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Putin Hands Over Historic Icon to Church

By AFP

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Believers in front of Andrei Rublev's 15th century icon The Trinity delivered from the Tretyakov Gallery to the Trinity Sergius Lavra in the town of Sergiyev Posad on July 18, 2022. **Artyom Geodakyan/TASS**

Russian President Vladimir Putin has handed over the country's most acclaimed Russian icon — Andrei Rublev's Trinity — to the Church, the Moscow Patriarchate said on Monday.

The handover of Rublev's most famous work to the Russian Orthodox Church comes after its hugely powerful head Patriarch Kirill threw his support behind Putin's decision to send troops to Ukraine and urged believers to support the offensive.

The Moscow Patriarchate said in a statement that Putin made the decision to hand over the icon "in response to numerous requests from Orthodox believers."

The masterpiece is believed to have been painted for what is now the Trinity Lavra of St. Sergius located in the town of Sergiyev Posad outside Moscow.

After the 1917 Bolshevik revolution, the icon was transferred to the Tretyakov Gallery in 1929.

It left the museum only several times including during World War II when it was evacuated to safety.

In 2022, the medieval icon traveled back to the Trinity Lavra of St. Sergius for religious celebrations.

The move was criticized by art experts who said the work of art should be kept at the Tretyakov Gallery where it can be properly preserved.

The Moscow Patriarchate said the icon will be exhibited for a year at the Christ the Savior Cathedral in Moscow before returning to the historic monastery in Sergiyev Posad.

On Sunday, the Hermitage Museum said another Russian monastery will receive the memorial complex of the tomb of Alexander Nevsky, a medieval prince and national hero.

An agreement lending the tomb for 49 years with possibility of extension was signed between the Hermitage Museum and the Church, with approval from the Culture Ministry.

Handing the prince's tomb to the Alexander Nevsky Monastery of the Holy Trinity will be a sign of "particular social and spiritual unity," the museum said in a statement.

Following military setbacks for Russia in Ukraine, authorities in Moscow have sought to depict the military campaign in religious terms. Dozens of Orthodox priests have been sent to the front to support Russian troops.

In a sermon last September, Patriarch Kirill said dying in Ukraine "washes away all sins."

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