Metropolitan Hilarion: For God there is nothing impossible



On October 25, 2020, the commemoration day of the holy fathers of the Seventh Ecumenical Council, Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk, head of the Moscow Patriarchate's department for external church relations, celebrated the Divine Liturgy in the church of Our Lady the Joy to All the Afflicted-In-Bolshaya-Ordynka, Moscow. The archpastor was assisted by the clergy of the church.

During the Prayer of Fervent Supplication, prayer petitions were voiced over the threat of the spreading coronavirus infection. His Eminence lifted up the prayer read at a time of the spread of a pernicious infection.

After the service, the archpastor addressed himself to the faithful with a sermon:

"In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit!

The Gospels tell us a story about the three cases in which the Lord Jesus Christ brought back to life a dead man. In the Gospels of Matthews, Mark and Luke, we hear how the Saviour raised from death a girl who had died. The Gospel of John relates the raising of Lazarus, and the Gospel of Luke, which we have heard today, tells us about how the Lord Jesus Christ raised from the dead a widow's son in the town of Nain.

Christ encountered this funeral procession accidentally, though there is nothing accidental in people's life. People cannot encounter Incarnate God in the street in such an accidental way. Still it was an unplanned encounter, and none of the participants in that funeral procession expected and could not expect it.

The Lord Jesus Christ encountered that procession; saw the dead youth lying on the bier, the only son of a widow who walked right behind crying bitterly. And coming up, Christ touched the bier and said, "Young man, I say to you, get up!" (Lk. 7:14), and immediately the dead, brought back to life by the power God's word, rose up.

Reading the Gospel's stories about the resurrection of the dead, we ask ourselves, what is the meaning of these stories and why the Evangelists decided to report them to us? "I am the resurrection and the life", the Lord Jesus Christ says approaching the coffin of Lazarus who was dead for already four days. These words were addressed to Martha who said to the Saviour that she believed in the resurrection of Lazarus at the last day. And we all believe too that the universal resurrection will happen and all the dead whenever they lived on the earth will be brought to a new life by the power of God. And the testimonies to this are the cases of raising to a temporal life described in the Gospel.

There is nothing impossible for God. For Him there is no death, for *He is not the God of the dead, but of the living* (Lk. 20:38), We all are alive for God: people who live on this earth or lived on it before, or those who are to come to this world, for they have not been born as yet – all are present in the Divine Providence and all live in God.

Here on earth, each of us is given a certain portion of time so that in the course of our earthly life we could come to God, to unite with Him spiritually and physically through participation in the church Sacraments and through a life according to the gospel commandments. Indeed, one thing is unthinkable without the other. And as St. James put it, "faith without deeds is dead" (James 2:26), and any religious practice, if it does not involve good works, does not benefit a person.

In the Gospel, the Lord Jesus Christ declared to the world that He is the source of life, but at the same time, the Gospel shows us that salvation is not given automatically or magically. And the very

participation in church Sacraments, partaking of the Holy Mysteries of Christ does not yet guarantee a person's salvation in the eternal life. The Lord expects us to bring fruit of a virtuous life, to verify our life with the gospel commandments, to do as He commands, to give our life to others and to proclaim Him Crucified and Raised not only in word but also in deed for the salvation of people.

This is the meaning of our life on earth, which is preparation for the future life. Here the Lord gives us through the Sacrament of Holy Communion an opportunity to unite with Him spiritually and physically and, most importantly, to get prepared for the future life that is measured not in hours, or minutes, or days, or months, or years but that lasts without end.

Some people reflecting on the everlasting life ask: Well, what will we do there? Will the everlasting life really last and last unchanging? But at present we do not know what the everlasting life will be and how we will perceive it. We only know that the earthly life is a preparation for the life eternal and that the earthly life is given for us to unite with the Lord here through the church Sacraments and good works.

As the Holy Church teaches us, the universal resurrection will be universal indeed, as not only believers will rise from the dead, but also non-believers, not only those who are awaiting it, but also those who do not believe in the future life. And this resurrection will be different in quality for those who lived with God and for those who lived without God. Those who live without God will see with fear the formidable Judge Who will come to denounce them as sinners and to do His last will for those who opposed Him in the earthly life. And to those who prayed to God, who sought to unite with Him in this life, who participated in the church Sacraments and did good works – to these people a different resurrection is prepared, about which we speak in the Creed: 'I look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come'. We pronounce these words not with fear but with hope and trust in God's mercy. And we rejoice that the human life does not end in death but over the threshold of death it is eternal life that awaits us.

So let us already now partake of the eternal life through the church Sacraments, through partaking in the Holy Mysteries of Christ. And let us ask the Lord that at the Last Judgement we may with dignity give account of all our deeds, receive from God the verdict of not guilty and inherit the Heavenly Kingdom prepared by the Lord for each and all. Amen.

I congratulate you all on the feast!

Take care of yourselves, your loved ones and may the Lord preserve all of you!"

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