your attention.