Bishop Veniamin of Minsk: Today spiritual struggle is going on for our Motherland

On August 26, 2020, the Day of the Minsk Icon of the Mother of God, Bishop Veniamin, elected Metropolitan of Minsk and Zaslavsk, Patriarchal Exarch for All Belarus, addressed himself to the faithful of the Belorussian Orthodox Church with an archpastoral homily.

"O Virgin the Hodegetria, full of grace and charity,

Rejoice, giving joy to the faithful

Rejoice, O swift helper to all those in trial and sorrow"

(Canon to the Most Holy Mother of God the Hodegetria)

Peace be to you!

My first address to you as primate of the Belorussian Orthodox Church will not be solemn and elevated. It will stem from the pain of my heart for my dear people and for our land, out of love for all of you.

Our sorrows and feelings from the time of Lent to this day are rapidly replacing each other. We are seeking an outcome and still cannot find it. But what did our pious ancestors do in such cases and what do saints teach us? What does the spiritual comprehension of the developments lie in?

"God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pains. It is His megaphone to rouse a deaf world" (Clive Lewis). We have to bring peace back to our land and to our hearts.

In these last day of the Dormition Fast devoted to the remembrance of the last days of the Most Holy Mother of God on earth, I call upon all Christians to observe the fast strictly and to prolong it for three days. When the old city of Nineveh was facing a threat, all its people assigned themselves and even animals a fast, and God's mercy came (Jonah 3:5-10). During our fasting let us intensify our prayer, common and individual, for Belarus. In churches and churchyards let us unite for a common prayer, kindle the icon-lamps of ardent prayer for the whole Belarus in each home.

One more important thing without which there can be no return of peace is repentance for committed sins. Let us recall that the Greek word *metanoia* translated traditionally as 'repentance' literarily means 'a change of mind'. The Church of Christ calls each of us to become aware of our sins, to fill ourselves

with desire for their forgiveness, to resort to the sacrament of Confession and, most importantly, to bring forth fruits meet for repentance (Mt. 3:8) – to redress the committed sin and its negative consequences. The change of minds, the change of hearts from evil to good, from falsehood to truth, from division to unity, from condemnation to understanding – these are the changes so much needed by our society in the first place.

All of us, Orthodox believers, are aware of the power of common prayer and aware that, along with outward confrontation, what is going on is a spiritual struggle for our Motherland and in the heart of each of us we are called to intensify our prayer with eagerness and daring, faith, hope and love for God and our neighbors. This unity in common prayer and love according to the faith and the law of Christ has always been an inalienable rule in White Rus' in overcoming various misfortunes, sorrows, illnesses and troubles.

The recent sorrowful events in our Motherland have happened because our hearts have bent to an evil side, because the light of Christ could not shine forth in this dark time when a sin of lawlessness was manifested.

I believe that if we fulfil with inspiration, zeal and unanimity our intention to spend these three days fasting, praying and repenting, then we will quickly see a response from Heaven and understanding what we, people of Belarus, are to do to defeat evil by good and prevent evil in future.

The Gospel says: 'Come and see!' (Jn. 1:46), I ask you, dear brothers and sisters, 'let us come to the Lord and see'. Indeed, not all the Orthodox Christians observe fasts nowadays; many have not purified their soul with repentance for a long time. The desire to make one's life better is quite natural for a person but when one fails to call for help from above while exerting only human efforts, then the result will be the same as that of the builders of the Tower of Babel (Gen. 11:1-9). Let us begin our journey for the good of the Motherland on the day of the old shrine of Belarus and the whole Orthodox world – the Minsk Icon of the Mother of God, whose image on the emblem of our capital city is like a commandment from previous generations to venerate the Mother of God, to solicit Her help and protection. The Lord will always hear our Intercessor and Protectress – the Most Holy Mother of God as He heard her in Cana of Galilee, though His time had not yet come to openly work wonders and mercies for His people.

"We have no other help, no other hope except you, the Queen. Help us; you are our hope and we praise you, for we are your slaves; let us not be ashamed of it!"

May the Lord and the Mother of God and the saints always be with us, especially now in our good first joint initiative!

+ Bishop Veniamin

Elected Metropolitan of Minsk and Zaslavsk

Patriarchal Exarch for All Belarus.

DECR Communication Service

BOC official website

Source: https://mospat.ru/en/news/45428/