



A paper sent free to all St Nicholas friends around the World
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**THE ANCIENT RUSSIAN STORY ON
 THE TRANSLATION OF ST NICHOLAS' RELICS
 FROM MYRA TO BARI**

Written in Kiev or Černigov in the year 1095, on the occasion of the institution in Russia (Kievan Rus') of the Feast of the Translation of St Nicholas relics to Bari, this **SLOVO** or **POVEST'** (Sermon, Narration) is of great **historical and ecumenical** importance.

Although composed 41 years after the official schism between Rome and Constantinople, the feast has been always celebrated in Russia (with Ukraine and Bjelorussia) without interruption.

It is all due to the **intellectual honesty** of the metropolitan **Makarij** who in the fifties of the XVI century, free from confessionalistic prejudices, collected all the ancient Russian writings in his **Великие Минеи Четьи** (**Great Monthly Readings**).



The **chronology** of this feast brought some Catholic writers to the absurd thesis of a submission of the Russian Church to the Pope, while Russian historians, like Evgenij Golubinskij, made recourse to clumsy argumentations to explain the joy of the Russians for the presence of the Saint in a Catholic country. The Greeks, on the other hand, celebrate St Nicholas' translation carefully avoiding any mention of Bari.

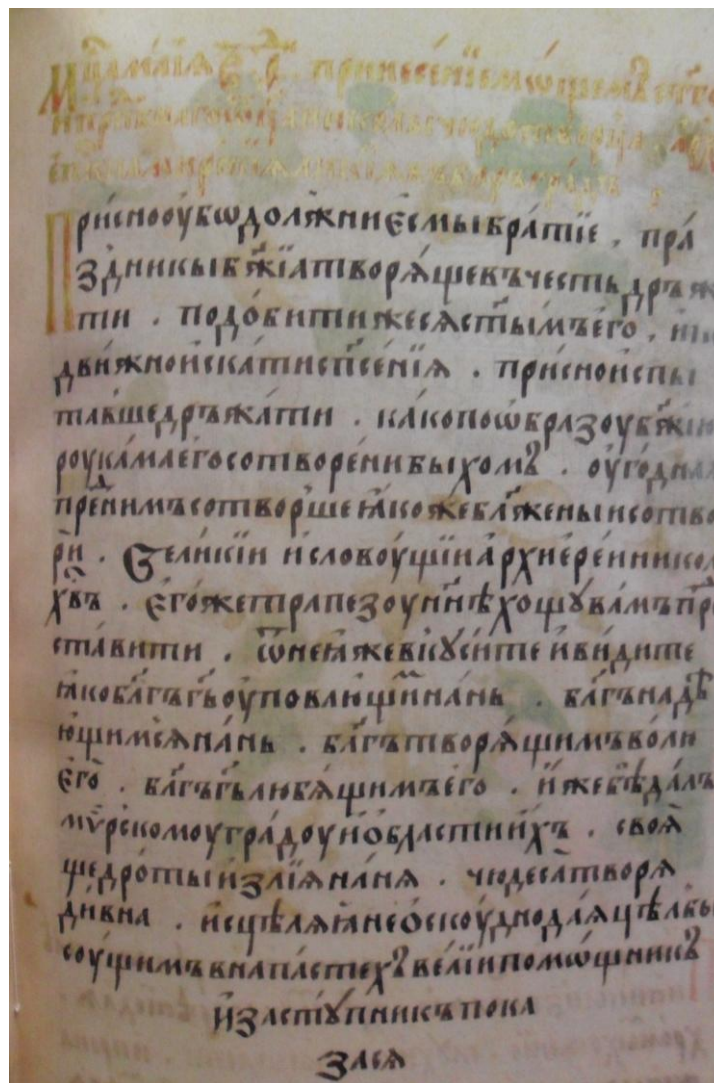
ON THE 9th DAY
OF THE MONTH OF
MAY:

TRANSLATION
TO THE CITY OF BARI
OF THE RELICS OF THE
GODLY MAN, THE
SAINT AND FATHER
NICHOLAS
THE
WONDERWORKER,
ARCHBISHOP OF
MYRA IN LYCIA

1. Brothers, it is our duty to celebrate and to honor the feasts of God, to become like His Saints and, by practicing the virtues, look for salvation, always in the living experience that we were created in the image of God and by the work of his hands, doing what is pleasing to Him, as did Saint Nicholas, the great and glorious bishop of Christ.

His table I wish now to display before you, dear brothers. Taste of it and see how the Lord is good toward those who put their hope in Him, toward those who trust in Him, toward those who behave according to His will, and how good is the Lord toward those who love Him.

He gave him as a gift to the city of Myra and to the surrounding region in order that he would spread his generosity on them, by working extraordinary miracles and granting healings that cannot be counted, so that he appeared to be great defender and intercessor to those who were in danger,



2. both by earth and by sea, healing the sick, setting the prisoners free, letting the blind see, the lame walk and the deaf hear, cleansing the lepers and expelling the demons. He performed every kind of miracles for everybody, according to what the Lord had said: « *Whosoever believes in Me, he too will perform the same works I do* ». So did this saint and godly man, the bishop and father Nicholas.

3. When grace and philanthropy were allowed to rain on us the sun of justice, and the favors of the Lord Almighty have been disclosed to us, in our own time and in our years, a wonderful event that is still in our memory has taken place, beyond any human understanding, concerning the godly man, the great bishop Saint Nicholas.

LYCIA PLUNDERED BY THE TURKS.

In 1071 Bari, capital city of the Byzantine Province of Italy, is conquered by the Normans.

Capital city is now Salerno. Bari experiences a slump in stock exchange.

1085. Antioch, Bari's main commercial partner, falls into the hands of the Muslims.

The Southern Asia Minor (Turkey), including Lycia, where St Nicholas' body rests, is prey of Turkish incursions and massacres.

The Russian text opens by underscoring the dramatic situation of St Nicholas' land in the hands of the Turks.

NB. Russian copyists often are mistaken about the year 1087 (some write 1088, others 1089 or 1096).



In the year 1088 from the incarnation of God Himself, become man through the inviolate marriage of the Mother of God and ever Virgin Mary, under the Greek Emperor Alexios, under the Patriarch Nicholas

4. of Constantinople, in the time of the Russian Princes, the loved by Christ Prince Vsevolod in Kiev and his noble son Vladimir in Černigov, the Ismaelites, having already invaded for divine decree and design of the Most High the Greek lands on the other side of the sea, starting from the Khersonese unto Antioch and Jerusalem,

5. killed every man they would find through all their cities and villages, women and children they took into slavery and burned their houses.

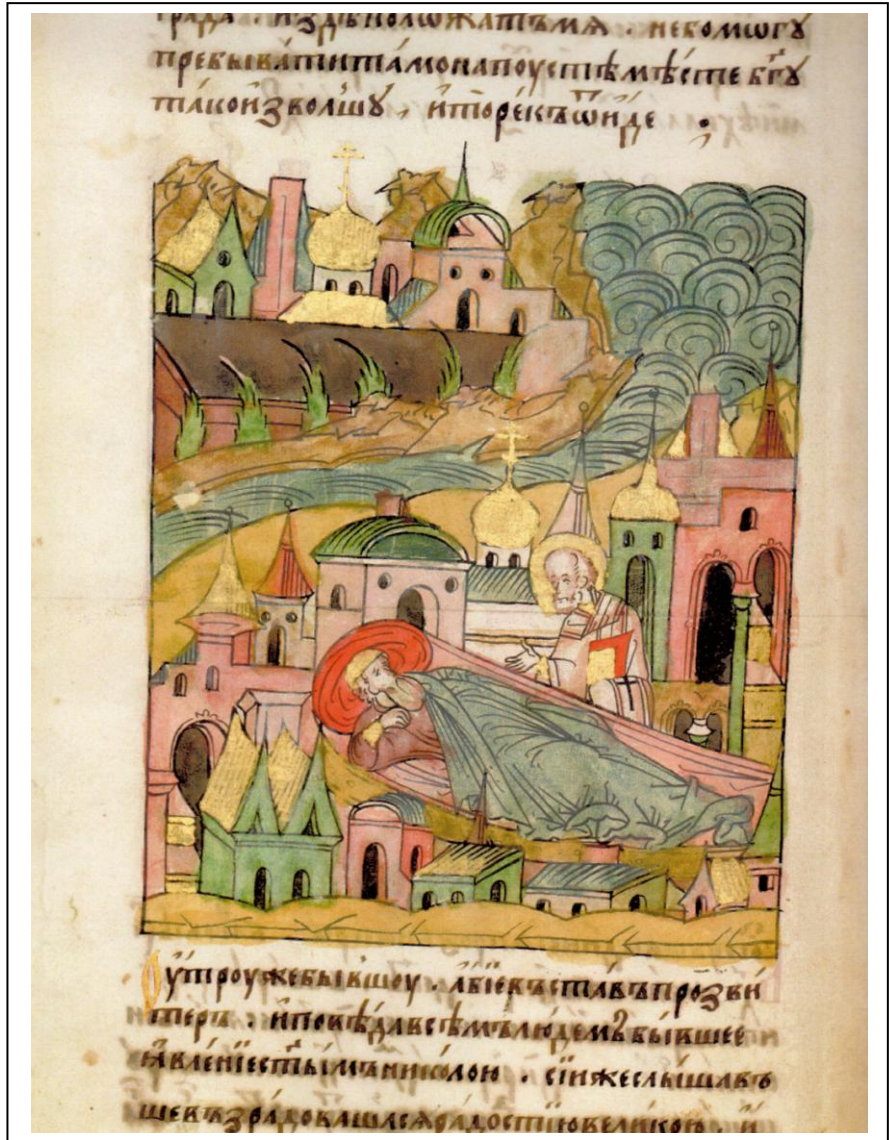
They plundered churches and monasteries, taking the cities under their power.

ST NICHOLAS ASKS THE BARIANS TO GO TO TAKE HIM FROM MYRA

Unlike the other sources, the *Kievan Legend* sees the entire affair in the light of Divine Providence.

St Nicholas appears in a dream to a pious priest of Bari exhorting him to tell the citizens to set up an expedition in order to take him from Myra, because his city is in the hands of the Turks and nobody goes there to venerate him.

NB. The other sources say that the idea of the “theft” came to the sailors during the trip. And this seems to be the truth, otherwise the sailors, back to Bari, could not name their own terms to the Archbishop.



6. Then they wasted Lycia too, where the body of St. Nicholas was resting, precious body, venerable body, performing wondrous and glorious miracles.

Couldn't such a godly man stop the waste of his city and of the churches? [Certainly he could] But he did not wish to oppose the divine decree. On the contrary, he said: «*That the Lord do what is fitting to his eyes.* » Our Lord Jesus Christ, however, could not stand that His faithful servant rest with his mortal remains in a desolate place,

7. where he could not be glorified by anybody. It is written in fact: «*I will glorify, he said, those who glorify me and I will raise the glory of those who praise me.* »

In those days, in the city of Bari, in the German territory, lived a pious priest, loving Christ and righteous. To him appeared Saint Nicholas, saying: «*Go and tell the men of this city and all the gathered clergy to go and bring me from the city of Myra*

TRADE OPERATIONS IN ANTIOCH

62 SAILORS leave from Bari. The sources do not say which month or day. We can suppose: the first days of March of the year 1087.

While according to Nicephorus they went directly to Antioch, John the Archdeacon says that they thought about the sacred theft already on the way there, but renounced because Myra was full of Turks gathered for a funeral service.

Once in Antioch, the Barians make their trade operations, selling cereals and buying textile products.

Then, sailing on the way back, stopped in Andriake, the harbor of Myra. Learning that the church was isolated, they decided to give it a try.



8. and let me rest here. As a matter of fact, I cannot remain there, in a place that God permitted to be deserted. » Having said this, he disappeared.

As he got up, at dawn, he informed all the men about St. Nicholas' apparition. Those who were listening were filled with great joy,

9. and said: « Today Christ has increased his mercy on his people and on our city, because he made us worthy of receiving his faithful servant St. Nicholas ». And so, in that very place, they chose a group of honorable and God-fearing men, who should go with three ships for the Saint.

Having loaded the ships with grain, pretending to go for trade, they left.

10. They reached Antioch. Having sold the grain they bought all the merchandise suitable to them. At this time the Barians came to know that the Venetians who were there had in mind to go there, and take for themselves the relics of St. Nicholas.

ENCOUNTER WITH THE MONKS AND TAKING OF THE RELICS

Faithful to his providentialistic vision, the Russian writer omits the contrasts between the sailors and the Byzantine monks.

The other three sources, Nicephorus, John and the French Compiler refer about Matthew (and Alexander) putting the sword at the throat of a monk who was trying to escape to say to the Myrians what was happening.

In the *Kievan Legend*, on the contrary, the monks spontaneously and unasked revealed the place of the Saint's tomb and two of them sailed with the Barians accompanying the relics till Bari.



11. They speeded up their operations and soon left. Arriving to Myra in Lycia, they moored to the wharf of the city.

12. Having taken council they armed themselves and entered the church of St. Nicholas, where they met four monks, whom they asked where St. Nicholas was. [The monks] showed them the tomb where St. Nicholas was resting.

13. They then smashed the floor of the church and found the stone coffin full of sacred liquor. They poured the sacred liquor in some vessels and took his relics as well as the stone coffin where the relics had been and took them to the ships.

14. They set sail again, leaving two monks in Myra, while the other two accompanied the relics of St. Nicholas. And they got under way toward the city of Bari, on the other side of the sea.

ARRIVAL TO BARI.

After referring all the stops of the navigation, the sources say that the Barians, in the evening before entering the port of the city, stop in the St. George, few miles before Bari. The day after **(Sunday 9th of May 1087)** they enter the harbor of Bari .

The abbot Elia mediates between those who want the relics to be preserved in the Cathedral church and those (in tune with the sailors) who want a new temple to be built in the Catepan's court.

In the fight die two young people. The Archbishop draws back his souldiers yielding to the people's will.

The Kievian Legend omits the fight, and speaks only of the people's joy and the Saint's miracles (borrowing them from Nicephorus).



15. They left Myra on the eleventh of the month of April, and reached Bari on the ninth of the month of May, on Sunday in the evening.

16. As the Barians saw their arrival from Myra with the relics of St. Nicholas, all went out together to meet them, men and women, children and adults, with candles and thuribles of incense, and welcomed them with great honor.

17. And they put the relics in the church of St. John the Forerunner, near the sea. Oh, listen to me, my brothers, I beg you, how many were the miracles performed once St. Nicholas arrived in Bari from Myra. He arrived in the evening of Sunday, and already the following morning, Monday, he healed 47

18. sick people, men and women, subject to various infirmities and illnesses, some to the head, some to the eyes, others to the hands or to the feet, others to the heart or to the stomach, or through the entire body, and still others who were tormented by unclean spirits. On Tuesday he healed 22 sick people. On Wednesday he healed 29 sick people. On Thursday,

THE BUILDING OF THE CHURCH

The Russian writer speaks of the grandiosity of the church.

The illuminator of the monumental *St Nicholas' Life in Ivan the Terrible's times* (about 1570) reserves this page to the construction of the church in Bari.

NB. While on the Translation we own a rich documentation, about the construction of the church we have no "Legend". Fortunately, the Basilica is full of inscriptions of the first two centuries inside and outside that make up for this failing.



18. about dawn, he healed a deaf-mute, afflicted by this decease already for five years. After this, St. Nicholas appeared in a vision to a monk, who was a holy man, and said to him: « *It was by the will of God that I came in this city.* » On Sunday, at the ninth hour, eleven men were healed.

19. Afterwards every day St. Nicholas performed miracles like a fountain flowing without end. Many gifts were brought to the Saint, gold and silver as well as precious fabrics. The people, in fact, having witnessed to his glorious miracles rejoiced with great joy.

20. And they built in his honor a wonderful church, great and beautiful indeed, named after the holy and virtuous father Nicholas. They made for him also a silver and gold-plated urn.

**THE POPE PUTS THE
RELICS UNDER THE
ALTAR OF THE CRYPT
October 1, 1089**

**Invited by the
Archbishop Elia and the
Norman Lord of Bari
(Bohemund), Pope
Urban II comes to Bari and
solemnly puts St Nicholas'
bones under the altar of
the Crypt (= the
underground church).**

Almost all Russian
manuscripts give the wrong
name of the Pope:
**German, instead of
Urban**, the famous Pope of
the First Crusade.

**A detail present only in
the *Kievan Legend* is
the circumstance
according to which the
Pope puts the relics
under the altar, but
leaves one hand outside
for veneration.**



22. The third year after his translation from Myra, they sent an embassy to the Pope of Rome, German, inviting him to come with his bishops and all his ecclesiastical retinue in order to move the relics of St. Nicholas [to the new church].

23. They came, and took the relics of St. Nicholas and deposited them in the silver urn.

24. The bishops and their dignitaries took them and moved them into the great new church. It was the 9th of May when they deposited them in a hidden place under the altar.

25. They transferred also the ancient box in which he was brought from Myra and put it in the church. They picked up a bone of his hands from the relics and exposed it. And a great multitude of people started to come to kiss the relic and the box.

26. The Pope of Rome, German, the bishops and all the people of the city that day established a great feast in honor of the Saint, a feast that is observed up to our own day. They ate and drank and feasted through those days, and they gave many presents to the poor.

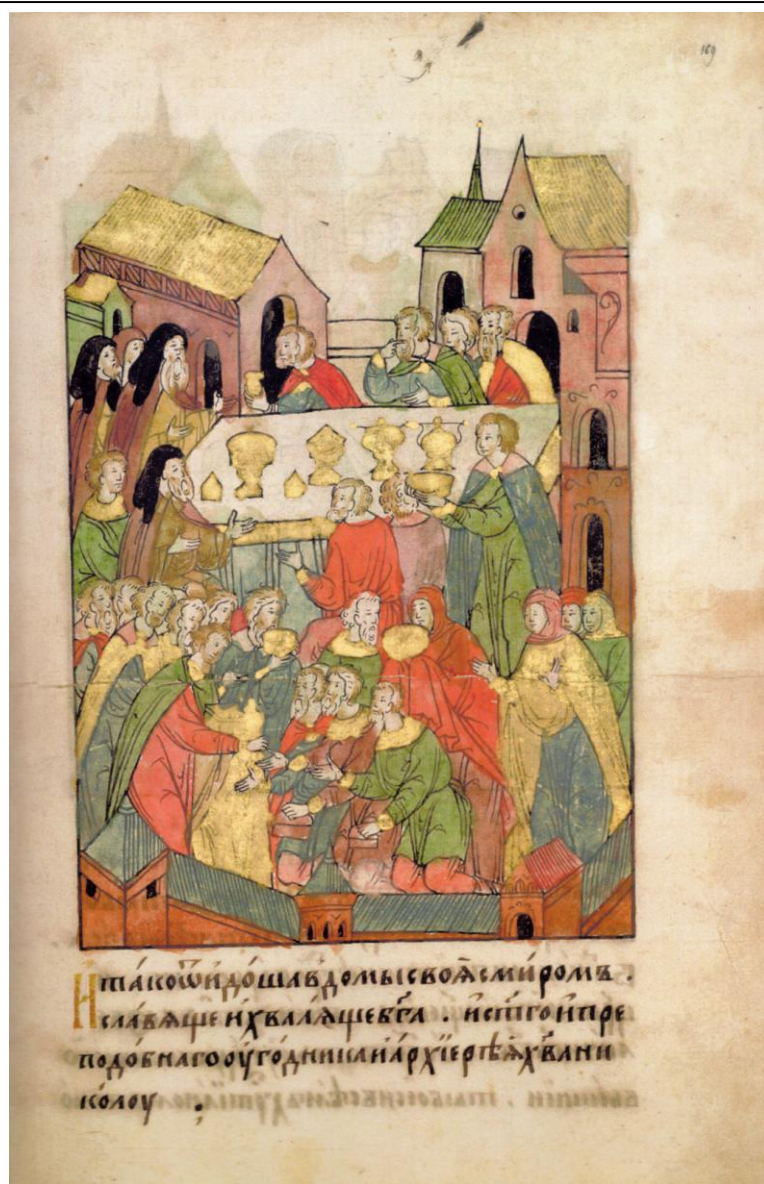
**JOYFUL CELEBRATIONS
IN BARI FOR MANY DAYS
AND GIFTS TO THE POOR**

The *Kievan Legend* ends the story with the great Barian celebrations and joyful feasts for many days. The writer does not forget the Christian spirit of the event and concludes with the gifts to the poor.

As this miniature shows, the illuminator too inserts in the same page (above) the eating and drinking of the people of Bari, together with (below) the gifts to the poor.

Soon after the story, there is the final prayer.

For an overall study on this ancient Russian text, see my "La leggenda di Kiev", Bari 1980 (= my first printed book).



27. Then they returned peacefully home, praising and glorifying God, as well as the virtuous and godly man, the bishop of Christ Nicholas.

28. O very blessed and faithful servant of Christ, have mercy on us too, here and in the ages to come. On you we rely and to you we pray, you who are the most worthy of honor of all, visible and invisible. Happy is the city of Bari indeed, and sacred is its church, in which the Lord God has exalted you. The Most High has sanctified you, His faithful servant. You are in fact the helper of all the Christians

29. and intercessor, delivering us from all dangers and troubles. We pray to you furthermore, o very blessed Saint and faithful servant, bishop of Christ, Nicholas, daring [to intercede] with the Lord, to pray for us, who always observe your annual festival and celebrate the feast of the translation of your relics, so that thanks to your prayers we may be saved, through the grace and love of our Lord Jesus Christ. Through Him and with Him be glory and power, honor and adoration to the Eternal Father together with His all-holy and life-creating Spirit, now and always, for ever and ever. Amen.

ALL THE MINIATURES OF THE **KIEVIAN LEGEND** INSERTED IN THIS ISSUE OF THE **ST NICHOLAS NEWS** ARE TAKEN FROM THE FOLLOWING BOOK THAT REPRODUCES IN FACSIMILE THE MONUMENTAL WORK REALIZED IN MOSCOW KREMLIN BY MINIATURISTS AT THE SERVICE OF THE TSAR AROUND THE YEAR 1570. IT IS A BOOK OF 482 PAGES. 408 OF WHICH WITH A MINIATURE. IT IS PRESERVED IN THE *ROSSIJSKAJA GOSUDARSTVENNAJA BIBLIOTEKA*, MANUSCRIPTS, FUND 37, COLLECTION T. F. BOL'ŠAKOV, N. 15.

Лицевое Житие святителя Николая Чудотворца - уникальный царственный книжный памятник, созданный в Кремлёвской книгописной мастерской в 70-х годах XVI века.

This marvelous text in facsimile has been printed in Moscow in the year 2010
by the editorial house AKTEON
with the metodological and scientific support of the National Russian Library.

SOME IMAGES OF THE RUSSIAN ORTHODOX FEAST OF THE 9/22 MAY 2014 IN BARI AND IN MOSCOW



A first imposing pilgrimage has come to Bari May 20th under the guidance of **Aristarch**, Metropolitan of Kemerovo. The celebration of May 22 was presided by Juvenalij, Metropolitan of **Kruticy e Kolomna**.

MAY 21ST 2014
THE PATRIARCH KIRILL OF MOSCOW
PRESIDED
THE VIGIL (*ВСЕНОЩНОЕ БДЕНИЕ*)
OF THE TRANSLATION OF ST NICHOLAS
TO BARI IN THE CATHEDRAL CHURCH
OF MOSCOW.



MOSCOW

MAY 21, EVENING.
PATRIARCH KIRILL OPENS
THE CELEBRATION OF
THE VIGIL
OF ST NICHOLAS
TRANSLATION,

МОСКВА. 21 МАЯ

ВСЕНОЩНОЕ БДЕНИЕ В
КАФЕДРАЛЬНОМ
СОБОРЕ



BARI. The rector of the Russian church in Bari
together with the Dominican Fathers wait for
the Metropolitan Juvenaliy's arrival.

BARI



THE PATRIARCH KIRILL PRESIDES THE CELEBRATION OF THE TRANSLATION OF ST NICHOLAS



**THE METROPOLITAN JUVENALIJ, FROM ELIA'S EPISCOPAL THRONE,
PRESIDES THE CELEBRATION IN BARI,**



MOSCOW



BARI



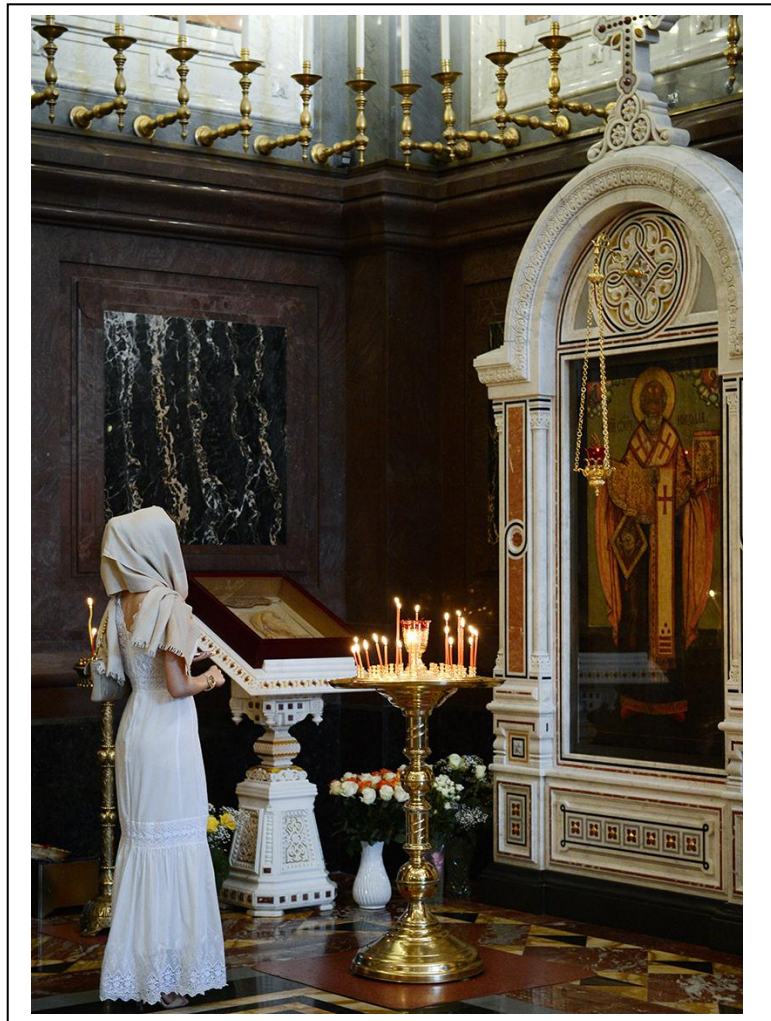


BARI



MOSCOW

**PATRIARCH
KIRILL
KISSES THE
ICON
DONATED BY
THE
BARIANS
TO THE
MOSCOW
CATHEDRAL**



**GREETINGS
FROM BARI TO ALL
ST NICHOLAS'
FRIENDS IN THE
WORLD**