

October 31, 2009

Parish School of the Holy Virgin Protection Church, Nyack, New York

An excited, elevated mood permeated the parish school of the Holy Virgin Protection Church in Nyack on the morning of Saturday, October 31<sup>st</sup>: we were promised a visit by the First Hierarch, His Eminence Metropolitan Hilarion. The day started with the usual routine: a morning prayer in the Church and the bell signaling the start of the first period. At the same time, preparations were underway in the parish hall for the special event: tables and chairs were set up, lunch was prepared, and guests arrived from the St. Alexander Nevsky parish school: Fr. Seraphim Chemodakov and several students.

His Eminence was greeted with the sound of ringing bells. The long-serving rector and parish school director, Mitred Archpriest George Larin, and the School Administrator, Marina Galitzine, escorted the Metropolitan to the classroom of the Pre-school and Kindergarten, where he was greeted by the youngest (4-5 year old) students. They sang a song about the fall season and one about two happy geese, and everyone was offered cookies for a snack. As His Eminence was led into the parish hall, the school choir, under the direction of Irina Serdsev, greeted him with "Ispolla..." The Metropolitan blessed everyone and greeted them warmly. After the excitement settled and everyone was seated at the tables, Vladyka answered questions that the students prepared for Him, talked about the Church, what it means to be an Orthodox Christian, and a little about himself. After the discussion, pizza was served and everyone enjoyed having lunch with His Eminence ("Pizza with the Metropolitan"). The school choir sang several songs, and after a group photograph, Vladyka Metropolitan left for Jordanville.

But the special school program on this day did not end there. We were fortunate to have the experienced choir director, Peter Fekula, at our school, as well. He spoke to the students, teachers, parents and guests about church choral singing, and prepared the children's choir to sing the evening vigil. Piotr Alekseevich has been conducting choirs for over thirty years. He is the choir director of the Metropolitan Choir in the Synod Cathedral in New York City. In May 2007, he conducted the large choir made up of singers from across the diaspora, which travelled to Russia to sing at the services marking the establishment of canonical communion between the Russian Church in the homeland and abroad.

The complex challenge of preparing a children's choir to sing the Vigil service in a single day was no match to the talent of Peter Fekula: even with the lengthy, event-filled, day over 30 students remained for the 3:30 PM vigil service. All were impressed and pleased by the sound of the children's choir in the church.

The day concluded with the showing of the inspiring film "Ostrov" in the parish hall.