

Returned beauty brings joy to all passionate believers

Catholic Christians and all those who respect and love the history of one of Belarus' most ancient cities delight in restoration of Grodno's century old treasure, after several years of work

By Natalia Romanovskaya

After five years of restoration works, the Cathedral of St. Francis Xavier (known as the Farny Roman Catholic Church) has a newly opened main sanctuary, unveiled during a solemn ceremony which gathered thousands of people. The Cathedral has regained its magnificence, once more confirming its right to be honoured as among the most beautiful and valuable places of worship. Churchmen, scientists and restoration masters have worked together for five years to renovate the altar damaged by fire in 2006. Four burnt wooden sculptures — St. Ambrose, apostles James and Thomas and patron Lozovoy — have been carved from whole lime tree, reproducing the original work by carvers Kazimir and Igor Misyuro, from Voronovo. Gilding has been completed by Lithuanian specialists, while scientific controls were performed by experienced experts Vladimir Kisly from Belarus and Pavel Sadley from Poland.

Not only the lost figures but also relief columns and part of the balustrade and decoration have been restored. The altar, shining in all its beauty, is impressive in its magnificence and spirituality. It was created in the first half of the 18th century by an engraver from Königsberg, Johannes Schmidt, and his students, following Prussian architect Pauker's design.

The Cathedral's history is even longer, having been first instigated by Polish King Stephen Bathory, back in the 16th century, who selected Grodno as one of his main residences. He donated ten thousand zlotys for its construction. However, his intentions went unrealised until long after his death. In 1622, Grodno gave shelter to one of the powerful Jesuit orders, who erected the wooden church of St. Peter and Paul. In 1678, the first stone of today's building was laid, in honour of Francois Xavier — a legendary French missionary worker in Africa.

Construction took over a quarter of a century and, according to docu-



Grodno Farny Roman Catholic Church's altar solemnly unveiled after restoration

mentary sources, the building was sanctified only in 1705, with Russian Tsar Peter I and Polish King August II in attendance. Their simultaneous visit to Grodno for the consecration allowed them to meet, creating a po-

litical event of significance.

Since then, the church has grown in beauty, accumulating spiritual treasures which are also significant as works of art. The vaults are decorated with wonderful fresco paintings nar-

rating the missionary deeds of Francis Xavier and there is a unique pendulum clock — considered the oldest in Europe. It originally adorned the wooden tower of the Jesuit collegium, built in the mid-17th century, but

was moved at some unknown time — when the old tower fell into disrepair. We do know that the Cathedral's Congregate Chapel painting — created in the second half of the 18th century — already bears the image of the clock. By the 19th-early 20th century, the clock was officially used to keep time for the whole town, maintained from the magistrate budget.

The clock continued working until the beginning of World War I, after which it remained still for many years — until restored in the post-Soviet era. Its ancient mechanism has a 60kg stone weight which slowly descends 15m over a period of 36 hours. The hour hand on the dial is 1m long, while the minute hand is 1.15m.

The Cathedral's original bells, moulded in 1665, are priceless artistically and historically. Three of the four, including the large clock bell, were removed to Germany during World War I, with new ones fashioned only in 1938. The Congregate Virgin Mary icon, presented to Grodno by the Pope in 1641, is also priceless.

The Farny (which only gained this status after the Farny Roman Catholic Church standing on the opposite side of the central square was demolished in Soviet times) has accumulated many legends over the years. Some Grodno old-timers recollect that, during World War II, a German bomb hit, passing next to one of the icons, yet failed to detonate, inspiring tales that the icon protected the building. Later, in the 1960s, during the years when religious sites were closed and Christianity set aside, the Cathedral was due to be demolished. However, church members refused to leave the building, keeping guard for several days until the plan of destruction was abandoned.

Owing to their efforts, the Cathedral today decorates Grodno's central square. Its baroque-style architecture is inscribed on the list of historical and cultural treasures of Belarus and its altar restoration is just the first step in reviving the ancient church. Works will continue, enhancing the beauty of the Cathedral.

Noble deed from owner of ancient rarity commands true respect

By Mikhail Feofanov

Ancient Gospel returns from Munich to its original home in a village church in the Drogichin District, 67 years on

The ancient Gospel, in a metal frame, disappeared during World War II from St. Trinity Church in Bezdezh village (Drogichin District) but was noticed in an antique shop in

Munich by Gantsevichi Deanery priest Piotr Pilipchuk. It was impossible not to recognise the sacred book, which bears an inscription on its back cover: "This Gospel was given as a gift to the Church of Saint Life-Giving Trinity in Bezdezh of the Kobrin District, Grodno Province, in eternal remembrance of priest Alexander Kadlubosky's wife — God's servant Feofilia — who died on

14th October, 1890, in St. Petersburg, and was committed to the earth inside the boundaries of the aforementioned church."

The Gospel was published with the blessing of the Tsar's family, headed at that time by Alexander III. It honoured the memory of several generations of the Kadlubovsky family who served in Bezdezh as churchmen. Father Piotr joined German Orthodox priests in

finding the owner of the relic, which is assessed to be worth 6,700 Euros, and persuaded him to return it to Bezdezh Parish free of charge. The Father Superior of St. Trinity Church, archpriest Gennady Voron, has sent pictures by e-mail to prove that the Gospel is now resident in its new home — as requested by the Munich resident who made the noble donation.

Forest honey known for its healing properties

By Tatiana Lobanova

Foresters collect over 40 tonnes of honey from their own bee hives — double that of 2010

Almost every Belarusian forestry has its own bee hives, with honey collected and sold to generate revenue. Most is sold to forestry staff

and local residents, with the honey always in demand. The bees collect pollen from various plants, creating a honey which is thought to have great healing properties.

Foresters also sell other natural products, including wild berries. In mid-September, red bilberries and cranberries are gathered.