Metropolitan Hilarion: Eucharist is the wedding feast, to which Lord Jesus Christ invites each of us



On 13th September 2020, 14th Sunday after Pentecost, feast day of the Placing of the Precious Sash of the Most Holy Theotokos, Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokamsk, chairman of the Moscow Patriarchate's Department for External Church Relations, celebrated the Divine Liturgy at the Church of the "Joy of All Who Sorrow" Icon of the Mother of God in Bolshaya Ordynka Street, Moscow. Concelebrating with the archpastor were clerics of the church.

During the Litany of Fervent Supplication, prayerful petitions were offered in view of the threat of the spreading coronavirus infection.

Then Metropolitan Hilarion lifted up the prayer which is read out at a time of harmful pestilence.

After the divine service the archpastor addressed the worshippers with the following homily:

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

“This Sunday coincides with the commemoration day of the Holy Hieromartyr Cyprian of Carthage, one of the ancient Church fathers who lived in the 3rd century. He left to us his remarkable works written in Latin and translated into Russian.

“In one of his writings Hieromartyr Cyprian says, ‘No one can have God for his father, who has not the Church for his mother.’ I would like to dwell on these words of the saint in relation to today’s Gospel reading.

“Today we have heard a parable that the Lord Jesus Christ told on one of the last days of His earthly life. Christ was already in Jerusalem, and sufferings on the cross lay ahead of him. The Saviour told a parable about a king who invited different people to a wedding feast. Yet, one by one these people started to turn down the invitation. Then the king sent his servant to invite everyone who would wish to come. People came, and the wedding hall was filled with guests. ‘When the king came in to look at the guests, he saw there a man who had no wedding garment’ (Mt 22:11), and commanded his servants to ‘bind him hand and foot, and cast him into the outer darkness’ (Mt 22:13). Such is the plot of the parable.

“What does this parable tell us about? It tells us about the Church and about the wedding feast, to which the Lord invites anyone who wants to come. This wedding banquet is the entire Church, the whole church life, the liturgical, sacramental and mystical life of the Church that finds its highest expression in the Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist. For Eucharist is the wedding feast, to which our Lord Jesus Christ invites each and all of us. And whenever the Divine Liturgy is celebrated, be it on a Sunday, a feast or a week day, we gather in the church, partake of the Holy Mysteries of Christ and thus become those whom the Lord called to His wedding banquet. And about us St Cyprian of Carthage said that for us the Church is the mother and therefore God is the Father.

“Of course, many people say that God exists, but the Church is unnecessary. There are many different variations of this thought, this ideology, which is voiced by different people. They say that the Church is unnecessary in general, in principle, because God is above all, and every person has direct access to God through prayer. Others believe that even prayer is unnecessary, but it suffices to acknowledge that somewhere in heavens there is some supreme good origin, and it is enough in order to lead a good life. And there are people who say that the Church is kind of necessary, but not the Church that exists now, whose hierarchs cruise on yachts and whose priests fleece people and drive limousines; some other Church is needed. It can be an alternative Church, but surely not the one which all of you are invited to enter, because in this Church something is always wrong...

“Regrettably, many people, being under the influence of this propaganda spread via the mass media, especially the Internet and social networks, do not go to church, thus depriving themselves of what has always been the most important and essential thing in the Church – the wedding supper during which God sits at table with those whom He invited. And He invites everyone who wants to come, and there are no people who would not be allowed to join this wedding supper.

“The Church, which is created by the Lord Jesus Christ, has existed for two thousand years. Over this time so many people, so many hierarchs and clergymen, monastics and laypeople have passed through the Church. Some of them reached the heights of holiness, others proved to be unworthy and became a stumbling block to other people by their behaviour, by failing to live up to the ideal given by Christ in the Gospel. So what? Has the Church diminished because of that? Has she defiled herself? No, of course not! The Church was and remains holy, but not thanks to us, but rather in spite of us. The Church is holy, because Christ granted unto her His holiness and through Her gives it to anyone who wishes to come to His wedding feast.

“The highest expression of the Divine love for humankind is in the suffering and death of our Lord Jesus Christ. In our liturgical experience it is refracted through the holy Eucharist, because every time we go to the church of God and participate in the Divine Liturgy we commemorate the passions of our Lord Jesus Christ, His death on the cross and His resurrection. We not only commemorate it; we also participate in it: we are present at Golgotha where the crucified Lord cries out to His Father; we see His burial and then become participants in His resurrection.

“This is the most important thing in the Church. This is what the Church is needed for. And we should never stumble over a rumour about this or that church member, even a clergyman. For, firstly, what we hear is very often not true: some may slander clergymen, hierarchs, the Patriarch, imputing to them what they have never had and creating myths in order to turn others away from the Church.

“Secondly, we must keep in mind that the Church stands on this earth thanks not to people, but to God Who created it for people. And we come to the Church in order to to be filled with the Divine grace and holiness which originate from the Very Source of life, and not in order to be carried away by rumours and undignified talks about other people’s lives.

“I would like to remind all of us, dear brothers and sisters, that the Church exists for the sake of people’s salvation, and to cite once again the remarkable words of St Cyprian of Carthage: those who do not have the Church for their mother, do not have God for their father. Let slanderers of the Church make no mistake that without the Church they will have direct access to God. God will not accept such people, for they do not have the Church for their mother, they do not love the Church and, therefore, do not love God. As for us, we love the Church, we cherish her. For us the Church is the salvific Noah’s ark, in

which we move towards the Heavenly Kingdom.

“But let us also remember what today’s parable tells us: in order to take part in the wedding feast, we need the wedding garment.

“Some people are perplexed about the actions of the king from the parable: how come he himself invited commoners from thoroughfares and crossroads and then suddenly demanded the wedding garment? The thing is that there is no need for people to bring it with them or to prepare it beforehand – it is given by the Lord Himself to those who wish to partake in His wedding feast. And when the Church reminds us that we need to have the wedding garment, she refers, first and foremost, to the purity of heart, so that, when coming to the Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist and partaking of the Holy Mysteries of Christ, we may purify our heart in order to eradicate all duplicity and ambiguity, so that with the love for God, with the awareness of our sinfulness and with the desire to improve ourselves and receive God’s grace, we may come to this holy feast, this holy Sacrament. And if we come to the Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist with sincere and heartfelt zeal and attention, then this Sacrament itself will be for us the wedding garment which is necessary for partaking in the wedding supper of our Lord Jesus Christ.

“Let us always, at every opportunity, come to the church of God, partake of the Holy Mysteries of Christ and participate in the Sacraments of the Church. Let us not listen to any blasphemies against the Church, but let us share our experience of blessed life in the Church with other people, so that each of them may partake of the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ through the Sacrament of Eucharist.

“I greet all of you on this feast day and wish you good health. Take care of yourselves and of your beloved ones. I am rejoicing at seeing how disciplined you are, because you all, with a few exceptions, wear masks during the divine services. It is not very comfortable, but it is an emergency and temporary measure. It will be cancelled as soon the circumstances get favourable.

“God save you all!”

DECR Communication Service

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