***“Is Christianity alive in Russia?”***

Happy Feast of St. Sergius. As some of you know I have had the privilege of being in Russia to meet with the Patriarch and Metropolitan. The vibrancy of the Russian Orthodox Church is breathtaking, and for Americans it requires removing all thoughts of the USSR and the Kremlin along with the Communist leaders of the time, in order to see what is happening in the Church.

 No matter what one may think of any elements of the secular regime, the reality is that those churches which had been desecrated and made into libraries, museums, and barns are now open for Divine Liturgy and they are packed with worshippers. The level of the piety is amazing and kiosks are to be found in the Kremlin, in the streets and at the Malls where religious items are displayed not only openly but with enthusiasm.

 As I walked down a street one day, people came up to me simply asking for a blessing — right there on the street — no other requests. To see how Christianity had been “underground” in the USSR and now is a very visible and active expression of faith is very inspiring. Churches are being built in numerous places, and they are filled. What happened? The life of St. Sergius is well worth reading, and also reading about underground Christianity in the Soviet Era is a testimony to how God ministers to those who are oppressed and martyred for their Faith.

 There is no apology in Russia today for wearing a cross, for talking about God or for making the Sign of the Cross in public places. Even when it appears that religious freedom is taken from us, God is still in charge. For those who enjoy religious freedom — the freedom of religion and not freedom from religion, history in other places may well help us understand our own.