

VISIT TO THE SVETITSKHOVELI  
PATRIARCHAL CATHEDRAL

*Mtskheta, Saturday, 1 October 2016*

ADDRESS OF PATRIARCH ILIA II

Your Holiness, Pope Francis,  
Your Excellency, Mr Prime Minister,

Distinguished Authorities and Representatives of the  
Diplomatic Corps, Dear guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

We once again wholeheartedly greet you in the most  
ancient and important cathedral of the Church of  
Georgia Svetitskhoveli. This cathedral bears a special  
significance since it is a place of outstanding sanctities:  
the mantle of Saint Elijah the Prophet is here and the  
greatest of sanctities of the world – the Tunic of our  
Lord Jesus Christ – is in the cathedral, it was  
committed to the earth with one of the earliest saints,  
Sidonia.

Saint Sidonia belonged to a remarkable family  
of Georgian Jews: her brother Eliezer brought the  
Tunic to Georgia. Here, in the town of Mtskheta, their  
mother, devastated by the Saviour's sufferings, on the  
day of His Crucifixion on Great Friday, died, and after  
her death, the Church of Georgia consecrated her also  
as a saint.

We are in the cathedral where down from the  
ancient times chrism has been sanctified, where kings  
of Georgia were crowned, and where catholicos  
patriarchs were enthroned and in this day they've been  
enthroned in this cathedral. This is also the place of the  
entombment of kings and foremost hierarchs.

The very first church in this place was built in  
the 4th century, and it was reconstructed into  
magnificent temple in the 11th century. The  
Svetitskhoveli Cathedral is dedicated to the  
commemoration of the Twelve Apostles.

Mtskheta was the ancient capital of Georgia  
and to this day is maintained the status of the spiritual  
center of the country. The town and its vicinity were  
constructed in such a shape that it leaves an impression  
of another Jerusalem: Golgotha, Bethany, Gethsemane,  
Tabor, Eleon and other sacred places are all around  
this place.

Torrents of blood and tears have been shed  
here as Georgia was constantly the arena of invasion;  
however, this small oasis of Christianity has survived  
having maintained its identity, but at the cost of the  
heaviest sacrifice.

As our illustrious writer and statesman, now  
canonized as Saint Ilia the Righteous, writes, Christ  
accepted the Crucifixion for our sake and so also  
Georgia accepted her Crucifixion for the sake of  
Christ. Here, I will recall the event of the 13th century  
to illustrate this: 100.000 of the residents of Tbilisi  
were beheaded for having refused to renounce the Faith and

tread on the icons of the Saviour and of the Mother of  
God, placed on the bridge in the vicinity of the Sioni  
Cathedral.

Yes, our strength was and still is in fervent  
prayer and devoted ministry to the True God! But what  
is the reason for our weakness? The lack of both of  
these.

I remember the admonition of the Holy  
Fathers of old times. The prayer of the righteous can  
change the very order of nature and is a shield which  
steadfastly defends from corporeal and incorporeal  
enemies; besides this, such prayer stops the right hand  
of the Almighty God, lifted up for the punishment of  
the sinful.

The true faith, humility, contrition and charity  
make up the shortest way towards salvation. I think,  
today Humankind, including us, is deficient in all of  
this. But God's mercy is boundless. He waits for every  
step, made towards Him by us. The most important  
thing is to show to the Lord the heart which in  
righteousness judges others, the contrite heart, the  
heart of a prayer; when this is achieved, the reality will  
be different. Therefore, I, always and now also, implore  
the Creator that He may grant all of us His grace to  
cognize our own selves, to be cleansed and walk in the  
path of the Truth. May God's will unify Christians on  
the foundation of the true faith, Amen!

[https://zenit.org/articles/ilia-iis-address-at-pope-  
francis-visit-to-patriarchal-cathedral/](https://zenit.org/articles/ilia-iis-address-at-pope-francis-visit-to-patriarchal-cathedral/)

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